

# Preface

Like many authors, I generated the idea for this book when I was unable to find the information I needed for my work. As the CEO of eWorld Learning, I have many roles and, correspondingly, multiple concerns. From the perspective of my role as an educational consultant and manager of educational projects, how could I best guide my clients in the creation of accessible and viable e-learning? As an instructional designer, I had different concerns. How would I design instruction for educators and learners in other cultures? If I were offering e-learning to non-American, or even non-Western, audiences, could I adapt e-learning to their needs? Would I need to design differently, or would/could students adapt to a Western style of teaching or learning? In addition, as an instructor for online universities, I wanted information about the learning environments in countries outside of the United States: To what types of educational systems were they accustomed? How did they, as members of different cultural groups, prefer or expect to learn? What instructional strategies would be most effective for a globalized, multicultural group of learners?

Useful information was available, but often in disciplines or fields of expertise other than education. I could find substantial information about the effects of culture in business and communications. I could also find research on the effects of culture on various aspects of people's lives and/or their work. I could find authors who *postulated* on how this information and cultural research might be applied to e-learning; however, there were few personal accounts and scant empirical research, especially in the field of e-learning, to answer questions adequately. In addition, much of the research with which we are familiar was conducted by Westerners. Would results be

valuable to members of cultures? Did the research reflect the perspectives of learners and educators in non-Western cultures?

When I originally proposed this book to the publisher, the table of contents closely resembled the literature review for my research study, *The Cross-Cultural Dimensions of Globalized E-Learning*. However, as chapter proposals began to arrive, the table of contents morphed into the version you see now. I received chapter submissions from authors of many cultures and countries. I received proposals on topics previously overlooked by at least my blossoming view of where and how culture might have an impact on e-learning. Some of these challenges could have been anticipated, and within disciplines, they were. The language issues were obvious to linguists, and computer code issues were obvious to computer programmers. However, such concepts had not previously been assembled together and treated as essential components of successful e-learning. This book should serve as a tool for “consciousness-raising” for consumers and producers of e-learning, educators, instructional designers, trainers, faculty, and university administrators, challenging them to address the many cultural aspects of e-learning. Gert Jan Hofstede, co-author of *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories, and Synthetic Cultures*, with Gert Hofstede and Paul B. Pedersen, introduces the book. I have placed the chapters into four sections, leading the reader from broad perspectives of globalized e-learning to practical considerations.

## **Section I:**

### **The Big Picture: Culture and E-Learning from Global Perspectives**

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In the first chapter, *The Meaning of Culture in Online Education: Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Design*, Chun-Min Wang and Thomas C. Reeves present a review of the literature on cultural dimensions in online education and draw implications for design and research in this area. Bolanle Olaniran, in Chapter II, *Challenges to Implementing E-Learning in Lesser-Developed Countries*, discusses how globalized e-learning has implications for communications, culture, and technology in both developed and lesser-developed countries, all of which must be addressed in order for successful implementation to occur. In Chapter III, *Designing Quality Online Education to Promote Cross-Cultural Understanding*, Youmei Liu discusses the relationship between cultural value systems in education and how cross-cultural online education can promote the development of social capital by improving cultural awareness and social competency. In Chapter IV, *African Education Perspectives on Culture and E-Learning Convergence*, Wanjira Kinuthia uses examples from an African perspective, illustrating that increasing awareness of cultural aspects is crucial to making instructional decisions. In Chapter V, *Intercultural Dimensions in the Information Society: Reflections on Designing and Developing Culturally-Oriented Learning*, Nektaria Palaiologou promotes the development of non-culture-centric online e-learning that incorporates values that support global citizenship.

## Section II: Western Philosophies and Theoretical Foundations in E-Learning

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In this section, Western authors raise various questions about the theoretical foundations of e-learning. In the globalized environment, where the majority of e-learning producers are from Western cultures, but the largest growing consumer groups are Eastern, we need to determine whether we can use (or impose) Western learning theories and paradigms in other cultures. In Chapter VI, *Theorizing and Realizing the Globalized Classroom*, Steve McCarty discusses the characteristics, criteria, and conditions that constitute a successful “globalized” classroom, including constructivist approaches. In contrast, in Chapter VII, David Catterick asks, *Do the Philosophical Foundations of Online Learning Disadvantage Non-Western Students?* Lyn Henderson, in Chapter VIII, *Theorizing a Multiple Cultures Instructional Design Model for E-Learning and E-Teaching*, proposes a theoretical model of multiple cultures that provides the rationale and strategies for creating and adapting e-learning resources for various cultural contexts.

## Section III: Language and Semiotics

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The tasks of addressing language differences and the potential need for translation both seem to be obvious challenges, but the authors in this section take us beyond the concepts of simple translation. In Chapter IX, *How to Globalize Online Course Content*, Martin Schell shows us how English, being the most common language used in e-learning, needs to be “globalized”, stripped of idioms, colloquialisms, and other biasing characteristics, in order for it to be understood among learners for whom English is not a first language. Meng-Fen (Grace) Lin and Mimi Miyong Lee, in Chapter X, *E-Learning Localized: The Case of the OOPS* (Opensource OpenCourseWare Prototype System) *Project*, describe how volunteer translators are translating English courseware into Chinese and simultaneously “localizing” it for learners. In Chapter XI, *What Can Cave Walls Teach Us?* Ruth Gannon Cook and Caroline M. Crawford remind us of another dimension of language, semiotics (the use of symbolism), and how semiotics affect comprehension in Web sites and e-learning courses. Lastly, Katherine Watson in Chapter XII introduces us to the concept of *Electronic Paralanguage: Interfacing with the International*, explaining how immersion in the language environment online can actually lead learners to a better understanding of the culture itself.

## Section IV:

# Addressing Issues of Cross-Cultural Instructional Design

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In this section, authors who are practitioners, or who have conducted research studies on some of the challenges identified in previous sections, present practical information and advice on designing instruction for the e-learning environment. In Chapter XIII, *Adapting E-Learning Across Cultural Boundaries: A Framework for Quality Learning, Pedagogy, and Interaction*, Catherine McLoughlin challenges us to use flexible and pluralistic instructional design to provide learning experiences, activities, and forms of communication that are congruent with the learners' cultural values, belief systems, and preferred styles of learning. Then, two somewhat opposing approaches to designing e-learning are introduced. Jane Eberle and Marcus Childress, in Chapter XIV, *Universal Design for Culturally-Diverse Online Learning*, propose that, using principles they delineate, we can design one course that is suitable for all cultures. In contrast, in Chapter XV, *Beyond Localization: Effective Learning Strategies for Cross-Cultural E-Learning*, Patrick Dunn and Alessandra Marinetti propose adaptation strategies that supersede localization techniques to accommodate the needs of different cultures. Then I, in Chapter XVI, *The Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP) Model: Designing E-Learning for Another Culture*, illustrate how to use the model, within the framework of a needs assessment, to determine if and how e-learning may need to be adapted for other cultures. Next, two authors address important aspects of communication in today's globalized e-learning: In Chapter XVII, Rita Zaltsman presents research findings on *Communication Barriers and Conflicts in Cross-Cultural E-Learning*, and in Chapter XVIII, Datta Kaur Khalsa discusses *Multi-Cultural E-Learning Teamwork: Social and Cultural Characteristics and Influence*. Lastly, in Chapter XIX, *Modern Technology and Mass Education: A Case Study of a Global Virtual Learning System*, Ahmed Ali presents a case study in which e-learning was implemented from European countries to Africa, and discusses its effectiveness, including feedback from the students themselves.

In the conclusion, in Chapter XX, *The Treasure Trove*, I provide a brief overview of the state of globalized e-learning and cultural challenges, based on concepts raised in seminal research and in this book. We are in the early stages of discovery and change. Speaking for all contributors to this book, we hope you enjoy the journey.

## How to Use This Book

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Here are few suggestions on how to use this book:

1. Take advantage of the authors' reference lists to locate seminal research studies on cultural dimensions and other aspects of culture that may have an impact on e-learning.

2. Be open to the concepts offered throughout the book; they come from several different disciplines, and thus, should be treated as potentially useful in new domains.
3. Use the book to begin to identify the critical challenges *you* or *your organization* may face and begin to seek practical ways in which to address them.
4. None of the concepts presented in this book are “set in stone”, and we can expect new developments continually and in the near future.
5. Lastly, we are working with human beings and, while we can make reasonable generalizations about members of cultures and groups of people with similar attributes, we must respect members of all cultures as individuals and thus, use the concepts presented in this book accordingly.

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