TRANSLITERACIES IN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN: A STRATEGY TO REDUCE TRANSACTIONAL DISTANCE IN MOOCS

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Introduction

In this research, we apply instructional design theories and case study methodology to examine the design and actions of facilitators in a Connectivist Massive Online Open Course (cMOOC).

We verified that the course instructional design project, combined with facilitator actions, applied successful strategies to reduce the transactional distance in e-learning.

The findings of our research indicated that transliteracies are an efficient strategy to reduce this distance between student and tutor.
Two concepts are fundamental to the development of this research, which, when applied together, allow us to understand how to build an instructional dialogue based on movement.

These are the concepts:

- Transliteracies.
- Traversal.

The definition of transliteracy encompasses the concept of digital literacies because it comprises skills to deal with technologies and, moreover, focuses on the meaning-making and movement within complex informational contexts.
Thinking about transliteracy includes different abilities and skill sets, but transliteracy is mainly about movement across a whole range of contexts, technologies, and modalities. [...] Our work and home lives are often separated by a click on a browser tab. [...] **Investigations of transliteracy are concerned with the fluency of our movement across this complex information field we experience daily.** How do we think and what do we experience as we move across it? What are the skills we need? Does it affect our social interactions?

(Sukovic, 2016)
On the concept of traversal

We use the concept of traversal to refer to certain actions of the participants of the cMOOC course. Jay Lemke conceptualized traversal as:

*a traversal across standardized genres, themes, types, practices, or activities that nevertheless creates at least an ephemeral or idiotypical meaning for its human participants, and represents at least a temporarily functional connection or relationship among all its constituent processes and their (human or nonhuman) participants (i.e. actants).*[Lemke, 2002]

We believe that the traversal is a concept that dialogues and complements the notion of transliteracy. It is possible to apply the concept of traversal to the case, highlighting users' literacy to move and manage information among different digital spaces, genres, modalities, channels and other several media.
On the concept of traversal

Applying the concept of traversal to the educational context of an online course, we can focus on the student's fluid movement during the teaching-learning process. In this situation, we have a student who applies transliteracies, he moves through complex informational spaces. This student makes traversals, transferring configurations and skills between these platforms and spaces, integrating literacies practices.

*Figure 1. Student makes traversals between complex informational spaces*
METHODOLOGY

This article comes from a purposive research, based on a case study, with an interpretative-qualitative analysis.

On the subject of the case study
The analyzed object was a Massive Online Open Course, applied from September 2 to December 15, 2014. The course's theme was the development of open online courses. All units involved facilitators to guide the development of activities and connections during the course.

A cMOOC has a more fluid and open format due to its basis on the connectivist theory of learning. It was designed to prioritize the generation of connections among students, contents and facilitators.
On the data collection

Sources Of data

- Connected Courses portal,
- The Daily Connector Site,
- Twitter microblog tweets (indexed with the hashtag #ccourses),
- Blogs of seven participants of the course.

The material from the four sources was found online and was archived through manual records, screenshots and specific tools: Google Chrome browser, which allowed us to save pages for offline viewing, and via the DOPDF program.

Data collection from the Twitter microblog was collected during the first semester of 2015. In the data recovery process, we used the Topsy tool and DOPDF program.
On the individuals selected for the case study

We investigated the participation and interaction among seven participants on the course forum, on Twitter and on their personal blogs.

These participants were selected because they demonstrated greater participation and engagement with the course. The sample group consisted of 5 students and 2 facilitators (tutors).

We worked to identify connections between contents; trace semiotic marks of participation; identify factors that lead to successful design strategies and, finally, interpret subjective events and produce an analytical generalization (YIN, 2005), which synthesized the response of the students to the design of teaching materials and to the design of interaction with tutors.
We realized that the course built a strategic design project whereby the content design, interaction design and informational structure were based on spreadability [Jenkins, 2013].

Each teaching unit led the user / student to transit out of the portal. This design project, based on the student's movement between spaces and connections, dialogued directly with the concept of transliteracy.

As a result of the course design, the student needed to navigate between contents, sites, and platforms, discovering and suggesting new connections to peers; all these actions fostered the student’s autonomy and something that can be understood as a contextually authentic learning experience [Saadatmand, 2017].
▪ The transliteracies were applied by the facilitators in a systematic project of exchange with the participants, doing traversals and contacts through the forum platforms, Twitter, Blogs and other virtual spaces.

▪ Next, we present two examples, which illustrate how the facilitators moved between spaces, building an approach and appreciation of the students.
Ex. 1: Facilitator sharing and commenting in a student’s blog

It promotes the appreciation of the student, because it highlights the voice of the participant. The gesture produces an alternative form of feedback: commenting and sharing the learner's content is a positive answer. **This sharing is a form of appropriation and integration of student activity**, which honors their participation and gives them visibility.

*Figure 2. Facilitator commenting in a student’s blog.*
Ex. 2: On another occasion, the facilitator F1 posted a tweet, which praises and indicates the posting of another student to the course community. Besides sharing, the facilitator applied the @username setting to tag and call the student to the Microblog discussion:

Figure 3. Facilitator sharing student activity on Twitter microblog.
• The importance of motivation carried out by tutors in Distance Education is a topic widely commented in the literature of the area. What we find in this case is that, in the context of a new ethos (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007), motivating the student goes through a filter that softens the power relations in an educational context.

• In this scenario, motivating means highlighting participation, valuing it, celebrating it, empowering, centralizing the teaching-learning process in the student figure, such that the tutor moves towards the student's direction.
RESULTS: Transliteracies change the informational flow

The interaction project resulted in a *redirection of the interactive flow between tutor and student*. With this tutor movement, the facilitator in the Connected Courses was characterized as an educational *agent who leaves the course's official platform and moves towards the students’ direction*, seeking them, interacting on more informal platforms.

→ *such flow redirection also changes the educational hierarchy.*

In general, when educational initiatives adopt technologies, the chosen environment design and resources materialize an informational flow that still reflects power relations centered on the teacher figure. It is a *tradicional hierarchy*, we believe that the instructional dialogue strategy, based on transliteracies, is relatively going to break with this hierarchical flow.
RESULTS: Transliteracies change the informational flow

This strategy and innovative disruption can be represented by the dynamics represented in the illustration below.

Network 1 represents the traditional teaching flow, whereby all students converge toward the tutor, and few connections are generated among students.

In Network 2 represents the facilitator flow moving towards the student's direction and new interactions that can occur in a connected network, where the facilitator highlights the students.

Figure 4. Networks
RESULTS: Transliteracies change the informational flow

- The motion of the tutor emphasizes certain students, making these students become valued links or even hubs within the learning network. The movement of the tutor makes other students move in the direction of these students, creating and encouraging new connections among peers.

- The motion of the tutor promotes connections that can improve exchanges, affinity links between persons, and enhance student engagement and belonging within this learning network. We notice, thus, that connections can empower the learning network, since some students are able to become hubs within this network.
CONCLUSIONS

- It can be concluded that the more open content design and information structure, based on spreadability, was a key point for the use of transliteracies by students and facilitators.

- The results showed that the open design, the spreading informational structure and the transliteracies carried out by the facilitators had beneficial effects to favor the sense of belonging, involvement with the course, and student engagement, encouraging greater participation and delivery of activities.
Finally, we conclude that integrating transliteracies into the project had severe and positive impacts on the three key elements that build transactional distance (structure, dialogue and student autonomy), revealing a powerful strategy for bringing educator and students closer together; transforming the informational flow of the course; favoring highlighting and empowering students.
REFERENCES