

13. Symposium: Communication and Control in E-Learning Environments Symposium

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this Symposium is to present the work of the Communication and Control in E-Learning Environments Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Equality in E-Learning Project. The SIG has examined the inter-relationships between on-line communication and learner and tutor experience of control over different aspects of the e-learning process.

If education is seen as a prime site for the reproduction of reality, the interaction of asymmetrical power relations between teachers and students, and the formation of identities, then understanding issues of communication and control becomes central to an understanding of educational processes. E-learning and in particular networked, collaborative e-learning, provides a very interesting case study. It offers, in its processes and in its philosophical approach, an understanding of reality as constructed and an approach which supports the construction of alternative 'realities' (i.e. it challenges the idea of truth as naturalized); it aims to engage learners and teachers in collaborative and social processes where the aim is to reduce the unequal distribution of power between participants; and it supports subjectivity and takes account of difference and the expression and construction of multiple identities. It is also embedded within new forms of communication technology which may enable or constrain these processes. The interesting question posed by this new learning process is: what happens to communication and control within such new contexts of learning?

This SIG has taken a psycho-socio-discoursal approach to examining the issue of communication and control within networked e-learning. The experience of control is seen to be both psychological, and emerges as motivation; and sociological, and related to power. It assumes that control is mediated through the tools and technologies available, the tasks required, individual levels of competence and motivation, social structural factors, available roles and identities, and pedagogic design. This dynamic interaction takes place within the social context of discourse and forms the flow of learner engagement.

The SIG has thus focused on investigating the individual learner and tutor's experience according to psychological, pedagogical and socio-discoursal factors. Subgroups within the SIG have taken each of these factors and examined them according to the following three questions:

- What is the relationship between the experience of control and motivation?
- What is the relationship between pedagogic design of collaborative learning processes and issues of power and control?
- How do relations of power and the exercise of control reveal themselves in the discourse of collaborative networked e-learning?

The three papers presented as part of this symposium address each of these questions respectively.

Organised By: Sarah J Mann