Chapter XIX

Media Selection from the Teacher’s Point of View

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Abstract

Teachers, trainers, and educational designers often face the problem of choosing the most suitable media for achieving their educational purposes. To solve this problem, they need to take into account both the variables at play in the educational setting and the characteristics and potentialities of the media available. This chapter discusses the criteria for media choice, with particular attention to the point of view of the individual teacher who makes decisions on the basis of the educational strategies he or she deems most appropriate and, given that schools usually have limited resources, must favor techniques for material retrieval and reuse rather than new development.
Introduction

Choosing which media to use in a learning process is a crucial phase of educational design. Teachers, trainers, and designers of learning material all face the problem of identifying the most suitable media for conveying a message, for facilitating understanding of a concept, and for acquiring and consolidating skills of various kinds. The problem may be tackled intuitively or set within a systematic design methodology: in any case, solving it successfully is vital, as inappropriate choices may undermine the outcome of the learning process. Consequently, media selection criteria have been the subject of many research studies conducted over the past 50 years and more (Reiser & Gagné, 1982; Boud & Prosser, 2002; Romiszowski, 1988; Laurillard, 1993; Kirkwood, 1994). During this period, the focus has shifted towards emerging technologies. In the ’50s and ’60s, audio-visual media attracted great interest. In subsequent decades numerous studies sought to determine the potential and limits of the computer in education. Finally, since the ’90s, communication technologies have become the main focus. At the same time, there has been a similar shift in the approach adopted to tackle the problem of media choice, especially with the changes in perspective brought about by the evolution of learning theories. For example, Reiser and Gagné’s (1982) review of media selection methods considers learning models mainly pinned to a behaviorist approach whereby the aim, when choosing the medium, is to make the imparted stimulus as effective as possible. By contrast, more recent studies (Bates, 1991; Collins et al., 2000; Boud & Prosser, 2002) have tended towards a framework in which the educational functions of different media are not limited to optimal message conveying but embrace the performance of learning activities within a constructivist perspective. In other words, media are today seen as tools which designers of educational projects can use for constructing environments that foster and facilitate the learning process.

Most studies of media selection criteria have been carried out from the viewpoint of distance education because, when geographical distance separates the provider and the beneficiary of learning, adopting media is almost unavoidable. This chapter will instead focus on media choice by teachers in the school context.

Selecting Media: The Variables at Play

In distance education, decision making in instructional design is based on the following “variables” (Figure 1):