

professional development quicknotes

Effective Learning Environments

April 4, 2008

In "Toward a Theory of Online Learning," Terry Anderson examines the "How People Learn" (HPL) scholarship of Bransford, Brown, and Cocking within the context of online learning.¹ Anderson refers to the HPL literature as the "new science of learning."

In their HPL research, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, found that effective learning environments are constructed at the convergence of four "lenses" [Anderson's term]. As Anderson points out, in HPL theory "effective learning is learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered, and community centered."

Since online learning is a subset of learning in general, Anderson argues that "issues relevant to how adults learn generally [are] relevant to how they learn in an online context. Anderson goes on to examine each of these areas and "apply [the] analytical framework [of HPL theory] to the unique characteristics of online learning."²

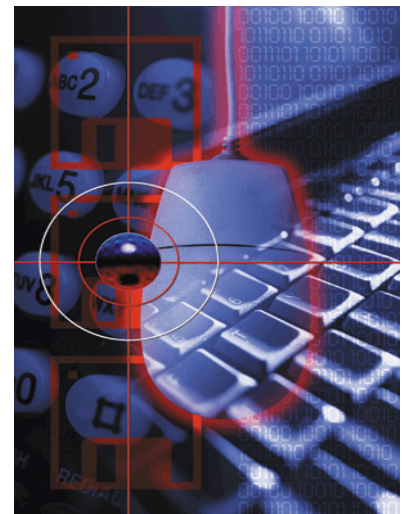
Anderson's greater purpose in this examination of effective learning environments is part of an exploration of "learning theory generally, and then [to] focus on those attributes of the online learning context that allow us to develop deeper and more useful theories of online learning." Anderson points out that theory "makes it possible for us to view our practice and our research from a broader perspective than that envisioned from the murky trenches of our practice."³

With the loss of the physical learning space of the face-to-face classroom, it is crucial that attention is paid to the constructed learning spaces of the online environment. Over the next several issues each of these four areas will be addressed in greater detail. While the primary focus will be on their application to online learning, these topics apply equally to learning in the face-to-face classroom as well.

The TLC has created a companion website for this series of articles @ <http://www.jalc.edu/tlc/ele.html>. Both the Anderson and the Bransford, Brown, and Cocking works are available for free online on this website. Links to other resources will be added as the series continues.

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Terry Anderson



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¹Terry Anderson, "Toward a Theory of Online Learning," in Terry Anderson and Fathi Elloumi, editors, Theory and Practice of Online Learning (Athabasca, AB T9S 3A3, Canada: Athabasca University, 2004), 35. The original research is found in John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cockering, editors, How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999).

²Anderson, 35.

³Anderson, 33.