



SETTING THE TONE: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE LEARNING RESOURCES TO IMPROVE THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF MIGRANTS IN FRANCE

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Introduction

The handling of mass migration is subject to a great deal of public debate in the past few years, notably in light of the recent economic crisis, armed conflicts and changes in the geopolitical sphere. This migration is both a source of richness and subject of conflict for the countries that welcome these migrants. The cultural and economic benefits of such migration are highly documented.

However, due to a lack of understanding of migration on local, national and international, overwhelming misconceptions that persist and that are often emphasised by social media and the wariness that can exist when the cultural practices of a country's citizens and incoming migrants is diagonally opposed, the integration process of migrants is hindered by overriding tensions.

Providing migrants with tailored educational resources can allow them to better understand the environment within which they find themselves, allow them to recognise the specificities of that environment, comprehend the complexity of the given society and in some cases provide them with arguments in order to anticipate and respond to potential conflict.

MOOC "Vivre en France, vivre ensemble" (Living in France, living together), addresses the question of smoothening the integration process for migrants in France. We will explore how this MOOC was developed in order to respond to the needs of migrants through a considerable amount of planning in terms of both editorial and production practices.

After briefly introducing the course context and the chosen structure to respond to that context, we will examine the importance of finding the right tone, managing the mass of content at learner disposal, handling the distribution process before emitting some recommendations in maintaining an optimal production process faced with the multiple validation processes that such politically sensitive courses are subjected to.

Context

The MOOC “Vivre en France, vivre ensemble”, commissioned in 2016 and launched early 2017 is a joint venture between the French Ministry of the Interior and France Terre d’Asile, a non-for-profit organisation, specialised in issues surrounding access to asylum in France and the life of migrants who are settled on French territory (The course being launched in Spring 2017, early results of the use of the MOOC will be available and presented at the EDEN conference). Produced in conjunction with MOOC & Cie, it is destined primarily at those who arrive legally in France and those who accompany these migrants on a regular basis, even though its scope goes largely beyond these initial targets.

The overall aim of the course is to share the fundamentals of what enables the “vivre ensemble” or living together in France, that is to say the values on which the Republic is founded and their materialisation in laws and programs that tie in rights and responsibilities for both residents and citizens. It means presenting in the simplest and the most concrete way imaginable the “culture” of republican democracy in France and how that notion was forged over the centuries. It is a way of addressing something that is rarely shared, as these elements appear to be natural to those who have grown up this culture and contribute to it on a daily basis.

Equality, fraternity, liberty, the right to free education, secularism ... All of these concepts are incarnated in the political and administrative functioning that is specific to France but largely shared by European countries with Europe featuring as a module within the course. The course assumes that a better understanding of the founding values of the republic and their incarnation on a day to day basis will facilitate the integration of migrants coming from diverse horizons including countries that are sometimes irrigated by several different cultures. These cultures are not presented as being better or worse than that of France, they are simply presented as being different. In fact, it is France that appears to be the “foreign” if not somewhat strange country in this course, something that migrants should familiarise themselves with or with which may even become accustomed.

This rather solemn approach to French society is balanced by light aired sections that deal with everyday life in France with a certain degree of humour. It is a way of positioning the learner in the shoes of a migrant who is trying to understand the apparently bizarre habits of French people including the unease with which people discuss money. For example, in France, it is rarely acceptable to ask a person how much money they earn. This section works on the hypothesis that if migrants are able to recognise the particularities of life in France, they are better equipped to face situations in which these political, social and cultural differences arise.

However, the course is not to be considered as an attempt to assimilate the behaviour of migrants to that of French citizens. In order to avoid such notions, the aspects that refer to

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French customs are presented in the form of self-derision, explaining that they may sometimes appear quite bizarre to outsiders.

Course structure

The course is divided into seven independent modules; secularism, fraternity, Europe, liberty, equality, schooling and family life. Each module is then divided into six sub-sections. Each of these sections has specific objectives in terms of the accompaniment of migrants.

The first section contains a presentation of the subject through an introductory video on the given topic and a series of commented images that allow learners to apprehend the key messages within these wide-covering subject matters. The content is presented by someone who is considered to be an “expert” or authority on the matter but using a language that is accessible to migrants who may sometimes have all but an elementary mastery of the French language. For this reason, media contents are subtitled in English and Arabic with all of the course contents available in English as well as French.

The second section proposes a series of videos containing the testimonials of migrants who are settled in France and their interpretation and understanding of the subject area. This allows learners to connect with the subject matter by relating their personal experience to that of fellow migrants.

The third section contains a short quiz that covers five of the key messages for the given module. This is used to ensure that learners have correctly understood these messages and to provide effective feedback, ensuring that doubts or misconceptions arising from the aforementioned videos can be dealt with using a more accessible level of expression.

The fourth section is built from two case studies that provide a practical approach to apprehending the issues arising from this subject area in the daily life of certain migrants. They encourage learners to question how they can tackle these issues in a practical, efficient and fair manner.

The fifth section provides a couple of explanations of the specificities and sometime peculiarities of French customs and society. This section allows learners to both understand and recognise these daily occurrences so that are less phased when they encounter them. Migrants may adopt some of these customs but the learners are not necessarily encouraged to do this. A more auto-derisive approach is adopted to avoid any sentiment of cultural superiority.

The sixth and final section is a short pedagogical guide in order to explain to those accompanying the migrants on a regular basis, how they can employ the course material within a classroom environment. The majority of migrants will have access to French language courses at some point and this is seen as an effective vector for promotion of these digital tools as a complement to the existing language and cultural courses with educators able to provide further insight into these subject matters.

Finding the right tone

The aim of this MOOC is to facilitate the integration process of migrants into their new environment. There is a fine line between providing migrants with support in integrating their newfound life context and enforcing some form of social and cultural assimilation. It is therefore necessary to discuss the values of the French Republic and its society without putting a societal model on a pedestal or opposing the migrant's previous context with that of his life in France. If such comparisons are made, they are made in a very general sense without naming a specific region, country or religion.

Handling learner interpretation and understanding of social norms and customs in the host country is an equally complex subject. It is important for migrants to understand the social norms of the country so that they can understand and anticipate the adverse reactions that they may face or face others with when the value sets of the host country are far removed from that which they are accustomed to. However, this should not become the basis for stigmatising learners by highlighting the gulf between the practices or introducing some form of superiority complex.

In order to avoid such a situation, we adopted a tone that highlighted the apparent absurdity of certain practices from the migrant's point of view, attempting to provide some form of historical or logical reasoning for the custom whilst recognising its capacity to astound outsiders. This reinforces the aforementioned concept of promoting social integration without falling into the traps of attempting to force cultural assimilation on migrants.

Accessing information

As mentioned earlier, there is a considerable mass of existing resources available for migrants to learn more about the context of living and working in France. The proper of the course is not to produce yet another resource within the mass of available content but rather to provide a condensed and adapted introduction to the diverse subjects that are prominent in French society.

This represents a major originality of the course. Beyond the trivial elements of daily life presented in the resources that are generally developed for migrants that include practical information such as how to greet people or order a train ticket, the course works on the basis that the migrant is educated and capable of reflecting upon what forms the basis for common life in their new environment. The course offers them the possibility of building their own path rather than imposing a fixed and directive learning path.

Beyond the questions of society, it is important for migrants to have access to the right information at the right time. For this reason, the different modules contain supplementary resources that allow learners to obtain more detailed explanations of complex subjects including the French social security system or the varied and frequent occasions where it is generally considered acceptable to greet a French person with a kiss on the cheek or "bisous".

Permanent and accessible distribution

There is a constant and fairly regular flow of migrants arriving in France throughout the year. Whether they come for work, study, to join family members or to flee persecution, they require access to resources that will support them in their new environment. This need cannot be met with traditional MOOC models with fixed start dates, end dates and durations. It was therefore decided to make the course available on a permanent basis for learners who are free to sign up and follow the learning units as they wish.

Whilst such openness has a positive effect on the flexibility of learning, it has pitfalls on other aspects of learning, notably on social interaction between learners, as it is difficult to attain the critical mass that is necessary for sustained learner interaction. In such cases, it is important to find a compromise between the optimal environment for learning and the priorities of the learning community. In our case, the continued access to the learning resources was primordial and weighed in on the advantages of social learning. In the case of this specific course, social interaction will come through the specialised French classes who during the obligatory citizenship courses that migrants must follow.

It is also important to highlight that the MOOC is distributed in parallel with other tools and resources produced by France Terre d'Asile, including the SamSam application that provides migrants with useful information and contacts for everyday necessities in France, fulfilling the role of the aforementioned guide. This is coupled with activities on social networks, notably Facebook where migrants can get snippets of French culture and share their experiences and top tips for living and working in France, allowing migrants to partake in other forms of social interaction around the questions treated in the MOOC.

Beyond these organisational factors, the questions of accessibility, relevant to all digital courses, take a great importance faced with migrant communities. Indeed, many migrants do not readily have access to internet connected computers. It is therefore important to develop a digital strategy that necessarily integrates access to content through mobile devices and the ability to access learning resources with limited bandwidth. In order to ensure such access with have adopted many of the recommendations set out by fragile learning community specialists. This includes downloadable versions of video contents or transcripts of these videos and short learning sequences.

Production processes

The course creation called upon the skills and efforts of a wide variety of people in the three aforementioned stakeholders; the French Ministry of the Interior, France Terre d'Asile and MOOC & Cie. The videos were produced by a professional documentary producer at France Terre d'Asile, the course contents were designed and developed by three learning designers at MOOC & Cie and the project management was handled conjointly by a representative for France Terre d'Asile and a representative for MOOC & Cie. The Ministry of

the Interior were responsible for the validation of contents before integration to the platform that was handled by a technical manager working for MOOC & Cie.

It was necessary to call upon this enlarged production to deal with the complexity of the course design. Indeed, it deals with politically and socially sensitive subjects involving representatives of both the state and associations founded by citizen initiatives. It was therefore necessary to go through a rigorous validation process and to reach consensus on these questions.

In order to simplify the process, a test module was developed that would serve as a reference model for the development of the subsequent modules. This module was co-constructed by the three stakeholders. The piloting committee notably exchanged on the choice of the subsections and the level of expression in terms of French as a foreign language. Particular attention was paid to the presentation of the case studies and the development of the quizzes. They were numerous exchanges between France Terre d'Asile and the Ministry of the Interior as it is important for the actors to know one another. All of the stakeholders demonstrated a great degree of openness ensuring that the exchanges remained fluid. A consensus was reached on this initial module within a period of four months with all of the stakeholders satisfied with the results of the process.

Following this initial production it was necessary to “industrialise” the process as, in order to respect the initial schedule, in the four months following the development of this initial sequence, the following six modules were to be developed. To foster the efficiency of the production teams, the three learning designers divided the subsections of the following modules with one designer working on the editorial for the videos and the accompanying images, one designer working on the case studies and the perspectives for deployment in the classroom environment and finally one designer working on the development of the quizzes and the notions of daily life in France, with the latter being a migrant himself and aware of the issues surrounding the integration of social norms. This would ensure a more rapid development of the following modules as designers only needed to master two of the six subsections.

In order to ensure the homogeneity of the modules in terms of the tone employed, the quality of the productions and the conformity of the modules to the reference model, the designer responsible for the editorials was also responsible for the editorial validation of the modules from MOOC & Cie's point of view. The development of two modules in parallel at any given time allowed for the optimisation of exchanges between designers who were working on physically distant sites.

Once the contents had been produced, they were loaded into a mock-up document that mirrored the layout of the learning platform. In turn the stakeholders could comment upon and modify the contents collaboratively. The contents were validated by MOOC & Cie then France Terre d'Asile before ultimate validation by the French Ministry of the Interior with

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modifications performed after each reading. The contents were then loaded onto the platform with the definitive version being validated by the piloting committee involving representative of the three stakeholders.

The platform was built from Moodle and personalised to incorporate the colour scheme of France Terre d'Asile.

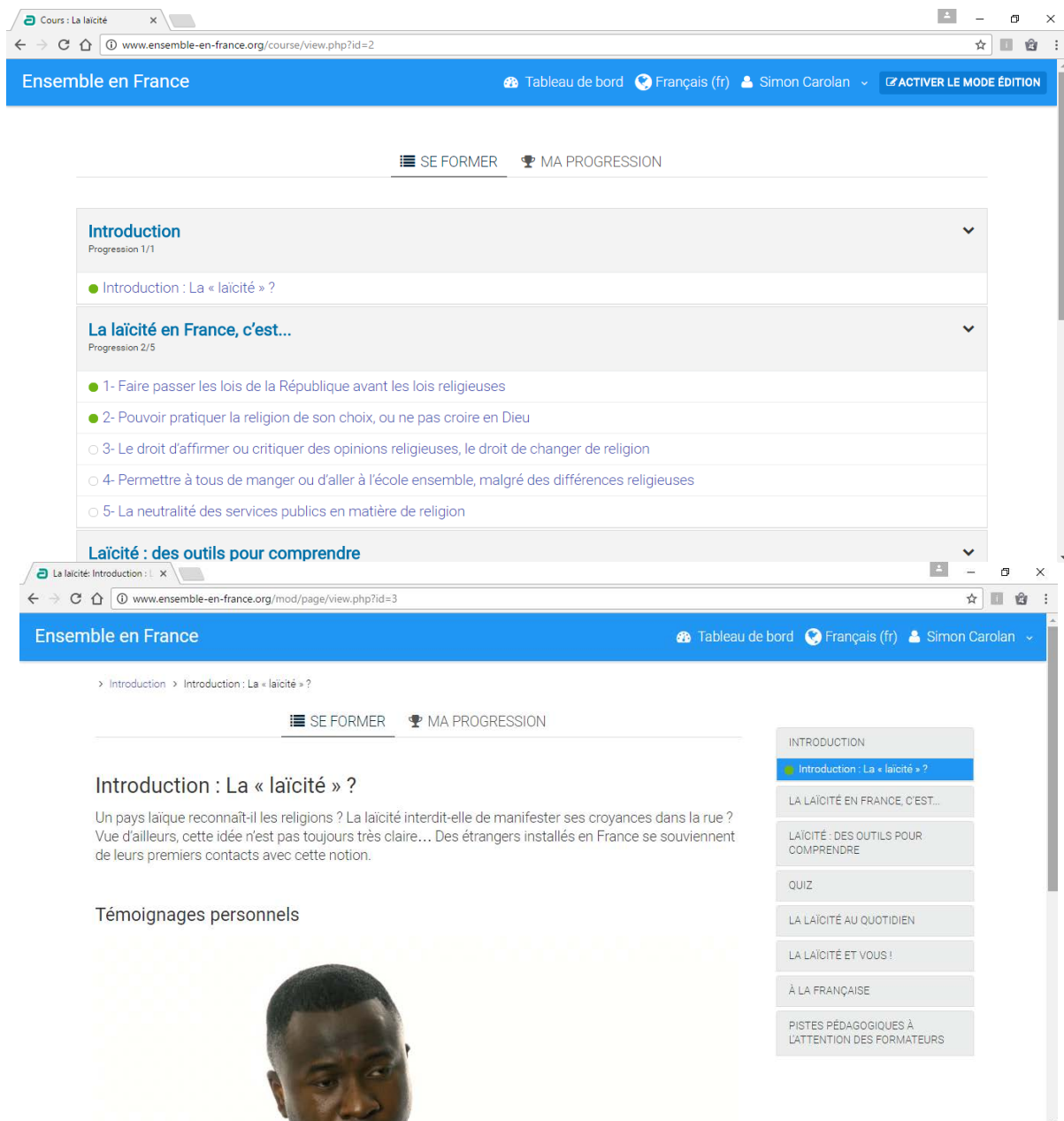


Figure 1. Screenshots of the course platform

The template for the course is simplified in order to prevent users getting lost amongst the varied resources and modules. A priority was placed on the visualisation of the resources, incorporating fat media for both the videos and the presentations. In addition, the users are able to switch easily with one simple quick between the English and the French versions of the platform.

Conclusions and perspectives

In many ways, the learning object described in this article should be not really be considered to be a MOOC but more a platform based self-training course that allows us to follow learner practices closely. The apparent lack of social interaction online is largely compensated for the majority of learners by their participation in French language and culture classes and their exchanges with the different French administrative institutions.

The course is original in terms of its contents, in so much as it does not simply address questions of daily life, it gives access to the building blocks of both French and European culture and societies. It is equally original in terms of its modes of distribution in that it is not simply a web site but a platform with the notion of free learning paths that are nevertheless highly structured. The advantages of such a structure do not only concern learners but also course providers who have the flexibility of replicating the model to produce supplementary learning modules.

In order to promote the accessibility of contents for migrant learners, it could be interesting to further explore the adaptation of the course to mobile technology working on optimised mobile interfaces that go beyond the mobile format that is currently proposed and that is largely based on the technology provided by the Moodle consortium. In order to achieve such accessibility, research teams at MOOC & Cie are currently exploring the development of specific mobile technologies for the deployment of courses.

Beyond the scope of this course for accompanying the integration of migrants, this course could be deployed in a wide variety of contexts. For example, it could be used to give recall or give new meaning to terms that are widely exploited in a complex political and social context that is characterised by tension between communities, a culture of recrimination and the omnipresence of communication and social media that bypasses fundamental questions and favours short-sighted interpretations of these terms. The course and its platform invite learners to think about and reflect upon these ideas that form the basis of French society. Learners are able to realise what brings us together more than what separates us. Could this be a new way of dealing with teaching citizenship?

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