Although we're all constantly bombarded with symbols, I can't say that I was truly aware of semiotics as a field of study until I saw the video produced by Dana for the first assignment in this course – I appreciated her clever use of visual symbols to convey meaning about … symbols and meaning. I had never really thought about semiotics in any formal sense until then, and saw this project as an opportunity to explore it.

One of the reasons I took an interest in semiotics is that I teach a technical subject using the English language to non-native English speakers. As a result, I often find myself challenged to convey the meaning of certain concepts - many of my students are still struggling with the English language while I'm trying to introduce them to the language of Biology. This is further complicated by cultural differences; working on this project has made me more aware of how often I rely on analogy to help illustrate concepts, and the possibility that these analogies may not be carrying the intended meaning. This awareness is definitely having an effect on my teaching – I have started modifying my slides from last semester to include more images so that I could provide multiple means of representation (a UDL principle) and make my meaning less reliant on the examples and analogies I normally make.

In terms of work on the project, there have been times when I felt a bit overwhelmed – the close linkage of semiotics to constructivism, UDL and multiliteracies presented our group with a challenge in terms of the amount of literature to review. Thankfully, a discussion with our instructor helped us to narrow our focus. At other times, the work was eye-opening – being a bit of a computer geek, I was excited by the opportunity to research game development toolkits. In the past I had made an effort to teach myself some programming; I managed to learn the main concepts but not enough to be able to develop anything too complex, so it was great to discover just how much simpler the production of software applications has become over the past few years.

My experience with developing a simple but functional game has inspired me to try to incorporate some gamification into my teaching tool set. This is exciting because I've been having trouble

motivating my students to prepare for their labs – it doesn't seem to be part of the educational culture here. I feel that incorporating a little bit of fun and enjoyment into any e-learning modules I create could be the key to developing that habit. I'm already toying with some ideas and hope to find time this Summer to develop them into something I can use. Additionally, since games rely heavily on interactions with symbols, my increased awareness of semiotics and affordances is very likely to have a positive impact on my design choices in any games I might develop.

Such design choices are critical to the success of any e-learning module. The main design challenge in any online learning situation is that direct interaction between instructor and student is limited (and sometimes non-existent), thus clarifying meaning can be difficult. This, was especially true for our project – our module would have to function on its own without our constant supervision, we therefore decided to focus on presenting the main concept without being overly technical, to make use of UDL guidelines to make it comprehensible to a wider audience, and to encourage further independent exploration. I hope to use a similar approach with any modules I produce for my classes, but with the added benefit of being available for direct interactions.