

## Foreword

As Adam noted to Eve in the garden of paradise, “We live in a time of change.” And indeed, we still do. Nary has a faculty meeting passed without the introduction of a new learning technology. Nor do we plan the annual budget without rethinking the allocation for software upgrades and training. Within academic institutions, there is routine pressure for online delivery, blended learning and networking requirements. Within corporations, the freedom to bring global associates together electronically for learning opportunities and the ease of computer-based training is replacing much of the face-to-face instruction that had dominated prior professional development.

Amidst all of this enthusiasm for convenient new pedagogies, however, there are questions that are rarely addressed, questions having to do with appropriate technology as it relates to the cultural needs of the learners.

In the flurry to catch up with new delivery systems, the culture of the receivers is typically ignored as a variable. And as we know from many fields of research, *culture matters*.

For instance, how does culture influence the learners’ thinking styles, learning styles, and communication styles? Research on culturally influenced patterns of thinking (Nisbett, 2003; Oxford and Anderson, 1995) suggests that substantial contrasts exist between Western and Eastern logic, or thinking styles, the ways we prefer to gather and interpret information. A more Western style tends to reflect a stronger task orientation; abstract, analytical, digital, objective thinking; a focus on details and precision; inner-direction; and autonomy. In contrast, a more Eastern style often reflects a relationship orientation; concrete, global, analogic, metaphorical thinking; a focus on people rather than things; and group consciousness. How this powerful worldview affects the content of a course, the design of the online components, and the ultimate learning is only one of the many issues the instructional designer faces.

As we internalize the issues of how learners prefer to learn, we are also experiencing a growing recognition that culture imposes a significant filter on the methods and teaching strategies our students prefer. While frequently discussed learning styles systems have been incorporated for decades into training design (Kolb, 1984), the cultural influence on those patterns is less well known. Many researchers have explored learning styles relevant to domestic groups within the United States, and some have examined certain global influences, but such insights are largely underutilized. In addition, these explorations are most typically related to younger learners and are rarely expanded into the arena of adult learning, where culturally influenced learning styles continue to have enormous sway. Just as we know we must address each learning style systematically in our classrooms, we must also create online learning with cultural styles in mind.

Further, the deep values we hold as members of various culture groups, whether related to our ethnic identity, cultural privilege, age, gender, or other affinity groups, become filters for our teaching and

learning. Do the learners identify as individuals, or do they prefer collaborative learning projects? Do they expect instructors to be co-learners, or to lead a more hierarchical course? What sort of feedback is tolerable within their concept of face-saving? And what level of risk are they willing to tolerate? Are expectations built on formal interaction rules, or informal norms that are continually evolving?

Essentially, as educators and trainers, we are layering educational theories in our design work, and global e-learning requires that culture assume precedence in that effort.

To teach across cultures requires intercultural competence: the knowledge, skills and attitudes to engage others across differences in both appropriate as well as effective ways. While the ability to master this in all cultures, all contexts, is daunting, the general capacity to exercise empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, and cognitive flexibility is a prerequisite for global learning.

This pioneering work in e-learning across cultures has tackled this ever-complicated topic of bridging the instructional design perspective with culturally responsive pedagogy.

Following her pioneering collection *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*, Andrea Edmundson has in this volume assembled a collection of cases and resources that pragmatically illustrate responses to the above concerns, as well as many more. While the first reader provided research and conceptual frameworks, this text focuses primarily on how to do culturally responsive e-learning in a wide variety of contexts. It is notable that this text and its companion guarantee educators that global e-learning need not ignore culture nearly as long as traditional pedagogy has.

Exploring both the academic and corporate learning environments, the cases provide models and insights for the practitioner. While some of the cases focus on specific cultures, such as Chinese and Arabic, others supply general models useful in any culture. The intercultural practitioner in this burgeoning field will recognize this collection as a stimulus for future research as well as for creative design.

A concluding section of substantial resources helps the new designer gain a hold on what will continue to be the paramount challenge in teaching in a globalized world: placing the culturally different learner at the core of the educational process.

While we no doubt will continue to live in a time of change, of rapid change, there is little evidence of deep cultures converging into a single worldview. Until that time, understanding the complexity of intercultural learning is a core competency for educators everywhere.

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