Chapter 31
Inviting Citizen Designers to Design Digital Interface for the Democratization of Web Online Environments

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ABSTRACT

Web online environments are supposed to create unifying spaces where diverse societies, cultures and linguistics as well as literacies and knowledge associated with them merge together as negotiated in neutral space. However, these online environments are not culturally neutral or innocent communication landscapes. They may alienate the users from marginal/periphery social, cultural, and linguistic background and experience because of their disregard to their social, cultural, and linguistics norms and values in the digital contact zone. Acknowledging the social, cultural, and linguistic limitations of these technologies that aim to provide agency to their users in this chapter, this chapter proposes to invite citizen designers to design the interface of web online environment in general and Learning Management Systems (LMS) in particular because this process can transform online environments into democratic platforms. Citizen designers, who have democratic sentiments for the creation of a just society, are composition students in general and students with periphery cultural and linguistic experience in particular. Doing a cultural usability test of Blackboard 8, the author argues that current web interface design is not democratic and inclusive, and proposes to invite citizen designers to re/design interface of online environments for their democratization so that they would include people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and enhance writing students' writing powers.

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INTERFACE RE/DESIGN BY CITIZEN DESIGNERS AND DEMOCRATIZATION OF WEB ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS: AN INTRODUCTION

Web online environments are supposed to create unifying spaces where diverse societies, cultures and linguistics as well as literacies and knowledge associated with them merge together as negotiated space of neutral space. However, these online environments are not culturally neutral or innocent communication landscapes. They may alienate the participants from marginal/periphery social, cultural, and linguistics background and experience because of their disregard to their social, cultural, and linguistics norms and values in the digital contact zone. Acknowledging the social, cultural, and linguistic limitations of these technologies that aim to provide agency to their users in this chapter, I propose to invite citizen designers to design the interface of web online environments because this process can transform online environments into democratic platforms. Citizen designers, who have democratic sentiments for the creation of a just society, are composition students in general and composition students with periphery cultural and linguistic experience in particular. Also, these citizen designers are mainly the non-expert/historically disfranchised composition students who have democratic impulses/sensibilities for the creation of just/democratic digital environment in the digital contact zone. I propose to invite them to design digital interfaces since interfaces are cultural maps, and it is important to identify the cultural information passed along the online environments. Therefore, it is necessary to rewrite the relationship between center and periphery groups in a society through the re/design of interface of online platforms because this rewriting of the relationship can contribute to the democratization within the culture and educational system through the authentic representation of marginal voice.

I conduct a usability test of Blackboard Learn in order to assess what citizen designers experience in an online environment of Blackboard as well as how it can be transformed into a democratic platform since Blackboard is the most used Web tool that writing students use in a cross-cultural digital contact zone situation. My focus in this chapter will be on the interface re/design of digital platforms used for a cross-cultural collaboration in the contact zone. For this, I invite citizen designers to re/design digital interfaces. I propose to invite them to design those digital interfaces since interfaces are cultural maps, and it is important to identify the cultural information passed along the online environments. Therefore, it is necessary to rewrite the relationship between dominant and marginalized group in the society through the re/design of interface of online platforms because this rewriting of the relationship can contribute to the democratization within the culture and educational system through the authentic representation of marginalized and oppressed voice.

Interface re/design plays a great role in online environments as literacy is figured through the interface. Periphery writing students' participation in its re/design may validate their prior literacy practices besides acknowledging their cultural and linguistic norms and values. Further, interfaces are treated as site of rhetorical practice- "one(s) that open up new possibilities for making meaning" (Kimmehea & Turnely, 2010, p. 33). Interface re/design may be invaluable to periphery writing students to exercise their rhetorical power since they can facilitate different literacy and rhetorical practices that "transcend and yet are embedded in a specific geocultural location" (Pandey, 2007, p. 123). Further, writing in the digital environment demands writing students "a range of critical composing practices, and visual figuration and interactivity offer fruitful starting points for the development of critical, multimodel literacies" (Kimmehea & Turnley, 2010, p. 33).