

Chapter 11

Culturally Significant Signs, Symbols, and Philosophical Belief Systems within E-Learning Environments

Caroline M. Crawford
University of Houston, Clear Lake, USA

Ruth Gannon Cook
DePaul University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Semiotic components, that of culturally representative signs and symbols, when thoughtfully included in the design of electronic learning (e-learning) environments could directly impact the viability of the e-learning environment and student success in that environment. In fact, when the instructor's and instructional designer's philosophies and model choices are embedded with cultural and historical symbolic representations, stories, and tools, including new technologies, there can be a positive impact upon the students in the semiotic e-learning environment (Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995; Dillon, 1996; Gallini, Seaman, & Terry, 1995; Gannon-Cook & Crawford, 2001; Salomon, 1997; Verene, 1993). Within an electronic learning environment, the semiotic and philosophical imperatives can culturally charge the students' impressions, communications, and interactions with a strong positive impact. The learner's consciousness, because of the subconscious comfort level with the embedded semiotic course elements, is then more open to the new content material. The cultural and social elements thus minimize cognitive load and positively impact

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1885-5.ch011

Culturally Significant Signs, Symbols, and Philosophical Belief Systems

electronic learning, not only in courses, but in other environments where semiotics is thoughtfully embedded, such as video and gaming environments. These case studies help provide a chronicle of the lessons learned from the ongoing research on embedded semiotics in e-learning.

To more appropriately frame the book chapter discussion, it is appropriate to offer a short overview of the discussion. The crux of the problem, at least in part, seemed to reside in a number of students' inability to succeed in taking an online course, in learning how to navigate the course, and in getting used to the isolation of online courses. The goal of the study was to see if the inclusion of semiotic tools, signs, symbols, stories, and tools, could help students to feel more comfortable and whether that comfort could help them to persist in completing assignments and finishing the course.

The contextual backdrop of the problem and goal of the study are based within the framework that the researchers wanted to be sure that the courses were unique in their appropriateness to their respective cultures; but they also wanted to see if the course adaptations provided cultural values and perspectives that were fairly consistent and appropriate across cultures and nations. The methodology is qualitative in nature, specifically focused upon development design research and narrative inquiry. The findings suggest that there were several levels of concern: learner concerns; instructional design or teaching concerns; management and organizational concerns; and, technology concerns. This study has addressed the question "what lessons could be learned from semiotic and philosophical instructional imperatives inclusion within e-learning environments?" As such, the interpretation of the findings of the study shed light on the importance of simple mediation tools, such as signs, symbols, and stories. The implications of the findings indicate that more research could shed light on how to help students feel comfortable enough to follow through and complete their e-learning courses. In viewing best practices for e-learning, students' existent knowledge can be bridged with what they need to know by using a variety of the semiotic tools discussed in this study.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The two universities that were the focus of this study significantly differ in size, and situation, but with similar missions with respect to their commitment to student success. Each has also committed to the success of their electronic learning (e-learning) programs. The priorities within each of the organizations are the design, development and implementation of the e-learning environments and the successful

32 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/culturally-significant-signs-symbols-philosophical/68066

Related Content

Enhanced Learning and Leading in a Technology Rich, 21st Century Global Learning Environment

Ian W. Gibson (2006). *Enhancing Learning Through Technology* (pp. 75-102).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/enhanced-learning-leading-technology-rich/18349

Scale

Jon Dron (2007). *Control and Constraint in E-Learning: Choosing When to Choose* (pp. 77-96).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/scale/7148

From Text to e-Text - Resisting Print

Katy Campbell (2004). *E-ffective Writing for E-Learning Environments* (pp. 176-194).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/text-text-resisting-print/8968

The History of Religions as a Tool for Citizenship Education of Children: An Experience in a Primary School

Mariachiara Giorda, Giulia Nardini and Beatrice Nuti (2013). *Handbook of Research on Didactic Strategies and Technologies for Education: Incorporating Advancements* (pp. 162-169).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/history-religions-tool-citizenship-education/72066

Blended Learning Internationalization from the Commonwealth: An Australian and Canadian Collaborative Case Study

Shelley Kinash and Susan Crichton (2013). *Cases on Cultural Implications and Considerations in Online Learning* (pp. 101-132).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/blended-learning-internationalization-commonwealth/68061