Definitions and Knowledge in Successive Educational Media

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ABSTRACT

This presentation brainstorms with international colleagues the implications of the paper "Cultural, Disciplinary and Temporal Contexts of e-Learning and English as a Foreign Language." A framework for understanding concepts in new disciplines in their full dimensionality also sheds light on why definitions of concepts such as in e-learning have been so inadequate.

Consider the supreme irony of Plato's Socrates: would that wisdom [or knowing] could be poured from the full cup into the empty cup. It offers faint praise to interlocutors believing that someone can have "lots of knowledge" that can either be transmitted from teacher to student or stolen off the Web. Knowledge is more like expertise: for better or worse, when the knower walks, his or her knowledge also walks, leaving only information that others need their own background knowledge or expertise to understand.

Choosing educational content to profess involves turning specialist information into generalist communication, offering interaction opportunities through which students construct their own knowledge. Another metaphor is that, after plays became an established genre, Shakespeare could write that "all life's a stage." Each successive medium redefines the previous media and renders them identifiable as paradigms. Concepts such as "offline," "f2f" and even "analog" used as a loanword in Japanese discourse arose from the newly established digital online media, rendering previously taken-for-granted assumptions about classroom education identifiable as a paradigm. A second meaning of "stage" could apply to successive educational media, where for example CAI, CALL and Network-based Language Learning are not defined in the abstract but in practice, contextualized in the historical development of a discipline.

Constructivism arose contemporaneously with online education, but they may actually represent separable disciplines, since online education is liable to be adopted without constructivism in most educational cultures. The presenter has reported on one case showing universality of constructivism with online education across cultures. There are cross-cultural dimensions also in the salience of distance and the importance of face, for example in contrasting Australia with Japan, cultural contexts that affect the uptake of distance education even if "Webagogues" realize that space and time barriers are now largely surmountable.