

really confuse the relevant aspects of stage and world. Therefore we will now consider a simpler fictional example: a Blackboard module which uses the metaphor of the Titanic. The Titanic was widely known as one of the world's most impressive ships owing to its size and luxury prior to its sinking on its maiden voyage.

Anderson et al's first stage is to decide what effort is saved. So we look at the imagery associated with the Titanic module which is helpful. This module is built on a physical resemblance to the ship: the ballroom is an area to socialise and discuss current issues; the library is a repository for resources; the drawing room is an area for more structured debate on a particular issue. The module designer may use images of the deck plan of the ship so that students can see the different areas they can enter. These comparisons are useful: students can easily see they should go to the library area for resources, but what about an area like the kitchen? How does that work in this metaphor?

This takes us to the second stage of analysis: what knowledge of the Titanic do we not want carried over in this metaphor? In this example there are several associations that may confuse the learner. What springs to your mind when you consider the Titanic: size? An awful song? Drowning? Icebergs? None of these aspects of the comparison item is useful for facilitating learning. So in step three we can see that the unhelpful elements outweigh the helpful ones, making this an inappropriate metaphor for aiding learning. While it is easy to build an attractive-looking module based on this metaphor, using deck plans and pictures, the metaphor is not a strong one for this purpose.

In comparison an effective metaphor, assessed by Anderson et al's method, is the recycle bin in Microsoft applications, which carries over all the appropriate knowledge from a real recycle bin: things can be retrieved from it (if done quickly); they are physically removed from the original location; files in here will be deleted eventually; its contents are not immediately removed, so it is not appropriate for confidential documents. However, even with this metaphor some elements do not match. Some users expect the bin to be emptied automatically (as their own recycle bin is). Others expect to have to empty the bin themselves (as they

do their own recycle bin). The learner's current associations with the comparison object are likely to be different from those of other learners and so it is likely their learning will be different because of this: the greatest difficulty may be experienced by those learners from different cultural backgrounds to that of the resource designer.

So does this mean metaphor is too difficult to use with online resources? I hope not, for using a metaphor allows resource designers to use images and structures which can initially draw students into using a resource they might not otherwise be attracted to. By assessing the metaphors you have considered using you should now be able to assess what is and isn't effective in increasing learning by the widest group of students.

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