

Chapter XI

What Can Cave Walls Teach Us?

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Abstract

The question raised in this chapter, “What can cave walls teach us?” is essential because education is increasingly taught within a ubiquitous global electronic venue. Since much of the current electronic learning (e-learning) education environment has been produced in the United States of America, Canada, and Western Europe, many other countries, such as China, Japan, India, and Africa are currently left out of e-learning designs. So the question of how to provide e-learning that accommodates the diverse learning needs of multicultural and multinational learners is becoming critical. This chapter discusses some of the ways instructional designers and educators can utilize lessons learned from the past to facilitate a renaissance of learning across cultures and nations and incorporate prior learning legacies into facilitative, 21st century e-learning. Positive by-products will include more equitable learning opportunities for targeted learners through e-learning and, optimally, more well-rounded learners.

In the Beginning: An Introduction to Semiotics

Over 20,000 years ago, our human ancestors painted beautiful pictures on cave walls. While those paintings might not have been viewed as educational in nature, they probably were used for more than decorating the living area. The cave wall paintings depicted animals and scenes which the ancient cave dwellers used to tell stories, and those stories were the antecedents of education. The question raised in this chapter is, “What can cave walls teach us?” This question could become increasingly important in a world wherein education is taught within a global electronic venue.

Increasingly, education is accessible through electronic venues (e-learning), and is currently produced predominantly in the United States of America (examples, such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), New Horizons[®] Computer Learning Centers, Inc., Nova Southeastern University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Phoenix); Canada (examples, such as Carleton University, ELearn Corporation[®], Elluminate, Inc.[®], Madonna University) and Western Europe (examples in the United Kingdom, such as Conation Technologies, University of Leeds; and, in the Netherlands, such as Europe/MiddleEast/Africa (EMEA) Corporation[®], and University of Twente (Konrad, 2003)). Other countries, such as China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and countries of Africa, are often left out of e-learning designs. So the questions related to providing e-learning to accommodate the diverse learning needs of multicultural, multinational learners become even more critical. The answers, at least in part, may be “written on the walls” of human ancestors. If e-learning can be designed to consciously utilize semiotics, then it can better meet the growing multicultural and multinational needs of non-Western cultural groups and can improve the literacy and socio-economic opportunities in developing nations. Semiotic tools, the old-fashioned “crayons” of the mind, such as metaphors, pictures, and other symbolic representations, can have a profound effect on electronic learners, if we choose to utilize them, in a careful design for e-learning. If these meditative tools are incorporated into online learning, the legacies passed down through millennia of human education can be extended to future generations of learners.

This chapter will not include technology issues, like bandwidth and new technological enhancements, but will discuss ways that instructional designers and educators can include lessons learned from the past to facilitate a renaissance of e-learning across cultures and nations. This chapter will include how to incorporate semiotics into electronic interactive activities, self-regulation strategies, and collaborative community goals. Positive by-products of the conscious inclusion of semiotics in instructional design include more equitable learning opportunities for targeted learners through e-learning and, optimally, more well-rounded learners.

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