A Study Utilising E-learning Theory, Universal Design for Learning and Multiliteracies for Teaching Practical Irish Genealogical Research Online

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Abstract

Over the last two decades the world has become increasingly tech savvy. A large majority of people worldwide have access to both the internet and a laptop, smartphone or similar internet supporting device. Under these conditions, online based education, or e-learning, has all the potential to educate people on a global scale. In order to feasibly reach students in the global classroom, with its inherent levels of diversity, an e-learning course needs a robust design that not only supports an online pedagogy, but learner accessibility and inclusivity as well. One subject matter that is in need for such a design is practical Irish genealogical research; as it has both a lack of an e-learning presence coupled with international student demand.

The purpose of this study was to create a sample, online based Irish genealogy course that combines E-learning Theory (Clark and Mayer, 2016) with the inclusivity and accessibility focused pedagogical approaches of Multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009) and Universal Design for Learning (Hall, Meyer and Rose, 2012). Internationally based students of the course were then surveyed and interviewed to assess the course effectiveness.

The findings reflected that the course was received as highly comprehensible and accessible from the participating students which were domiciled in six different countries. There were some limitations regarding this study as due to the nature of the subject itself: even though international; it is inherently limited to the English speaking world and the descendants of the Irish diaspora within it.

Based on the implications from these results, future work should be to have the same design applied to a synchronous e-learning course.

Keywords

E-learning Theory, Multiliteracies, Universal Design for Learning, Inclusivity in Education
1. Introduction and Motivation

Of the many possibilities that e-learning may hold, a particularly significant one is that it may serve as the modern world’s panacea for some of the ills associated with traditional learning; particularly student accessibility. In order to be truly accessible to all students, considerations must be made for inclusivity regarding all the cultural and social differences encountered when bringing together such a diverse classroom on the scale that e-learning allows for. Even with the wide reaching capabilities of the internet; if a course’s material is created only in the context of a particular culture; typically the same culture of the course creator; it will fall short of its potential (Growe et al., 2000). Another inherent aspect of a global classroom will be many students of different capabilities including those with special needs. Fortunately, there are two pedagogical approaches to address these elements: Multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009) and Universal Design for Learning (Hall, Meyer and Rose, 2012). One such subject matter that is in a position to benefit from an e-learning platform that supports inclusivity and accessibility is practical Irish genealogical research, as it commands a diverse, global student base (Grenham, 2012).

In this study, the author examines the outcome of combining E-learning Theory (Clark and Mayer, 2016) with Multiliteracies and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) via the creation of a sample course, entitled “Practical Irish Genealogical Research” and delivering the course online to students from a variety of different countries.

2. Methods

The objective of the course was to provide online training in genealogical research that was accessible and comprehensible to students; regardless of their background. To achieve this, the course design incorporated all three pedagogical approaches. The course had two stages of production which allowed for amendments to the course based on the feedback of international volunteer students via an anonymous questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions that reflected the desired outcomes of the E-learning Theory, UDL and Multiliteracies elements that were incorporated into the course. The students then had to rate how effective the course was at achieving these outcomes, using a rating system of 1 to 5;
1 being the lowest rating (poor) and 5 being the highest (excellent). The interviews asked the same questions but allowed for a broader feedback.

The initial stage consisted of students, categorized as “Group A,” from different countries in the following percentages: 86% from the US, 16% from Australia, 11% from Canada and 5% from the UK. The secondary stage consisted of students, categorized as “Group B”, from countries in the following percentages: 63% from the US, 11% from Australia, 11% from Canada, 5% from the UK, 5% from South Africa and 5% from New Zealand.

![Figure 1 – Questionnaire Results](image)

3. Findings

All the intended outcomes of blending E-learning Theory with Multiliteracies and UDL received high ratings in the feedback data from the questionnaires and interviews. Overall, the course was received as highly accessible and comprehensible for students from many different cultural backgrounds.

3. Future Work

A next step in development of the course would be to allow it to have subtitles across all three lessons. As this study was based on an asynchronously designed e-learning course; another area for further development would be to apply the same course design to a synchronous course.
References


