

Apr 15th, 1:35 PM

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Werner Van Wyk and Lisa Thompson, "TRANSLITERACY, eLEARNING AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION, LOST IN TRANSLATION?." *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 55.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2013/papers/55>

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TRANSLITERACY, eLEARNING AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION, LOST IN TRANSLATION?

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Abstract

Owing to changes in the areas of technology, research, teaching, learning, communication and more, libraries are required to change as well, so they can provide in the evolving needs of their customers (ACRL, 2006; Thomas et al. 2007). Amongst these changes, a need for a “new” type of literacy has arisen, that of transliteracy, which according to Thomas et al. (2007), can be defined as: “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks”. In return, this need has created the need to train librarians to be transliterate, which can be done by new ways of teaching and learning in the forms of eLearning, online training, virtual learning, etc., made possible by the modernization of education by ICT`s (Punie, Zinnbauer & Cabrera, 2006; Van Brakel & Chisenga, 2003).

Using ICT`s to communicate, and it can be argued using ICT`s for educational purposes as well, however has the disadvantage that even though some areas of communication are enhanced, others like nonverbal cues are neglected (Hollingshead, McGrath & O`Connor in Shachaf, 2008) which is a big concern, as nonverbal communication accounts for about 65% of successful communication (Steinberg, 2007). The researchers suggest that transliteracy education by means of modernized education methods need to account for the gap left by the missing nonverbal communication component, and find ways to ensure that during transliteracy education adequate content is transferred.

Keywords: Transliteracy, Nonverbal Communication, eLearning.

Background

According to ACRL (2007) and Thomas, et al. (2007), as a consequence of the advances in technology, research, teaching, learning, communication and more that the needs of the 21st Century user has changed. In order for the library to keep up with these changing needs, the library also need to adapt. Some of the skills that were previously deemed to be “nice to have” are now vital, not only for information professionals, but also for users.

In order for information professionals and organisations to have successful partnerships, new skills and competencies need to be developed. One of these new skills is “transliteracy”. According to Thomas et al. (2007), transliteracy can be defined as: “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks”. Newman (2012), supports this idea of transliteracy, and states that it can be described as a lifelong learning process that includes characteristics such as diversity, awareness, participation and flexibility. It also includes face-to-face communication, gestures, and expressions (Newman, 2012).

In developing these new competencies through continuing education, libraries and information professionals often make use of the new features available by means of ICT`s. Although it is true that ICT`s have modernized education, leading to the development of new concepts such as eLearning, virtual learning and online learning (Punie, Zinnbauer, & Cabrera, 2008; van Brakel & Chisenga, 2003), it is not the proverbial “silver bullet” for teaching and learning.

Although all methods of teaching and learning have drawbacks, eLearning educators must recognise that in the eLearning environment, one of these is the loss of nonverbal communication (NVC). According to Steinberg (2007), 65% of successful communication comprises NVC, therefore in the delivery of material to the learner in the online environment the significance of NVC should be recognised.

Definitions and key concepts:

According to The Pennsylvania State University (2009), there is no single definition that can be used to describe blended learning, owing to the diverse nature of the subject. A definition offered by The Pennsylvania State University (2009), is that: “a blended learning approach combines face to face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities to form an integrated instructional approach. In the past, digital materials have served in a supplementary role, helping to support face to face instruction”. The Macmillan Dictionary (2013), definition defines blended learning as: “a method of learning which uses a combination of different resources, especially a mixture of classroom sessions and online learning materials”.

eLearning according to JISC (2013) is “learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology”. It can be a combination of online and traditional learning (a blended approach) or it can be a program that is delivered only online (JISC, 2013).

It is clear that there are overlaps in the definitions of eLearning and blended learning. Both definitions include traditional classroom as well as online sessions as part of teaching and learning. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, eLearning will be used for both concepts.

Nonverbal communication (NVC) can be defined as: “communication that indicates how verbal information should be interpreted; stimuli surrounding the verbal communication that also have meaning, which may or may not be congruent with that of or support the verbal talk. It may support or contradict verbal communication...Communication which is implicit and not expressed in words” (Wiktionary, 2011). In other words, NVC is anything that is communicated without the use of words.

The meaning of “literacy” has evolved over time and rather simply being and ability to read and write, there are many more skills required in order to be “literate” In 1965 UNESCO stated that “rather than an end in itself, literacy should be regarded as a way of preparing man [or woman] for a social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing” (UNESCO, 1980). The definition has become even more inclusive and one of the most recent definitions of literacy is “transliteracy”

According to (Ipri, 2010) “transliteracy is concerned with what it means to be literate in the 21st century”. Newman (2012) continues on this idea by stating that transliteracy is an all-encompassing term that includes concepts such as literacy, media literacy, digital literacy and so on, and that transliteracy is basically “communication in any form”.

As we are dealing with the NVC aspect of communication it is important to take cognisance of the role that it plays in all types of literacy including transliteracy.

Context

Owing to the fact that transliteracy is extremely broad namely “communication in any form” (Newman, 2012), it is important to identify and clarify the concepts germane to our study.

Some of the components of transliteracy according to Newman (2012) are:

Information	Social networking	Emotions
Content	Social	Gestures
Connection	Cultural	Diverse
Format	Sharing	Face-to-face

Although all of the terms related to transliteracy are important, for the purposes of this paper, the terms relating directly to NVC are identified. These are:

Social	Emotions	Diverse
Cultural	Gestures	Face-to-face

A study on the impact of NVC in the classroom was conducted at the University of Pretoria as part of an honours research project. Second year Information Science students, as well as the lecturer were observed and a survey was conducted in an attempt to establish the importance of NVC in this setting. As part of the study, it was established that as communicators we rely heavily on non-verbal cues as it help to facilitate communication. The crux of the findings for this particular study was that NVC is of utmost importance for successful learning.

Recognising that NVC is a significant component of Transliteracy (Newman, 2012), and having established the importance of NVC for successful learning, we think that the findings of the study are applicable in the investigation of transliteracy, collaboration and eLearning in academic libraries.

Methodology of Honours Study

A mixed methods approach was followed. Questionnaires and observation were used to collect data from the sample group of 86 students. In order to select the research population, Convenience sampling, a form of Non-probability sampling, was used.

The observations were conducted during scheduled practical sessions. A total of four sessions were observed, two focusing on the instructor and two on the students. Data captured during the observation sessions were recorded on a Microsoft Excel program. Included in this program were the various areas that the researchers identified, that could have an influence on the outcome of the lecture. Preselected responses were programmed so that when certain behaviour was observed and entered into the program, the influence that it had on the lecture could automatically be seen. The program was set up in such a way that after all the available areas were completed, it indicated whether or not the class was successful. Using Microsoft Excel, a number of formulas were applied to analyse the results. The data were displayed in the form of graphs and tables (See appendix 1).

Data collection through questionnaires was also conducted utilising Google Forms, which is a tool used to create questionnaires or surveys online (Google, 2011). This form was connected to a document in Google Spread sheets. As with the Excel program used to capture data during the observations, formulas were inserted in this spread sheet, so that once the respondents completed a questionnaire, it automatically calculated the results. The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions. These included

- Multiple choice,
- Rating Scale and
- Check list questions.

A link to the questionnaire was delivered to the students via email, and it was also made available through ClickUP (the electronic learning management system of the University of Pretoria).

In the observation schema and questionnaire the categories of NVC and a number of qualifiers were used. The categories of NVC include:

- Emblems,
- Illustrators,
- Affect Displays,
- Regulators,
- Adaptors,
- Posture,
- Gestures, and
- Eye Contact.

The qualifiers used include:

Qualifiers	Description
Adequately/ Understandable	Carries over enough meaning to increase understanding up to the maximum level possible
All the time	On a continuous basis.
Bad	A low standard, lots of interferences, unclear, too soft, tempo to fast
False	Something that cannot be taken as fact
Good	A high standard, no interferences, loud and clear, correct tempo
A small amount/ Only a little	Carries over some meaning, increases understanding but not enough to ensure that there is no confusion
Incorrectly	Inappropriately or in the wrong order. The nonverbal communication does not match the verbal communication
Negatively	Distracting, inappropriate, and unpleasant to look at
Never	None at all.
No	Not agreeing with.
Positively	Not distracting, appropriate, and pleasant to look at.
Sometimes	From time to time, now and then.
Too little	Carries over some meaning, but not enough to ensure that there is no confusion.
Too much	Carries over so much meaning that it creates confusion. Attention is distracted from the verbal communication and places focus on the nonverbal communication.
True	Something that can be taken as fact.
Yes	Agreeing to.

Together with the categories, the qualifiers were used to establish the extent to which NVC was used. The positive qualifiers were seen as a positive influence on communication, while negative qualifiers were regarded as having a negative influence on communication. Consequently NVC was deemed to have:

- Regulated, Reinforced or Complemented,
- Replaced, or
- Contradicted verbal communication.

If verbal communication was Regulated, Reinforced or Complemented it was assumed that it would have a positive influence on the lecture, as meaning was added to the verbal communication. If verbal communication was Replaced or Contradicted it was assumed that it would have a negative influence on the lecture, as a different meaning was transferred than what was transferred by the verbal communication.

Thus the extent to which each category was used determined the success or failure of the lecture. The results were expressed in a table. (See appendix 1).

Findings

During observation session 1 on the instructor it was determined that the NVC of the instructor had a positive influence overall on the lecture which led to the success of this lecture. Observation session 2 revealed the same results. During observation session 1 on the students it was determined that the NVC of the students had a positive influence overall on the lecture which led to the success of this lecture. Observation session 2 revealed the same results.

It is interesting to note that although different groups of students were observed during each session, the results were similar.

Based on the four observation sessions, it can be said that NVC had a positive influence overall on the lectures. This resulted in the positive outcome of these lectures. Thus it can be said that the positive NVC of the instructor and the positive NVC of students during a lecture had a combined positive influence on the lecture.

The questionnaire was completed by 41 students out of a class of 86. The analysis of the results based on the NVC of the lecturer revealed that the use of Gestures, Regulators, Eye contact, a Positive posture, Affect displays and Good Vocal Characteristics had a positive influence on the lectures. The analysis of the results based on the NVC on the students revealed that the use of Gestures, Regulators, Mannerisms, Affect displays and a Positive posture had a positive influence on the lectures.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire it can be said that NVC had a positive influence overall on the lectures. This resulted in the positive outcome of these lectures. Thus it can be said that the positive NVC of the instructor and the positive NVC of students during a lecture have a combined positive influence on the lecture.

Based on the combined results of the observation and the questionnaire it was determined that the positive NVC of the instructor and the positive NVC of students during a lecture had a combined positive influence on the lecture.

It can thus be said that the importance of NVC in the teaching and learning environment is of utmost importance.

Discussion

Bearing in mind that NVC is a sine qua non in traditional classrooms, it can be assumed that it is equally important in the eLearning environment. According to Burgoon et al. (in Mersham, 2009) "New communication technologies tend to filter out important contextual and social cues" resulting in an "impoverished communication environment" which could "degrade the quality of communication, impair working relationships, and undermine task performance compared to face-to-face interaction unless communicators are able to compensate for such losses".

As the Library and Information Science professionals (LIS) professional and academic libraries in particular, continue to move in the direction of e-learning and electronic service delivery, it is important that the significance of NVC is recognised. Without including NVC, much of the essence of the communication will be lost, thereby compromising effective service delivery and collaboration.

Academic libraries are learning organisations and are expected to provide state of the art services, therefore LIS professionals have to be willing to adapt to change without compromising the quality of the service. In the words of Rice-Lively and Racine (1997) librarians need to be committed to "being more self-directed and self-motivated to develop new skills that will enable the fullest use of new technology and resources". By implication, librarians need to recognise and embrace the acquisition of new skills such as Transliteracy. Therefore, as we have already established NVC has to be included in the training of LIS professional in new skills.

LIS professionals contribute to lifelong learning through their contribution to e-learning in terms of distributing material as well as electronic service delivery. Increased remote access to information services is the hallmark of 21st century libraries. The implications of this are that the user is increasingly impersonalised, and therefore the meaning that normally would be transferred in face-to-face transactions is degraded.

A further implication is that in a multicultural society, where meaning can be compromised at the best of times, these users can also be severely disadvantaged in an online environment. The same can apply to users for whom English is not their mother tongue, in that cognitive access can also be negatively influenced.

This being the case, it is worth reiterating that NVC should be an integral component of the LIS curriculum in order to prepare new professionals for effective service delivery and collaboration within a multicultural environment.

South Africa is a multicultural society and as a focus area of the educational policy of the University of Pretoria (2011), it is stated that we (University of Pretoria) accommodate the “diverse values, beliefs, talents, backgrounds, thinking and learning preferences, needs (including special needs)...” of the students and staff. This policy is supported by the University of Pretoria Library that provides both e-access as well as face-to-face information provision (Department of Library Services, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative that both the University as a whole and the Library in particular adapt their services to include NVC so that we can better cater for the needs of the multicultural group of users.

In summary, it can be said that while the ever changing technology is seductive and institutions are quick to take advantage of these new technologies, we are at serious risk of losing content and quality if we continue to ignore the importance of NVC as a whole. Owing to the fact we focus so much on the technology aspect of e-learning, the content of the message becomes lost in translation.

Suggestions and Future research

In order to achieve effective learning in the e-environment we suggest that both staff and students need to be conscientised in the importance of NVC. Research into how to include NVC in the delivery of e-learning materials needs to be undertaken as well as more in depth research into NVC in the classroom.

The learning management system used by the University of Pretoria is ClickUP which uses Blackboard and Blackboard Collaborate. An in depth study of the role of NVC in the use of ClickUP as the preferred system should be undertaken to establish methods of improving the quality of the communication of the content so that the diverse population of the University is accommodated.

The learning management system used by the University of Pretoria is ClickUP which uses Blackboard and Blackboard Collaborate. In order to accommodate the diverse population of the University, an in depth study of the role of NVC in the use of ClickUP as the preferred system should be undertaken to establish methods of improving the quality of the communication of content. In addition, the participation of the library in delivery of material in support of teaching and learning via ClickUP needs to be investigated.

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Appendix 1

Evaluation of Students: 2011/08/29 - 10:30				Influence on the lecture
Emblems used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Illustrators used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Affect displays used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Regulators used:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Adaptors used:	Too much	Results in Verbal communication being	Replaced	Negative
Gestures used:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Making eye contact:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Proxemics used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Haptics used:		Results in Verbal communication being		
Chronemics used:	Incorrectly	Results in Verbal communication being	Contradicted	Negative
Posture displayed:	Positively	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Personal Appearance displayed:	Positively	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Quality of vocal characteristics is:	Bad	Resulting in Verbal communication being	Replaced/Contradicted	Negative
			Outcome of lecture	Successful

Evaluation of Students: 2011/08/29 - 06:30				Influence on the lecture
Emblems used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Illustrators used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Affect displays used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Regulators used:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Adaptors used:	In a small amount	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Gestures used:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Making eye contact:	Adequately	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Proxemics used:		Results in Verbal communication being		
Haptics used:		Results in Verbal communication being		
Chronemics used:		Results in Verbal communication being		
Posture displayed:	Positively	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Personal Appearance displayed:	Positively	Results in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
Quality of vocal characteristics is:	Good	Resulting in Verbal communication being	Regulated/Reinforced/Complemented	Positive
			Outcome of lecture	Successful