Preface

Traditional college classes and corporate training settings are now more culturally diverse than ever before. This is due to multiple factors including advancements in computer and information communication technologies and various globalization forces, such as growth of multinational companies, offshoring, and increased migration. The workplace diversity also continues to increase with the growth in virtual learning opportunities, usually targeting global participation that is afforded by colleges and corporate training entities. This exponential growth in the online learning industry will ensure that learners, now and in the future, will be more geographically dispersed and will exhibit varying educational, linguistic, religious, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, there will be a growing need to develop learning materials and experiences for culturally diverse audiences. Given that online learning “neither eliminates cultural differences nor is it culture free” (Swierszek & Bechter, 2010), the role of instructors and instructional designers is also critical to ensure that online and virtual learning environments are inclusive and culturally adaptive.

In a review of trends in instructional technology for corporate, higher education and K-12 in the US, Brown and Green (2013) predicted increasing use of instructional technology in all the sectors. Let us highlight a few of the studies and statistics they based their predictions on: corporate learning hours through computing technology in 2009 were the highest ever reported in the 14 year history of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD); that in Fall 2009, there was an increase of almost one million new US students taking an online class compared to the previous year; and lastly, about 30% of students in higher education take at least one online class. Additionally, being able to interact and function effectively in a multicultural environment has become a critical skill for success in many fields. Clearly, online education and training environments have become multicultural and instructional designers and instructors should be able to competently design and deliver effective learning experiences cross-culturally.

In higher education, it is obvious that the increasing number of online programs designed by universities is now intended for a global education marketplace. Clearly, online learning has been touted as one primary way of reducing the cost of higher education while simultaneously addressing the increasing demand for educational opportunity and providing access to hitherto “left out” populations. Many universities, including elite schools, are defying tradition by offering completely online degrees for a growing number of global participants. It is apparent that universities of the future will be characterized by cross-cultural online learning environments so much so that it will be a key competence for faculty, instructional designers, and administrators to understand and address issues and challenges arising from online learning across cultures.

In corporate settings, many companies are turning to online learning to cost-cut training expenditures, provide flexibility that will increase employee participation, and increase returns on training investments. In addition, adult learners are increasingly turning to virtual worlds to explore learning opportunities as
technology is becoming ubiquitous in their daily lives whether for work, education, or personal pleasure (Mancuso, Chlup, & McWhorter, 2010). Globalization forces pushing for corporate expansion beyond national borders, strategic partnerships, mergers and acquisitions, and off-shoring scenarios have led to a growing demand for cross-cultural online training. Even for companies that outsource their training function, depending on the company size and budget, those training solutions may be sourced across borders. In recent times, independent training consultants have also focused on developing training materials for a culturally diverse global audience.

In both higher education and corporate training, there is a paradigm shift in the development of online learning materials and experiences for diverse cultural audiences, and indeed a global audience. Even though university and corporate training settings address different missions/objectives and have different approaches when it comes to facilitating learning, both settings deal with adult learners. However, many approaches to understanding online learning have treated these settings as different despite the fact that they both deal with adult learners. Therefore, Cross-Cultural Online Learning in Higher Education and Corporate Training highlights theoretical and practice issues, challenges, and best practices arising from the design and facilitation of online learning experiences in higher education and corporate training across cultures. The underlying theme is how to facilitate adult online learning across cultures in higher education and corporate training settings.

The primary objective of this book is to bring together researchers who study and professionals who design and deliver online training across cultures in both higher education and corporate training settings to share paradigms, perspectives, insights, best practices, and challenges. This book is driven by the conviction that there should be cross-pollination of ideas between researchers and practitioners in higher education and corporate settings, even though professionals in both settings are driven by different objectives and aims. The premise of this book is that both higher education and corporate training settings deal with adult learners.

This premise might lead to new insights. To this end, chapter 1 explores theories and practices including approaches that instructional designers might consider when designing Web-based instruction for adult learners. This chapter also explores best practice activities and theories as well as technologies that will enable adult online learners to be involved in the design of their Web-based instruction. The roles of technology leaders within the institutional leadership and factors that may have a negative impact on the Web-based instruction for adults are also considered.

Chapter 2 explores the differences between personal culture orientation and online learning satisfaction by examining culture at the macro and micro level in an online learning environment. Specifically, the cultural orientation differences among graduate students enrolled in at least one online course in the fall of 2011 at a Western institution of higher education and how these cultural differences impact their level of satisfaction with online learning are examined.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the characteristics of both adult learners and members of the Millennial generation. Following a comparison of the characteristics of the two groups, the chapter contributor introduces a distinct subpopulation, Adult Millennials, and provides suggestions for further research pertaining to this special group.

Chapter 4 presents the design and implementation of e-learning from the perspective of globalization and provides a model of cultural-pedagogical paradigms in higher education in general and e-learning in particular. The contributors use this model to explore, from a comparative perspective, a case study of cultural-pedagogical orientations in virtual higher education institutions in developing countries.

Chapter 5 is grounded on the premise that online learning should examine the dimensions of cultural variability and their influences on learning within global education. In an attempt to address this need,
this chapter explores dimensions of cultural variability with a special focus on the African region and proposes four categories for m-learning projects and their influences on dimensions of cultural variability.

Chapter 6 reviews the distinctive characteristics of multi-generations, their cognitive differences within online learning environments, modern knowledge management theories and frameworks, and the differences of knowledge management practices among multi-generations with a focus on distinctive characteristics in the cognitive learning style and knowledge management practices between different cultural settings. The chapter contributors propose an integrated approach to comparing the divergent and convergent characteristics of multi-generations and cross-cultural variables in order to design and deliver effective learning solutions and knowledge management systems that will address various organizational and cross-cultural learning and performance issues.

Chapter 7 describes how adult learners of different cultures experience and respond to online learning, and what different instructional strategies and personnel in higher education can do to develop an appropriately delivered online experience. The chapter contributors critique the utilitarian functions of education in light of limited cultural differentiation and complications of using one-size-fits all online courses. To that end, it is argued that effective cultural responsiveness might greatly improve adult learning and potentially respond to a unique group of learner motivations.

Chapter 8 utilized Structural Equation Modeling with maximum likelihood discrepancy function to examine the relationship among various cultural dimensions and multicultural learning styles, and subsequently its impact on student academic performance. The chapter contributors found that the epistemological beliefs and temporal perceptions dimension of culture exhibited positive relationship with multicultural learning styles, social relationship dimension showed negative relationship, while total effect on student academic performance across was relatively similar across all models.

Chapter 9 explores the general requirements and challenges (both technical and cultural) that face a designer of an online or hybrid language program that is communicative, interactive, exciting, motivating, and engaging for students. Specifically, the chapter details the road travelled by the chapter contributor in designing and delivering a hybrid language course to American students abroad. The technical, technological, and cultural issues encountered by both the lecturer and the students are also examined and suggestions offered to enhance future online course design and delivery across cultures.

Chapter 10 discusses the existing research and understanding of Immersive Virtual Learning (IVL) and the application within an organizational setting. Further, this chapter explores the connection between knowledge transfer and the impact IVL has on the workforce. This exploration attempts to create a link between global connectivity, changing cultures, and changing technologies. To that end, this chapter examines the benefits of IVL in a workplace setting and offers suggestions for future research and practice.

Chapter 11 explores the macro (e.g. institutional and infrastructural requirements) and micro challenges (e.g. cultural biases of the designers and instructors) instructional designers face when designing Web-based instruction for adult learners. The chapter contributors also examine the effects of these challenges for instructional designers in higher education and include introspection of the authors’ experiences as instructors, instructional design professionals, and students in the field. Further, it provides strategies instructional designers can use to overcome the challenges discussed.

Chapter 12 explores best practices of teaching cross-cultural adults in the online format. Online learning benefits and suggestions relating to the evaluation of online learning are also presented.

Chapter 13 examines students’ perceptions of online learning courses at a four year mid-level Mid-Western university and whether or not these perceptions influenced their decision to continue taking online courses or not. The findings of this study show that thorough preparation prior to online course work can help to curb dropout rates and can better prepare learners for successful completion of the course.
Chapter 14 describes social presence, the forms in which it occurs, and how social presence enhances student engagement in the learning process, whether online or face-to-face. Further, this chapter examines how social presence affects student engagement, and offers some strategies to help instructors enhance social presence and student engagement in online learning.

Chapter 15 is grounded on the premise that due to geographic variations among online learners from culturally diverse backgrounds, instructors may be faced with challenges hindering their facilitation of online courses and the overall learning outcomes among cross-cultural students. This chapter, therefore, examines aspects of these challenges, provides educators across all discipline with an understanding of the role social constructivist instructional strategies have on facilitating an inclusive online cross-cultural learning environment, and provides recommendations for developing strategies to accommodate these diverse students.

Our hope is that this book becomes an excellent reference resource with a focus on design and delivery considerations and also personality characteristics for professionals working in the field. Further, this book will benefit multiple scholars and practitioners, including instructional designers, faculty, administrators, corporate trainers, students, and others interested in and working in design and facilitation of online learning for a global audience.

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**REFERENCES**


