“Coloring within the Lines” of Learning Management Systems and Constructed Meaning in Online Teaching

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How can Adult learners better navigate online courses successfully?

Adult learners look to the option of online learning to save time on commutes and to pursue a degree when they may otherwise be unable to do so. However, when adult students begin taking online courses, and sometimes even after a few courses, there is a period of adjustment. They may feel bombarded with information about the content in the courses, the learning management system (LMS), the textbooks and assignments, or the need to interact and network with other students in their online courses.
Minimize their Cognitive Load...
They are Navigating the LMS, the Online Content, and Interactivities...

A
They come to class with cultural knowledge and experiences: **They need to build on what they already know...**

B
To maximize learning, presenting knowledge in a way that resonates with students mediates with what they know.

C
Since most learning must take place in a relatively short timeframe, 10 weeks, helping students to mediate the new material becomes much more immediate.

D
Studies have found that students learn more effectively when they can scaffold new knowledge on what they already know.

E
There are techniques based on significant research that can greatly improve the chances of their scaffolding new knowledge and improve the likelihood of their completing the course successfully... here are a few...
• Building on What Our Learners Know

• 1. How Can they navigate the LMS and the Online Course Successfully?
   - Simple explanations with graphics and videos help a lot.
   - We need to go back to look at the past... what sticks in our memories...

• Dr. Gerald Zaltman, emeritus of Harvard (2008), says that pictures in our heads, stories, narratives, signs and symbols that touch our memories and emotions and serve as scaffolds for our learning.
• Evolution and Revolution in Virtual Learning

WHAT STICKS...

• Mediating new learning with stories, narratives. The human mind evolved with survival skills— and habits to handle routines. Using short-term memory well can integrate new knowledge if used thoughtfully.

• Technology integration modeling

• Technology that attends to the student’s ability level to learn... the zone of proximal development (ZPD)

• Using media to resonate with students... the online medium is... and is not the message

WHAT MAY NOT...

• Too much thrown at learners can produce cognitive overload. This can be a setback if it stresses out or frustrates the students. Pacing can help the students better assimilate new knowledge. And using pictures, graphs, stories, videos, will help.
Learning Management Systems also Are Not Neutral...

The structure of the LMS generally helps guide students by delivering the format and content consistently but it is not neutral, it sends its own messages...

- LMS Templates... “The Lines” within which every student must “color.”
- We just need to be aware the LMS is also a CMS (control/content management system) and keep the themes and messages within them consistent. Look at each area separately for consistency:
  - Metadata, including graphics
  - Design – Context and Pedagogy
  - Design – Structure and Presentation
  - Interoperability
Language, cultural knowledge, subject knowledge, relations to other learning resources and other factors that are needed to properly interpret a digital learning resource.
• Design Layers

How a digital learning resource is structured into smaller units, and how these are navigated or sequenced.

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• Keeping “Inside the Lines”
  But keeping the integrity and the “color”…

- Consider multi-language and culture tools. Use symbols, images, scenarios that are as widely-applied as possible.
- Paying attention to context and pedagogy guidelines increases usability for instructors and learners.
The process of understanding in nature, together with the joy that man feels in understanding, i.e., in becoming acquainted with new knowledge, seems to rest upon a correspondence, a coming into congruence of preexistent internal images of the human psyche with external objects and their behavior.”
(Rothstein, 1996, p.203).
Virtual “Crayons”
Technological Tools Can Also Facilitate Learning:

- Texting
- Webboard chatrooms
- List-servs and weblogs (BLOGs)
- Instant messaging
- See You, See Me (CUCMe) technologies
- Streamed videos
- Web phone conferences
- Net meetings
- Emerging technologies
- Wikis
- SKYPE
- QRs (Quick Response Codes for mobile phones
- Other Technologies

Play and Learning can be virtually bound together, and we truly do not have to have boundaries, but we do have to carefully scaffold the load that students can cognitively bear to be successful learners.
Some Considerations to Keep in Mind

1. Do socio-cultural influences combine or collide in your electronic classroom?

2. Are the symbols and content materials embedded in your course(s) sending consistent messages to your students that help them learn?

3. What are the effects of the technology used in the course(s) on students’ learning?

4. What are the implications for learning, teaching, and research?

5. What are some of the iconic and cultural ideas you could include in your courses to help your students to learn better and navigate better through the course(s)?
Humans hold onto memories, and symbolic nostalgia that give meaning to our lives.
Students Also Want to Be Heard, They Want to Have a Voice. In Online Courses that is not always easy to do. Here are some ideas to give them voice in online courses:

• Try Skype...http://skype.com, all you need is your PC, an eyecam and a microphone!

• And What’s Really Great is Free Conference and it also free!!: ttp://freeconference.com...

• Extranormal is fun because they can create animations that speak for them http://xtranormal.com

• Include VOICE in your courses really helps to humanize students and helps them to feel less isolated,

• But even if you don’t use ANY other technologies than the D2L Course itself, try including more pictures, symbols and metaphors in your courses. (While not all symbols are universal, many are, such as food, boats, campfires, family pictures, etc.) Testimonials are also very helpful for students.
So We Can Add “Color” Within the Lines of the Course, the LMS, and Also Outside the Lines and into the Virtual Realm—But We Have to Do it Thoughtfully and Give the Students the “Crayons” too!

Thank you for Letting Me Present to You Today. Any Questions?
References


