Foreword

Instructional design (ID) theory currently reflects increasingly diverse points of view, but the array of design and instructional strategies used are typically dependent upon an understanding of how people learn and how their backgrounds impinge the learning process. On the other hand, ID practitioners, while not disagreeing with this fundamental way of thinking, routinely are confronted with a multitude of other issues. They are required to produce high-quality instruction delivered through a wide variety of new technologies in a short period of time and with decreasing resources. The instruction must be motivating and technologically sophisticated. In addition, corporate designers are frequently dealing with global markets, and educators are faced with students of wildly diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Patricia Young tackles this set of conditions through an exploration of how to design instruction by emphasizing the culture of the learners. *Instructional Design Frameworks and Intercultural Models* presents a culture-based design model which aims to make instruction more accessible for diverse groups of people. Some might call it an over-lay model, one which adds the cultural component to a somewhat traditional ID model. It is a model geared toward product design with a special emphasis on computer-based technologies. It is a model, however, that is supported by rock-solid research.

While few would dispute the importance of learner culture, many have difficulties in providing a concrete explanation of precisely what this means after dealing with the obvious issues of language and clear differences in values and customs. Culture is explicated here in detail. It is explained from an anthropological point of view, a psychological point of view, and a scientific point of view. Twenty-five elements of culture are described and explained with examples from throughout the world. These are not elements that designers typically address. For example, Young speaks to the role of:

- Conceptions of what is beautiful;
- Class and status in a society;
- Non-verbal communication traditions;

- Behavior norms;
- Emotional patterns;
- Orientations toward time; and
- Conceptions of intimate, personal, social and public space.

Culture impacts many ID procedures. It is critical to the needs assessment and analysis processes, especially learner, context and at times content analysis. Culture impacts the selection of instructional strategies and often plays a role in media selection as well. Product development is affected by cultural considerations, particularly with respect to the use of visuals. It is also a key consideration in the design of assessment and evaluation instruments. In addition, Young shows how culture factors can influence ID project management from team formation to train-the-trainer activities.

Knowledgeable and creative use of culture data greatly enhances any instructional product, and understanding the effects of learner diversity is an essential instructional design competency. Nonetheless, a careful reading of the Young book seems to suggest that taking full advantage of the culture-based model is dependent upon including either design experts or culture experts on the project team.

However, I suspect that the problem that will be raised by many is not the expertise required to deal with culture, but rather the additional time required to meaningfully address it, especially as culture is broadly described in this book. It's a part of the resistance to needs assessment in general that many designers routinely confront. Young addresses this in part by viewing her book as a workbook or a handbook that designers will use by selectively attending to only those elements that are pertinent to a given project. She further facilitates the process by providing the range of questions that could be asked to gather data related to each culture element. This will not totally meet the concerns of skeptics. Fundamentally, designers will need to agree with Young that culture is critical to design and instruction. ID scholars and theorists are beginning to recognize this issue, and culture is beginning to be the focus of some ID research agendas. Hopefully, this body of research will provide results that support the logic and faith many designers now have in the power of cultural influences on the learning process.

The impact of culture on ID is a timely topic. It not only meets the needs of those designing globalized and localized instruction, but it addresses a number of current theoretical issues confronted by ID scholars today that were not previously considered. In much of the twentieth century behavioral scientists commonly supported the tenets of logical empiricism or logical positivism. This thinking relies upon the value of sensory data as a means of determining truth, and rejects any view of reality that was not based upon empirical observation and verification. The products of this type of inquiry were universal generalizations. During this same

period the fundamental structure of our instructional design models was established and they too tended to initially reflect such empiricist thinking. As a consequence, these ID models were not only rooted in research, but they were presented as being environmentally neutral and applicable to all education and training settings. The positivist orientation, however, ultimately lost its broad base of support to a great extent because it discounted the impact of culture, history, and individual characteristics.

Instructional Design Frameworks and Intercultural Models presents a post-positivist examination of culture. This is a book that would not likely have been written in the 1960's or 1970's. The current dominance of constructivist and other learner-centered theories provides an intellectual foundation for this book today. Young's culture-based ID model is compatible with current theory which views learning as a social process and knowledge construction as being unique to each individual. It is compatible with views of communication as less of a transmission process and more of an interaction process. It is compatible with a systemic (rather than a systematic) view of the world. Of equal importance, however, this book speaks to the problems of today's instructional designers, even as it expands the field's conception of all that instructional design entails.

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