An investigation into visual design in the development of educational Web-based projects

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Certification

I, Lesley Knapp, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters by Research, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Lesley Knapp

January 2006
Abstract

The thesis describes a study of methods of developing online learning material by non-professional visual designers. The primary areas of investigation for the research were visual design and instructional design. It is the premise of the researcher that visual design skills and instructional design principles are interdependent for creating coherent educational resources.

Academics are increasingly expected to design and develop projects for slide presentation and Websites. This is in part because the technology is available in the form of personal computers and development software. Access to the technology however doesn’t mean access to design skills. Historically, graphic designers were responsible for making information presentable, legible and accessible. There is substantial evidence to support the theory that well presented information not only improves the learning experience but also facilitates deeper learning.

Anecdotal evidence and texts acknowledge the problem of poorly designed interfaces in multimedia. Slide presentations frequently include distracting elements such as incongruous sound and animation. Web sites can be difficult to navigate requiring equanimity and patience. The proliferation of information delivered in formats other than print requires new skills and concepts to make sense of it. The combination of technology and the overwhelming amount of information readily available is creating an unprecedented challenge for the educator.

Many studies have been undertaken to compare the learning outcomes of incorporating images, colour and other graphical representations into online learning material with inconclusive results. Educational theorists raise issues of the need to use the computer as a constructivist learning medium needing different instructional methods. The traditional principles and guidelines for methods of instruction using print cannot be imposed on another medium that is a visual medium.