

Learning Sciences and Online Learning Symposium Summary and Participant Responses to “Unique Affordances”

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Abstract

The Learning Sciences and Online Learning Symposium is conference focused on how online learning might help meet the persistent challenges that discipline-based educational researchers have identified in teaching within their disciplines. In preparation for the symposium, participants were asked to reflect on three questions that will serve as the central themes for the symposium activities. The following represents one of the three prompts provided to participants.

What unique and different opportunities are afforded in online and digital environments?

Common affordances (mentioned more than once) emerging from participant responses are listed below.

Common opportunities identified by participants with respect to Unique Affordances

1. Suggestion to look at unique affordances from the viewpoint of the following question, “What can be done online better than any other circumstance.”
2. Opportunity to offer “laboratory activities...and hands-on inquiry investigations...whether real or simulated via technology enabled-solutions”; these are critical to the process of learning science. Opportunities for “inquiry activities” and “authentic” experiences” that

are “close-ish to real world performance tasks, but much easier to set-up and ‘clean up’.”

3. Opportunities for designers to “regularly review student work and improve the activities” and the provision of “timely” and “immediate feedback”. And the opportunity to capture “rich data flow about the interaction of students, teachers, and the learning environment to understand what happened vs. what was intended to happen.” And then present that data in “understandable and actionable way” for both learners and teachers.
4. Opportunities for “personalized guidance” or that are “tailored to the needs of subgroups of students”.
5. Opportunities for augmented reality, immersive online learning environments, virtual reality, etc.
6. Opportunities to link learners into learning communities of peers and experts.

About the Symposium

Online learning is becoming central to educational transformation efforts at institutions around the world. The increasing interest and engagement in digital and online learning suggest an urgency to examine the intersection of learning sciences/education research with digital learning practice. Symposium participants will discuss how online learning might help meet the persistent challenges that discipline-based educational researchers have identified in teaching within their disciplines with a focus on the following three themes:

- Threshold and difficult to learn concepts, as well as common misconceptions, that online and digital environments can address
- Unique and different opportunities that are afforded in online and digital environments
- Community and community interaction in online and digital learning experiences

The Learning Sciences and Online Learning Symposium is hosted by the MIT Office of Digital Learning.