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Exploring Cultural Competence in the Lived Experience of Instructional Designers

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EXPLORING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS

by

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a dissertation submitted by

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This dissertation has been read by each member of the graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS

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Doctor of Philosophy

There has been a limited amount of research concerning culture and online education. Although human beings have the ability to transcend past and current environments, helping professions are recognizing the influence of cultural epistemologies on themselves and those they intend to serve. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of additional challenges and concerns present when designing online instruction in a cross-cultural context. The data collected in this study stands as preliminary work to creating a substantive theory regarding the importance of cultural influences in the thinking, practice and lived experience of instructional designers, specifically those who have been creating cross-cultural online instruction.

Twelve participants were chosen through a snowball sampling method, and case studies were constructing mainly through in-depth interviews. All of these participants were aware of cultural differences, although they recognized theirs was a limited awareness. Some of the many cultural differences these participants noticed in learner characteristics and expectations can be loosely separated into the following four

categories: (a) technological infrastructure and familiarity, (b) general cultural and social expectations, (c) teaching and learning expectations, and (d) differences in the use of language and symbols. These participants became aware of cultural issues through both informal (unintentional) and formal (intentional) means. These participants felt a tension, however, between their desire to be more responsive to cultural differences, and the situations in which they were working. Three barriers to their ability to be as responsive to cultural differences were identified: (a) an over-focus on content development, (b) a relative lack of evaluation in real-world practice, and (c) the less than ideal roles instructional designers assume in the larger organizational structures involved.

From this research, I present a bridge-building metaphor as a description of how an increased sensitivity to cultural differences influences can change the practice of instructional designers. Additional efforts are needed to educate and get buy-in from other stakeholders to engage in more learner analysis and evaluation. And additional models need to be used which put evaluation and learner feedback as a more integral part of the entire instructional design process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since obtaining this degree was primarily an academic pursuit, I will try to maintain my comments to that audience. My family and friends know of my keen appreciation for them, and the Creator, who I have drawn closer to while attending this university, recognizes my gratitude for being allowed to participate in the joy of discovering things He already knows much better than I ever will.

It seems to me that the truest teachers are simply friends who are able to sense more of our potential than we might at the moment, and treat us in such a way that encourages that potential to become reality. If that is the case, then I have been surrounded in my years of study at BYU by more true teachers than I can even begin to name. Each has left a priceless imprint on me, giving me a debt that I doubt I will ever be able to repay. My hope is that somehow, deep in their hearts, they will know that they have made a meaningful difference in my life, and that somehow I can show my gratitude by returning the favor with others that I come into contact with. When it comes down to it, few things in life seem to truly matter (including dissertations and degrees) – unless through them come friendships and lessons that transform us into better beings. Those unforgettable friendships and examples I have found here are among the choicest gifts I prize, and by which I find life is made meaningful and worthwhile.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

The influence of culture is increasingly recognized as a major factor in the ways in which people learn and behave (Nolan, 2001; Nisbett, 2003; Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999; Sen, 2004). Our culture and language mediate, often unconsciously, conceptual frameworks and value systems that influence the ways in which we learn and design instruction. Often, we can unknowingly ignore the impact of cultural differences and consequently misunderstand and miscommunicate with those of other cultures (Chen & Mashadi, 1998; Hall, 1973; Henderson, 1996; Kawachi, 2000; Mayor & Swann, 2002; Monajemi, 2003; Robinson, 1999).

Much of the current online (or e-) learning has been created by members of one culture for members of another culture (Kahkonen, 2003; Spronk, 2004). A lack of critical reflection and responsiveness on issues of culture in instructional design may cause online learning to be less effective in helping distance learners of other cultures solve their real life problems (Chen & Mashhadi, 1998; Monajemi, 2003). Thus, online learning may be viewed as either unhelpful or irrelevant and unneeded (Inding & Skouge, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, as instructional designers become more conscious of their own implicit conceptual frameworks and value systems and more responsive to those of the cultures for which they are developing instruction, this will improve the quality and impact of online instruction (Chen, Mashadi & Harkrider, 1999; Looi, 2003; McLoughlin, 1999, 2000; Spronk, 2004). To what extent this is the case, and how exactly this takes place among instructional designers who are working cross-culturally has to my knowledge not

been explored. Although the concept of cultural competence has been discussed some in other fields (health sciences, Chambers, 1998; counseling psychology, Parham & Parham, 2002; and evaluation, SenGupta, Hopson & Thompson-Robinson, 2004), the lived experience of cultural competence among instructional designers still needs exploration, specifically for the subset of those developing online instruction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the preliminary research needed to create a substantive theory regarding the importance of culture in the thinking, practice and lived experience of instructional designers, specifically those who have been creating cross-cultural online instruction.

Research Questions

The questions to be examined in this proposed research are as follows. For instructional designers who are creating online instruction for people of other cultures:

1. Are they aware of possible differences between themselves and the cultural group for whom they are designing instruction?
2. If so,
    a. How did they become aware of these differences?
    b. What importance do these differences assume in their thinking?
    c. How does their understanding of these differences affect their instructional design practice?

Importance of this Research

Although the Internet is arguably one of the greatest resources for connecting people, it has also made more visible some of the cultural differences that exist around

the world, specifically in attempts to deliver instruction. Instructional designers need a better understanding of exactly how they can become aware of cultural differences, which differences make an impact in how their work is received, and how they should alter their practice to ensure they are making a positive contribution in the lives of others. This cultural understanding is needed for both ethical and quality reasons (Symonette, 2004). Thomas Schwen says, "We (as a profession) have only recently become proficient enough to do harm" (as quoted in Subramony, 2004, p. 21), and this applies directly to the topic at hand.

Rapid developments in the field of online educational technology often leave practitioners to experiment with sophisticated practice and technology long before academics can theorize about them. Critical reflection and theorizing is valuable, however, in order to facilitate greater consciousness among practitioners and academics regarding quality and ethical issues in online instruction. More exploration and an increased understanding of the impact of culture in online instructional design will assist the field of Instructional Design and Technology (IDT) in thinking critically about the adequacy of current educational and professional practice in meeting the needs of a diverse population in a shrinking world.

Layout of Chapters

Chapter 2 contains a review of the relevant literature and Chapter 3 explains the methodology chosen for this study. Due to the nature of the research questions and related methodology, a significant amount of data was collected. In order to meet the need of preserving the thick, rich description that is desired with exploration research, I have reported as much of the data as seemed appropriate. Chapter 4 contains this data in

the form of the full case studies of a few of the instructional designers in their own words. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the general concepts that emerged from all of the cases. These lengthy chapters discuss a wide range of complex issues. In order to facilitate more exposure to this research, a synopsis of the entire dissertation has already been submitted for conference presentation (and possible publication). It is included here as Chapter 6 in order to provide some focus on what I feel are the key issues and contributions of this study. I recommend that those who are interested in this research begin by reading Chapter 6, working their way back to the chapters that seem most relevant and interesting to them.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Definitions of Culture

Scholars have never been able to agree on a simple definition of culture. The anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871) was the first to define in print the concept of culture. He described culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society (Hall, 1973). Since then hundreds of other definitions have been offered.

Edward T. Hall (1973) said that "for anthropologists culture has long stood for the way of life of a people, for the sum of their behavior patterns, attitudes, and material things" (p.20). Geert Hofstede (1984), an expert on cross-cultural differences and management, defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another . . . Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture" (p. 21).

Gay (2000) emphasized how culture, "like any other social or biological organism, is multidimensional and continually changing" and that "it must be so to remain vital and functional for those who create it and for those it serves" (p. 10). Seelye (1996) added on this by explaining,

> Culture is the systematic, rather arbitrary, more or less coherent, group-invented, and group-shared creed from the past that defines the shape of reality, and assigns the sense and worth of things; it is modified by each generation and in response to adaptive pressures; it provides the code that tells people how to behave predictably and acceptably, the cipher that allows them to derive meaning from language and other symbols, the map that supplies the behavioral options for satisfying human needs. (p. 23)

The American Psychological Association (2003) defined culture as "the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (language, care taking practices, media, educational

systems) and organizations (media, educational systems)" (p. 378). Inherent in these definitions are acknowledgements that all individuals are cultural beings and that culture is the embodiment of a worldview through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices. It also encompasses a way of living influenced by historical, economic, ecological, and political forces. These definitions suggest that culture is fluid and dynamic, and yet remarkably enduring.

Identifying Sub-Cultures

In addition to the general culture of whole societies (e.g. Chinese culture, American culture, Italian culture, etc.), there exist many sub-cultures (e.g. farmers, professors, architects, teenagers, etc.), each with their own unique set of terminology, values and norms. Looi (2003) points out that in this way, "a learner may belong to multiple cultures at the same time" (p. 47). He explained how there are personal sub-cultures (e.g. learning styles, attitude styles, preferences) and learning community sub-cultures (e.g. differences due to community, school, etc.), all under the general culture of the whole societies. Spronk (2004) also identified how academics and media form sub-cultures, which need to be taken into consideration especially with post-secondary online instruction. Indeed within any one culture there is much variability of individual differences and care needs to be taken not to unduly stereotype learners.

In the field of Multicultural Counseling, Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Sanchez and Stadler (1996) describe how sub-cultures are created by identifying three dimensions of multicultural counseling competencies:

1. "A" Dimensions (Age, Culture, Gender, Language, Physical Challenge, Race, Sexual Orientation, Social Class)

2. "B" Dimensions (Geographic Location, Income, Marital Status, Religion, Work Experience, Citizenship Status, Military Experience, Hobbies/Recreational Interests)
3. "C" Dimensions (Historical Moments Time)

The "A" dimension represents immutable characteristics, the "C" dimension represents the major historical, political, sociocultural, and economic legacies – and both of these dimensions influence what happens to an individual in dimension "B". The authors explain the purpose of the model is to demonstrate "the complexity and holism of individuals," and that "despite the categories we may all fit into or that are assigned to us, the combination of these affiliations is what makes everyone unique" (p. 54). Similar to conceptions of our own identity, culture is dynamic and evolving.

Definition for this Research

This research followed the general notion of these definitions by viewing culture as a system of language, values and norms that are shared among a group of people and that when taken together constitute a design for living. I remained somewhat flexible in not imposing too rigid a definition, however, in order to see what emerged from the viewpoints and lived experiences of the participants in this research. Although it is important to recognize that most of the differences between cultures are better conceived of in terms of degree rather than absolutes, the influence of culture on our conceptions of "knowledge" and "reality" is well-founded in the existing theoretical literature.

Theoretical Backdrop Regarding Cultural Differences

Dewey (1926) speaks of the "unconscious influence of the environment" (p. 21), and the way that our surroundings help to shape our expectations and dispositions. In

attempting to answer the question of how "the young assimilate the point of view of the old" (p. 13), Dewey said,

> The answer, in general formation, is: By means of the action of the environment in calling out certain responses. The required beliefs cannot be hammered in; the needed attitudes cannot be plastered on. But the particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another; it leads him to have certain plans in order that he may act successfully with others; it strengthens some beliefs and weakens others as a condition of winning the approval of others. Thus it gradually produces in him a certain system of behavior, a certain disposition of action. The words "environment", "medium" denote something more than surroundings which encompass an individual. They denote the specific *continuity* of the surroundings with his own active tendencies. (p. 13)

Dewey recognized the power that our surroundings and environment can have in influencing us to believe and act in certain ways and not in other ways. However, we must turn to the work of other theorists for a more in depth description of how this comes about.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) present what they call a "treatise in the sociology of knowledge". They say that their "interest in questions of 'reality' and 'knowledge' is thus initially justified by the fact of their social relativity. What is 'real' to a Tibetian monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman. The 'knowledge' of the criminal differs from the 'knowledge' of the criminologist" (p. 2). In their treatise, Berger and Luckmann make a distinction between the philosopher, the social scientist, and the man on the street in dealing with issues of what is "reality" and what is "knowledge". "The man in the street," they say, "does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is 'real' to him and about what he 'knows' unless he is stopped short by some sort of problem" (p. 2). On the other end of the spectrum, the philosopher "is professionally obligated to take nothing for granted, and to obtain maximal clarity…" (p. 2). They continue, "The philosopher, by whatever methods, will inquire into the ontological and epistemological status of these

conceptions. Is man free? What is responsibility? Where are the limits of responsibility? How can one know these things?" (italics removed from questions, p. 2).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that those involved in the social sciences are somewhere in the middle. Although they assert that social science is "in no position to supply answers to these [ultimate] questions [of the philosopher]" they do feel that what the social scientist can and must do is "to ask how it is that the notion of 'freedom' has come to be taken for granted in one society and not another, how its 'reality' is maintained in the one society how, even more interestingly, this 'reality' may once again be lost to an individual or to an entire collectivity" (p. 2). Simply because there are "observable differences between societies in terms of what is taken for granted as 'knowledge'," Berger and Luckmann feel it important to try to deal with "not only the empirical variety of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also with the processes by which *any* body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially established *as* 'reality'" (p.3).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) continue to elaborate their treatise with an extensive explanation of the foundations of knowledge in everyday life (including the important role of social interaction and language), society as objective reality (including institutionalization and legitimation), and society as subjective reality (including internalization of reality, social structure, theories of identity, and organism and identity). Although their work does have value and insight, I will turn to Hewitt (1984) and his description of symbolic interactionism for what I feel is a more succinct description of how culture influences our individual conceptions of "knowledge" and "reality."

In articulating a type of social psychology called symbolic interactionism, Hewitt (1984) said that the "goal is not to make psychology more 'social', nor to imbue

sociology with a more 'psychological' color; instead, it is to present a perspective, *symbolic interactionism*, which affords a distinctive way of understanding and explaining human social conduct and group life" (p. 5). Symbolic interactionism presents a system of explanations for how identity and meaning is developed, for how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them, for how we function in daily life by habitually attempting to interpret and assign intent and motive to those around us, and for how our sense of "self" is influenced and altered based on our beliefs about and interactions with others. Hewitt argues,

> …human acts are meaningful acts, and we do not simply act out of particular biological motivations. Each action is mediated by the symbols we have learned, so that even those acts, such as eating, which respond to fairly concrete biological needs tend to be wrapped in layers of social meaning. Thus we respond to the act of another human being not on the basis of its innate biological meaning – such as aggression or altruism – but because we symbolically designate the act as aggressive or altruistic. (p. 51)

This focus on symbols forms the basis of Hewitt's argument. Hewitt believes that symbols came into existence as our ancestors mediated in social groups to deal with their habitat and coordinate their behavior amongst themselves:

> First, symbols transformed the world from a collection of stimuli into a world of objects…That is, we began to attach [names and] symbols to objects and events and to manipulate the symbols rather than the events themselves. Second, symbols made it possible for the social group itself to become part of the habitat in an effective and precise way…Third, because symbols made it possible to name others, they led to the creation of a new kind of object in the world – the self. Human beings are not simply animals with the capacity to use symbols – we are animals with selves, the only such animals in the world. Having and using a name for self makes it possible for the individual member of a group to see himself or herself as a member, to anticipate his or her own actions in various situations as well as the actions of others. This capacity to anticipate one's own actions is crucial, for it is on this ability that self-control rests. By developing the capacity for imagination and applying it to self, human beings became able to control their conduct and to do so consciously, something not previously possible. (p. 55-56)

Although I personally am not convinced of the origins of the use of symbols that Hewitt presents, I do agree with his emphasis on the prime importance and utility of symbols in human experience. Hewitt also introduces a theme of the unique human ability to see ourselves as an *object* both of our own imagination, and in the minds of the perceptions of others around us. He argues that this unique human ability has influenced us to have certain dispositions and expectations which have a big influence on our behavior. We often make decisions based upon how we think others see us.

Hewitt (1984) gives a place for emotions in social conduct and decision making, and even points out how emotions are labeled and treated differently in different cultures. He explains how one other key aspects of symbolic interactionism is the cognitive basis of role-making and role-taking. As meaning emerges over time for individuals in a society, they must have some grounds for determining their conduct in interactions with one another. And even in rather routine situations, they must be able to adapt to alternative possibilities for their own and others' acts. Here Hewitt borrows from the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz in explaining how the *stock of knowledge* that people acquire is stored in *typifications*. Hewitt explains that the idea of a typification "is itself quite simple but its implications for conduct are vast. People know what to expect of one another in particular situations because they 'know' that various *types* of people behave in *typical* ways under particular circumstances" (p. 152). Hewitt gives the example of the classroom:

> The conduct of the professor in the classroom can be understood by students and, within limits, predicted by them, because they share a conception of how professors typically behave under varying circumstances. Their typification of the conduct of a certain person as that of a professor is what makes the conduct comprehensible to them. Their typifications consist simply of a set of standard expectations and assumptions about what they think professors usually, ordinarily,

> generally, and typically do. As long as what the professor is doing can be regarded as what professors do, the identity of the professor and the definition of the situation go unchallenged. That is, meaning continues to emerge in the situation – objects remain intact and organized in relation to one another. (p 152)

Hewitt emphasizes that humans are not usually conscious of this, except for when the situations, or the actors in them, challenge their assumptions. I would point out that this is particularly of interest in cross-cultural interactions, where typifications people have are frequently not met and actors struggle to find meaning and their role in relation to others. For example, when students from one culture are expecting certain behavior from the teacher according to the typifications they have developed over their lifetime, and when those typifications are challenged, they become uncertain of both their own role and the roles of the other actors involved.

I particularly appreciate how Hewitt (1984) deals with the influence of culture and environment in an informative way without making it deterministic. Symbolic interactionism seems to allow room for agency, while at the same time accounting for the reality of the influence that our culture and language have on our thoughts and behavior. According to Hewitt,

> It is essential that the possibility for novel and creative responses to even the most routine situations be kept in mind, for otherwise we are apt to create images of human conduct that do not accord with reality. Much of social science, including sociology, is obsessed with the goal of finding regularity and pattern in human behavior. This obsession often takes the form of a belief that everything that people do is fully and completely determined by environment, and therefore can be explained completely. Against this image, symbolic interactionists portray a human organism that does act in familiar and repetitive ways much of the time, but that has the capacity – and uses it now and then – to behave in basically new and unfamiliar ways. We are, of course, strongly influenced by those around us, by the language they speak and the world of social objects they build for us, by their approval and disapproval, by the situations they create, and by their presentations of self. But we occasionally surprise ourselves, not to mention others, by acting in ways that suggest our disregard of others approval, our disbelief of their presentation of self, or our willingness to do things we have never done before. (p. 179)

There is a balance between finding the patterns why people tend to approach life and think about situations in different ways, while at the same time not explaining them or the situation in reified terminology.

In light of the agency humans have and the way in which we act meaningfully with the world, Hewitt (1984) makes another interesting point. This is the fact that despite our ability to transcend the environment we were initially socialized into, much of our time is spent in replicating and recreating those roles and situations that we are used to. He says that "the second implication of the interactionist position is that the very routine and stable everyday reality we create maintains itself to a great extent because we believe in it and continue to remake it in our acts" (p. 179). Hewitt explains,

> We pour all these energies into the maintenance of routine situations partly on the basis of our belief that things can be no other way, that what is must be. In part we do this because we need to have some sense of an orderly social world in which to act…One gains both identity and a sense of individual purpose from one's place in this structure…These two facts stand in an obviously paradoxical relationship to one another. Human beings are potentially creative beings, capable of creating and sustaining new worlds as well as familiar ones; yet much of their energies go to the maintenance of routine forms of conduct because they find it hard to believe that there are alternatives, that things need to be as they are. As organisms, we possess considerable power to transcend the limitations of our environment, of the worlds others have constructed for us. Yet we spend our time recreating those worlds, believing that the patterns of interaction in which we engage, the role structures of our groups, and the situations in which we act are natural and unalterable features of the world. (p. 179-180)

Having this backdrop of theoretical work regarding the social construction of knowledge and reality, the rest of this chapter will discuss specific implications of cultural variations and cross-cultural interactions on learning generally and on the field of instructional design and technology (IDT) in particular.

Cultural Epistemologies

The theoretical background leads us to see the influence of cultural epistemologies on how we view, talk about, and interact with the world (Vygotsky, 1962). As Spronk (2004) explains,

> Culture, especially as it operates in learning contexts, is far more profound and dynamic than these surface features alone. It involves beliefs and values, ways of seeing the world, and ways of knowing, thinking, doing, and relating to the cosmos and to society. These beliefs, values, and practices are learned from infancy onward, and are …very much bound up in the process of defining one's identity, or better, identities… (p. 171)

Other researchers agree that to some degree culture and society influence mental functioning in a way that "individuals have predisposed notions of how to respond to questions, solve problems, and so forth" (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001, p. 554). Bentley, Tinney, and Chia (2005) argue that these predispositions influence how children and then adults interpret, respond, and reason; that they learn how to think within a given culture. They hold that adult learners have "developed definite ideas about what kind of learners they are and what is an acceptable, comfortable way to learn from their culture's perspective" (Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005, p. 120), so that reeducation on the part of both course designers and the learners is necessary when creating online instruction.

Chen and Mashhadi (1998) further explain that "the interpretation of information and the generation of knowledge will be dependent on the existing conceptual frameworks of the learner, frameworks which will be culturally mediated" (p. 16). As will be discussed, much from these conceptual frameworks is implicit and below the level of consciousness, as mentioned previously. Examples of these are: concept of self, relationship with others and nature, concepts of time, authority, intuition, competition, cooperation, affective expression, contemplation, what can be known and why, what is

valuable to know, function of language, function of formal education, and holistic or dualistic metaphor of thinking. By recognizing differences in these conceptual frameworks, practical concerns emerge in many professions.

Examples in Other Fields

Chen and Mashadi (1998) use a description of Western versus Eastern perceptions towards medicine (see also Wu, 1991) to highlight an example of the difference:

> In Western medicine, distinct entities (organs, structures, performances) are measured quantitatively and analyzed linearly/causally, typical of separation-mentality; precision is important here. Chinese medicine is pattern-thinking, phenomenon-discerning, and takes things as interpretive…Technical terms in the West are independently and precisely defined; words in China are adumbrative and contextual. (p. 7)

The ways in which medical professionals and laymen conceptualize health and illness, remedies and their relationships with each other are bound tightly to culture. For example, Houston and Venkatesh (1996) found that differences in factors like time orientation (arising out of cultural value systems) have significant implications for health scheduling and utilization of services. The literature regarding the need for cultural competency and the ways in which it might be measured in the health care professions is extensive. Because of the wide variety of ways in which distinct cultures affect patients' ways of thinking and perceptions on health care and health behaviors, cultural competence is seen as a "necessary set of skills for physicians who wish to deliver high-quality care to all patients" (Betancourt, 2004, p. 953).

In economics, a field traditionally thought of as uninterested in cultural dimensions, the economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2004) wrote an influential paper entitled "How Does Culture Matter?" In it he refers to a previous book that explores whether culture matters and he indicates that they missed the point. He stated,

"The issue is not *whether* culture matters …it must be, given the pervasive influence of culture in human life. The real issue, rather, is *how* – not *whether* – culture matters" (Sen, 2004, p.1). Sen listed numerous examples of the ways in which culture must be taken into consideration when involved with development and development policies. For example, he recognizes that "cultural influences can make a major difference to work ethics, responsible conduct, spirited motivation, dynamic management, entrepreneurial initiatives, willingness to take risks, and a variety of other aspects of human behavior which can be critical to economic success" (p. 4).

Examples in Learning

Hawaiian children were described by teachers as lazy, uncooperative, uninvolved, and disinterested in school; chronic under-achievers. In order to address this problem, Ferraro (2001) described one research project that looked beyond the minimal linguistic differences that might have been a factor to the interaction patterns within their families. This research found that patterns at home were very different to those at school. From a very young age, Hawaiian children contribute significantly to household work (cleaning, cooking, laundry, caring for siblings, and even earning part of the family's income from outside employment). In sibling groups, these Hawaiian children organized their own work routines with little supervision from parents.

So how could children be so productive and responsible at home but lazy and disinterested at school? The comparison of school and home revealed structural differences. When the mother wanted something done at home, she made it known and then let the children organize how it was to be done. In the teacher dominated school environment, everything is managed and the children are controlled by the classroom

rather than responsible for it. When the anthropologist advised the teachers to change the classroom environment to be more like the home environment, Hawaiian students became more actively involved and academic performance levels increased.

Research has indicated significant differences between cultures in their educational goals, motivations, and even things like their uses of taxonomies, class distinctions/heuristics, memory skills, and so forth (Nisbett, 2003). Again, these insights emphasize the tangible impact culture has on the learner and the need for instructional designers to develop more cultural competence.

Spronk (2004) recognized that "many features of the academic culture familiar to most learners whose first language is English may strike learners from other linguistic and cultural traditions as alien" (p. 172). She also listed a few of the things which learners in other cultures might not be used to when encountering online instruction developed by Western minds. Quoting from Spronk, these features include,

> 1. Linear logic, thinking in straight lines, rather than more lateral or spiral logics of other traditions.
> 2. An analytical approach that emphasizes dividing reality into its component parts, rather than more synthetic approaches that emphasize the whole over the parts.
> 3. An expository, declarative and deductive rhetorical style that works from the 'big picture' or thesis statement down through the supporting details or arguments, rather than an inductive style that requires learners to be more tentative, stating rationales and arguments before attempting a more generalized statement.
> 4. Encouraging debate, discussion and original thinking, compared with academic traditions such as that which Robinson (1999) describes for Chinese learners, for whom three key rules are 'memorize the lesson, practice the skill, and respect superiors'.
> 5. Privileging the written over the spoken word. Despite the continuing dominance of the lecture as teaching mode, learners in the West are assessed primarily on their ability to express themselves in written form. In contrast, most of the world's languages have only recently been written down, in the context of conquest and colonization, hence the cultures associated with these languages are based on the spoken word and oral traditions and histories that continue to inform daily existence. The impact of the written word on oral cultures has been

> powerfully described by Ong (2002), and in specifically academic contexts by Scollon and Scollon (1981). (p. 172)

The Western influence on the culture of academia and especially the assumptions about online users need to be critically examined and questioned.

Cultural Influences are Implicit

Although we all are influenced by culture in real ways, many of these cultural influences are initially invisible to us. The noted anthropologist, Edward Hall (1973), said that "culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (p. 30). Hall continued, "Years of study have convinced me that the real job is not to understand a foreign culture but to understand our own" (p. 30). Schank (2000; 2002) argued that most of what we know is implicit, that is, we can't quite verbalize what we have internalized.

When we are infants, we are interacting and learning in a pre-verbal world. Whichever culture we were born into provided us with a language by which we began to put words to certain objects and experiences. In English there are certain terms and concepts that are not found in other languages. In other languages there are certain terms and concepts that people who only know English can not speak about. Slowinski (2002) goes as far as to say that one of the dangers of speaking English as a native language is that it holds status globally, and this can lead to a lack of knowledge and respect for the first languages of others. As Chen and Mashhadi (1998) explain,

> The mutual sharing and comprehension of experience between people is a matter of interpretation, not inference. Inference would involve a logical deduction, such as inferring that a wall has another side hidden from view. Interpretation is the process of determining the meaning of signs (e.g. words, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice) that are present and encountered directly. In other words if communication is regarded as an exchange of ideas through the use of

> symbols, the symbols are not the words themselves but some elements of common human experiences with which the words are associated. (p. 9)

Wittgenstein (1953) distinguished between "first language" which is essentially experiential and tacit, and "second language" which is expressed through the translational medium of the first.

Chen and Mashhadi (1998) continue by saying that "the 'danger' of a culture of [online instruction] lies in instructional designers overlooking the fact that meaning is not directly apprehended but it the result of meaning within a particular conceptual framework" (p. 9). Among the many implications that exist in light of the implicit nature of many of our predispositions, the development of cognition is one.

Cultural Influences and Cognition

In making the case that cultural competence is needed in instructional design, some deliberation on the ways in which culture affects cognition, a concept tied closely to learning, seems appropriate. As a backdrop, I will review the history on socio-cultural views regarding cognitive development, and then further examine the influence of culture on cognition.

The role and importance of culture in theories of cognition has varied throughout the years. Clem (2005) gives a good outline of the development of socio-cultural views regarding cognitive development, only a summary of which will be offered here. Although the socio-cultural influence on mental development was discussed extensively by Vygotsky in the 1920s-1930s, and recognized by Dewey in the 1930s, other subsequent movements seemed to give less emphasis to these matters. Behaviorism, in the 1960s and 1970s brought the belief that cognition is essentially the same across cultures, regardless of cultural norms and practices, and failed to explain why different

cultures develop such radically different practices if their cognitive patterns are essentially the same. Piaget, around the same time, had at the center of his theory the individual and the characteristics of the individual's mental organization, social issues were at best secondary. Bandura, in the 1980s and 1990s, made an attempt to accommodate, in some measure, behaviorism to more cognitivist approaches. He also had some focus on social constructs, in particular expanding the notion of self-efficacy to include the concept of "collective agency," or a shared belief among those in a group for their capability to accomplish their desired tasks. The 1990s brought some of what is known as diversity literature (Clem, 2005), which offered a description of differences between cultures that were largely anecdotal and without theoretical basis. The unfortunate result of this was the tendency to reduce cultures to stereotypical lists of characteristics. And most recently, there has been a movement towards situated learning and the importance of social processes in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) towards learning and problem solving. As seen in the work of people like Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989), learning itself is even described primarily as a process of enculturation.

Even more recently, Nisbett (2003), a cognitive psychologist, describes how he has come to believe that the universialist approach to human cognition that he used to hold, that all people on earth have the same basic cognitive processes, is wrong. His earlier research showed that even merely looking at adult learners of one culture, those who took classes in areas like statistics and economics acquired different thinking processes and made decisions in measurably different ways after the program than before taking those classes. At one point, an international student from China said to him, "You

know, the difference between you and me is that I think the world is a circle, and you think it's a line" (Nisbett, 2003, p. xiii), which consequently stimulated a lot of discussions, reading, questioning, and research. Through this, Nisbett came to believe that traditional views of cognitive science were off the mark. He finally came to the conclusion that "if it's possible to produce marked changes in the way adults think, it certainly seemed possible that indoctrination into distinctive habits of thought from birth could result in very large cultural differences in habits of thought" (p.xvi).

Following a series of comparative studies, in association with others at the University of Michigan, Bejing University, Kyoto University, Seoul National University, and the Chinese Institute of Psychology, Nisbett (2003) was able to provide new evidence previously unavailable regarding the reality of these differences in cognition. At the same time, new puzzles and questions evolved which still need answers. Below are examples of the questions Nisbett identified in cognitive domains that apply to learning:

> Science and Mathematics: Why would the ancient Chinese have excelled at algebra and arithmetic but not geometry, which was the forte of the Greeks? Why do modern Asians excel at math and science but produce less in the way of revolutionary science than Westerners?
>
> Attention and Perception: Why are East Asians better able to see relationships among events than Westerners are? Why do East Asians find it relatively difficult to disentangle an object from its surroundings?
>
> Causal Inference: Why are Westerners so likely to overlook the influence of context on the behavior of objects or even people? Why are Easterners more susceptible to the "hindsight bias," which allows them to believe that they "knew it all along"?
>
> Organization of Knowledge: Why do Western infants learn nouns at a much more rapid rate than verbs, whereas Eastern infants learn verbs at a more rapid rate than nouns? Why do East Asians group objects and events based on how they relate to one another, whereas Westerners are more likely to rely on categories?
>
> Reasoning: Why are Westerners more likely to apply formal logic when reasoning about everyday events, and why does their insistence on logic sometimes cause

> them to make errors? Why are Easterners so willing to entertain apparently contradictory propositions and how can this sometimes be helpful in getting at the truth? [In fact, the person who is too concerned with logic may be considered immature.] (p. xvi, xix)

These continuing discussions about the influence of culture on cognition seem to be providing more evidence for the argument that culture does matter, and that more research should be conducted to increase our knowledge regarding cultural differences.

Hofstede's Dimensions of Cultural Values

Hofstede (1984; 1991) has provided one of the most commonly used value structure across countries and cultures. Hofstede details the results of a series of surveys of cultural values conducted between 1966 and 1995. The surveys included some 116,000 questionnaires in 72 countries, using 20 languages. Respondents were mainly IBM employees, although later more data from non-IBM respondents were added.

Using these data, Hofstede conducted statistical analysis and revealed a structure of five clusters of values on which national cultures differed from one another. Hofstede's five cultural dimensions follow, together with a list of countries that score at the top or bottom of each scale (in descending order):

> Power distance: the degree to which the less powerful members of the society accept and agree that power is distributed unequally; the acceptance of power inequality in the society. Countries with the highest power distance were: Malaysia, Guatemala, Panama, Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, and Arab countries; those with the lowest power distance were Finland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand, Denmark, Israel, and Austria.

> Uncertainty avoidance: a measure of how comfortable or uncomfortable members of a culture are in unstructured situations; how much the society accepts the novel/surprising/unknown versus how much it tries to control it. This concept is not analogous to risk avoidance; rather it is a tolerance for ambiguity or uncertainty. Countries that rated highest on the uncertainty avoidance scale were Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, Belgium, and El Salvador; the lowest scorers included Great Britain, Ireland, Hong Kong, Sweden, Denmark, Jamaica, and Singapore.

> Individualism/collectivism: the balance in the society between the requirement that individuals take care of themselves versus integrating into groups; the degree to which social referencing is encouraged; whether the individual identifies strongly with a group and is indivisible from it, or whether the individual primarily sees him/herself in self-defined terms, separate from group identity. High individualism countries included: United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Netherlands, and New Zealand; low individualism (and therefore high collectivism) countries were: Peru, Costa Rica, Pakistan, Indonesia, Columbia, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, and Guatemala.
>
> Masculinity/femininity: the width of the divide between gender-based roles; the degree to which biological differences are expected to be reflected in social and emotional roles. Highest scoring countries were: Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, and Mexico; lowest scoring were Finland, Yugoslavia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.
>
> Long-term/short-term orientation: the degree to which members of a society are expected to be able to accept delayed gratification of material, social, and emotional needs; persistence and thrift are aspects of this continuum. High scorers included: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, and India; low scorers included the United States, Great Britain, Zimbabwe, Canada, Philippines, Nigeria, and Pakistan. (Clem, 2005, p. 21-22)

Hofstede contributed much by offering the first data-derived model of cultural values, and by defining the model and its components in ways that are statistically defensible. His work, however, is not without critics. For example the sample was based on a single multinational organization, the subjects were predominately middle-class males, there was a neglect of subcultures within various countries, and so on (Gunawardena, Wilson, & Nolla, 2003). Although work like Hofstede's has made a valuable contribution in conceptualizing where some of the differences may lie between cultural groups and is one of the few empirically supported frameworks, unfortunately it is based on national differences, and (as will be discussed later) it can easily be used to make unfounded and unhelpful stereotypical assumptions about individual learners. This work is helpful to those in IDT, but more is needed.

What Cultural Competence Means

An increasing number of disciplines and professions are finding the need to discuss "cultural competence", or their ability to respond to cultural influences and differences, especially in recent years. Particularly the services-oriented professions that cater to international audiences have found that to be effective in their delivery, the culture of the recipient and the competence of the caregiver/service-provider need to be taken into consideration. Selections of conceptions of cultural competence from a few helping professions are included in Table 1.

Each of these fields has a common idea of what it means to be culturally competent, with specific elements of their definition customized to their profession. So what about the field of IDT? If other helping professions are recognizing the impact that cultural issues can have, perhaps the field of IDT should also take a closer look at them as well. As will be discussed more in the next section, the author can find little discussion of cultural issues in IDT (Subramony, 2004), although one professional body, The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT, 2005), does include in their Code of Ethics two standards that relate to encouraging cultural diversity in (a) the media being created (Standard 1.8), and (b) their publications and conferences (Standard 3.1). One of the most accepted and used definitions of cultural competence identifies three components: (a) knowledge, (b) attitudes and beliefs, and (c) skills (Sue, Ivy & Pederson, 1996), and as will be argued in the next section, more discussion and research is needed to determine exactly how these components of cultural competence might specifically apply in the field of IDT.

Table 1

Definitions of Cultural Competence from Various Fields

Field	Definition
Mental Health Care	The set of behaviors, attitudes and skills, policies and procedures that come together in a system, agency or individuals to enable mental health caregivers to work effectively and efficiently in cross/multicultural situations (Chambers et al., 1998, p. 1)
Evaluation	A systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the evaluative endeavor; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further uses the findings (SenGupta et al., p. 13).
Psychology	American Psychological Association (2003) multicultural guidelines in education, research, and practice of psychology. 1. Psychologists are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, they may hold attitudes and beliefs that can detrimentally influence their perceptions of and interactions with individuals who are ethnically and racially different from themselves. 2. Psychologists are encouraged to recognize the importance of multicultural sensitivity/responsiveness, knowledge, and understanding about ethnically and racially different individuals. 3. As educators, psychologists are encouraged to employ the constructs of multiculturalism and diversity in psychological education. 4. Culturally sensitive psychological researchers are encouraged to recognize the importance of conducting culture–centered and ethical psychological research among persons from ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority backgrounds. 5. Psychologists strive to apply culturally–appropriate skills in clinical and other applied psychological practices. 6. Psychologists are encouraged to use organizational change processes to support culturally informed organizational (policy) development and practices.
Social Work	The ability of professionals to function successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin.
Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL)	TESOL instructors' ability to: (1) Identify and understand their own culture(s), (2) Effectively and positively communicate with others in culturally appropriate ways to better meet student needs, (3) Understand the effects their students' first languages and cultures have on their acquisition of English, and (4) Create positive multicultural environments for learning and understanding (Slowinski, 2002, p. 6-7)

Implications for Instructional Designers

The issue of culture in the field of Instructional Design and Technology (IDT) is gaining an increasing audience of interest. Some researchers in instructional design are beginning to realize that "culture itself cannot be objectified as just another factor to be programmed into designing a distance learning course" (Chen & Mashhadi, 1998, p.10). Following a comprehensive review of distance education, McIsaac and Gunawardena (1996) recommended that future research should "move beyond media comparison studies" and, among other things, "examine the cultural effects of technology and courseware transfer in distance education programs" (p. 41). Burnham (2005) even questioned whether the expression of instructional design as we now know it may well be so grounded in Western culture as to be of less value for a different culture (see also Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999). He recognized that at the very least, "even though people of all cultures find themselves learning and teaching in formal instructional settings; who they are and what they bring to these settings can make large differences in how design is approached" (p. 4). The impact of culture on IDT does need more exploration.

The preferences and predispositions of people from different cultural groups cast a foreboding shadow on instructional design decisions regarding how time and schedules are treated (Rogers, Hseuh & Allen, 2005), what role the teacher and other students play in the educational experience (McLoughlin, 1999; Venter, 2003), what content should be taught for what reasons (Monjameni, 2003), and how it assessed (Spronk, 2004). Spronk (2004) points out that in addition to normal cultural differences, online instruction brings with it a unique set of assumptions (e.g. learner autonomy as a desired goal, the heavy use of media in teaching and learning, increased focus on learning outcomes, and so on)

that are fairly new even to Western academic culture. Aware of the influence culture has on learning, and thus on the learners' interaction with online instruction, an increasing number of researchers in online instructional design have argued for the need for instructional designers to be more aware of and responsive to cultural differences (Chen et al., 1998, 1999; Henderson, 1996; Kawachi, 2000; Looi, 2003; Mayor & Swann, 2002; McLoughlin, 1999, 2000; Monajemi, 2003; Robinson, 1999; Spronk, 2004; Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005). However, more research is needed.

An entire chapter in the Handbook of Distance Education (Moore & Anderson, 2003) is dedicated to "culture and online education," but most of the material was borrowed from the work done in the field of cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communications, and intercultural computer-mediated communications (CMC) and then inferences were drawn to the field of online education. Towards the conclusion of the chapter, the authors of this chapter recognized that their review of the literature "has indicated little published research on the cultural aspects of online learning and teaching" (Gunawardena, Wilson & Nolla, 2003, p. 770), and supported this position with other authors who have begun research in this area (see also Branch, 1997; Chen, 2000; Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez & Mason, 2001; Wild, 1999). And regardless of the pockets of interested parties, Subramony (2004) points to a severe lack of attention among instructional designers as a whole (reflected in his review of the literature, conference proceedings, and from his own educational experience) towards important issues of cultural diversity among learners. He argues that this has resulted in the alienation of many groups of learners.

Of the little that has been published regarding the cultural aspects of online instruction and instructional design, too often the researchers have often automatically imposed existing theoretical dimensions of cultural variability (e.g. most often individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity; Hofstede, 1984). Maitland and Bauer (2001) argue that when they are based on national differences, theoretical dimensions of cultural variability are too easily used to make unfounded and unhelpful stereotypical assumptions about individual learners. While examining the diffusion of the Internet, Maitland and Bauer call this problem the "ecological fallacy"; that is, "the impulse to apply group or societal level characteristics onto individuals within that group" (p. 90). This is a mistake because the more generalized the descriptions of a group are (in order to get statistically significant quantitative data) the less likely that these descriptions will apply to any one individual. I agree with Maitland and Bauer's conclusion, "national level characteristics must not be interpreted at the individual level" (p. 90). Although some attempts have been made at creating and using measures to reveal individual placement on some of these scales (Clem, 2005; Neuliep, 2003), automatically imposing generalized frameworks, especially those derived from other fields, should be approached with caution. For online instructional design to meet the needs of real people in the process of making practical decisions, a more dynamic approach is needed to account for both the complexities of the learners' cultural predispositions and their individual uniqueness and ability to change.

So how might we come to understand what this more dynamic approach looks like? Where is the theoretical basis? Schwen, Evans, and Kalman (2005) made the argument that much of the sophisticated practice in educational technology is not

grounded in theory because the practitioners are using techniques and tools long before academics can begin to theorize about them, and that "scholars should look to those practices to enrich research and related theory" (p. 13). At the same time, there is a need to encourage critical assessment of practice in order to help educators in various venues to reflect on cultural, political and ethical implications of their work (Freire, 1973).

So one problem with imposing any pre-existing theoretical framework (borrowed from another field) on new questions related to online cross-cultural instructional design is that the issue is so complex, and while this borrowed framework would illuminate some things, it also necessarily conceals others. The current pioneer practitioners in the world of online cross-cultural instructional design must be working beyond the edges of theoretical understanding. As Schwen, Evans, and Kalman (2005) elaborated, "The fault, if there is any, is not with the practitioners who are of necessity practicing at the edge of the profession's knowledge. Rather the scholars in the community should be attempting to make sense of especially sophisticated practice" (p. 13), in addition to providing a critique that encourages necessary change. For this reason, there is a gap, and more exploration is needed by researchers into the complex reality of practitioners.

The present research study is an exploration study (for a description of the difference between exploration, explanation, and design research see Gibbons and Bunderson, 2005). Justification for this research stems from the fact that the author can find no existing publications focused on the fundamental exploration of the range of challenges in the lived experience of multiple instructional designers from around the world as they are engaged in designing online instruction cross-culturally. This is surprising considering the power of the Internet and related technologies to extend the

reach of instructional designers cross-culturally, and the inevitable problems attached. Isolated case studies exist (Ho & Burniske, 2005; Inding & Skouge, 2005; Mbambo & Cronje, 2005; Venter, 2003), and some discussion of cultural issues have been addressed (Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005; Chen & Mashhadi, 1998; Spronk, 2004). However, many of the frameworks for discussions of culture in IDT have been borrowed from other fields (e.g. Hofstede, 1984) and do not directly apply because although they highlight certain aspects of culture, they leave out some of the unique challenges of online instructional designers. Additionally there has been little focus on the designers themselves, the particular role that they play within the constraints they have, and the way they have developed through the decisions that they make in these cross-cultural contexts; rather the focus is usually on the instruction itself, the different learners, or the related abstracted cultural issues.

Questions regarding how instructional designers experience and struggle with designing online instruction cross-culturally deserve more attention (Kahkonen, 2003; Spronk, 2004; Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005). The real contribution of this study is that it takes a step forward in offering more of the comprehensive exploration research that can be used to inform both future explanation and design research (Gibbons & Bunderson, 2005) in this vital area of interest and importance; helping those whose impact and responsibility is expanding as they are reaching larger and more diverse populations than ever before through online instructional designs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

An exploration of the cultural competence in the lived experience of instructional designers is best met with the richness of detail in a qualitative approach. Interviews with designers who have been developing cross-cultural online instruction was the primary means of data collection.

Case Study Approach

The subjects of the study included 12 participants who have been designing instruction for one or more cultures other than their own. I sought an in-depth understanding of how they became aware of cultural differences and in what ways, if any, these cultural differences influenced their thinking and practice. A comparative case study or multi-case research design was used because it provided depth and involved a comparison of the issues discovered from different instructional designers' experiences. This type of study focuses on collection and analysis of data from several cases, and affords some level of cross case comparison. This type of research design is described by Miles and Huberman (1994):

> By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings. (p.29)

Although generalizability isn't the main goal in qualitative research, Merriam (2001) added "The inclusion of multiple case studies is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings" (p. 14). One of the primary research objectives was to identify how common perceived insights and understanding are regarding the impact of cultural differences on the current practice of

instructional designers. In addition, I engaged simultaneously in discovery and testing new ideas — always searching for additional insights. Both objectives are important, applicable, and compatible when using qualitative inquiry techniques.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was chosen to inform the methodology of this study because it works well in a context where there is little in the form of existing theory and data. As Goulding (2002) put it, "Essentially, [grounded theory] is most commonly used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge" (p. 41-42). As opposed to developing a *formal theory*, which has explanatory power across a range of situations, the goal of this research is to collect data that could contribute to a *substantive theory*, although developing a full theory will not be attempted. Substantive theories do not attempt to explain outside the immediate field of study. They are parsimonious: that is, they do not try to generalize with explanations of situations for which there are no data. The goal was to gather data that will be helpful in developing a substantive theory regarding what importance culture currently plays in the thinking, practice and lived experience of instructional designers, specifically those who have been creating cross-cultural online instruction.

Data Collection Procedures

The goal throughout the data gathering process was to gather rich sources of information. In order to identify and take advantages of rich information sources, the data collection procedures followed three stages in the ways that will be described: (a) participant identification, (b) participant selection, and (c) data collection.

Participant Identification – Snowball Sampling

Because of the nature of this study, I did not select a statistically random sample. Suitable participants for this study, who would likely offer the most insights, are few in number and live around the world. Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on small samples "selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth. . . . The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding" (p. 46).

Atkinson and Flint (2001) recommend that one of the most practical ways to approach this type of study is through a research strategy called "snowball sampling." This sampling method essentially consists of identifying respondents who are then asked to refer other respondents. Although seeming to contradict traditional notions of sampling for quantitative research, Atkinson and Flint (2001) assert that "the technique offers real benefits for studies which seek to access difficult to reach or hidden populations" (p. 1).

Participant identification resulted from the snowball method in the following way: the most notable or active scholars and practitioners of whom I was aware that have been publishing about or are currently engaged in creating culturally sensitive instructional designs (specifically online-based higher education content) were identified as the seed participants. These experts were contacted by phone or email, given a description of the purpose of the study and asked for recommendations regarding instructional designers they feel have spent the most time effectively creating online instruction for a culture other than their own. They were asked to provide (a) their name, (b) contact information, (c) what kind of online instruction they have created (corporate or higher education), (d)

what cultures they have worked with, and (e) an estimate of how long they have been involved in similar efforts. Names and demographic information were compiled onto a list, indicating the person (people) that they were referred by.

I compiled several lists of referral names from various global online-learning stakeholders. The list from which the sample was drawn represents the population of the sample frame of practicing instructional designers from around the world who have spent the most time and are currently developing cross-cultural online instruction.

Participant Selection – Maximize Richness of Data

Upon completion of the list of target respondents, I selected from the list those who were most likely to provide the richest source of information, contacted each, and obtained the consent of those who were willing to participate in the study. The potential richness of data collected was ideally enhanced by selecting a divergent group of instructional designers; that is, instructional designers who are developing materials for a wide variety of cultures (e.g. those focused on instruction for Asian, African, Arabian, South American, European, etc. cultures were included). Priority of selection was given to those who had more time invested in creating cross-cultural instructional design and those whose names appeared on more than one list of referrals. In other words, the goal was to (a) maximize the number of learner cultures represented, and (b) maximize the designer experience represented (e.g. amount of time spent designing for that context). Also practicality issues (willingness to participate and time available) ended up being a big factor in who was selected and how many were selected.

Researchers who create case studies aim to develop a deep understanding of the case. However, Miller and Salkind (2002) explain that the means of providing this deep

understanding requires "studying only a few cases, because for each additional case examined, the researcher has less time to devote to exploring the depths of any one case" (p. 162). For this reason, I limited my interviews to 12 participants.

In selecting participants, I followed three strategies from Patton (2002) and one from Glaser (1992) for gathering rich information:

1. I was using extreme or deviant case sampling since the people I interviewed were those instructional designers who have spent the most time with cross-cultural design issues.
2. I was open to opportunistic or emergent sampling, which allowed on-the-spot decisions about sampling. This occurred when I noticed that a participant not originally considered actually had a lot of rich information to contribute.
3. Related to this is what Glaser would refer to as theoretical sampling – using constant comparison analysis to direct further data collection.
4. My sampling was also, of necessity, one of convenience sampling in that I drew from the pool of instructional designers who had the time and were willing to participate in this study.

Limitation of Method. One limitation of snowball sampling to consider is that participant selection may not be representative of the entire community of interest (Sligo & Jameson, 2000). However, the goal in this study was to have cases rich in information. Patton (2002) suggests that the very things that are a weakness in statistical sampling (by creating "bias") actually become a strength in qualitative sampling. "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling" (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

Strength of Method. This participant selection method was chosen because of its ability to select individuals who had knowledge and experience with the phenomenon to be studied, without needing to pre-determine in a constraining way the range of responses and insights that could be collected. The limitations that were placed on the selection of participants were chosen in order to focus on a domain small enough so that insightful trends might emerge from a limited number of case studies.

Data Collection - Interviews

The main sources for data collection were interviews. Each interview lasted between one and two hours, although some participants were interviewed more than once. Four participants were interviewed over the telephone, and one through an extensive email dialogue, due to the geographical spread of research participants. Travel during the summer of the study allowed the me to conduct the remaining interviews in person, although some follow up was made through phone or email. The format was such that I posed a semi-structured series of open-ended questions. The interviews focused mainly on introspective information, primarily on the metacognitive reflection and insights designers have gained while developing cross-cultural online instruction.

Although most data used for analysis came from the interviews, I also asked for instructional designers to provide, where possible, related materials they had written and also examples of online instruction they have created that they felt was at least somewhat culturally sensitive. Due to many constraints, not many of these materials were available for me to examine.

Instruments. Because the primary means of collecting data for this study was personal interviews, the researcher (a.k.a. P. Clint Rogers) was the main instrument involved. I conducted all interviews and collected all data. Gay (1996) stated,

> In qualitative "measurement," validity is the degree to which [interviews accurately reflect the feelings, opinions, etc of the participants] and, consequently, permit appropriate interpretation of narrative data…In a qualitative study the "goodness" of the data depends on the "goodness of the researcher" (p. 217).

In other words, this means it was critical I took care to make precise, careful, and consistent observations during interviews and throughout the data analysis phase.

Some might feel that because the researcher is the main research tool in qualitative analysis, all the findings will be too subjective, intuitive, and value-laden. Goulding (2002; see also Borman & Preissle-Goez, 1986), however, rightly points out that subjectivity can and should be addressed:

> Personal discipline assists qualitative researchers in avoiding excessive subjectivity. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that qualitative researchers should adopt a rigorous and self-conscious examination for bias at each stage of the research process. There is also the requirement that the researcher checks for negative incidents in the data and accounts for occurrences that do not fit the emerging story. Moreover, qualitative researchers also make use of external referees such as other fieldworkers, academics and the informants themselves, in order to check the accuracy of their interpretation. They also check indirectly through the use of similar or related literature which enables them to provide a comparative picture. (p. 19)

In other words, personal discipline, peer-reviewers, and member-checking were some of the methods used to keep my potential bias in check (and will be discussed in more depth later). For the reader's benefit, the last section of this chapter includes a section that makes explicit some of the assumptions that I holds.

Number, Duration and Nature of Encounters with Participant. Introductory phone calls or emails were made to each instructional designer describing the study and its parameters. Upon receiving an affirmative interest in participating in the study, the initial

contact was typically followed by an email to each proposed participant with a copy of the Informed Consent Form approved by the BYU Institutional Review Board. They were asked to reply to the email with the following statement: "I have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study." They were also given a copy of the main question areas to be asked about in the interview in order to prepare their thoughts and make the interview time more productive.

Interviews were conducted, and the data were analyzed. To maintain accuracy, I requested permission to audio record all interviews. A follow-up email to each participant included a copy of the material derived from the interview, including direct quotations, and a request for corrections or additional insights and permission to use their quotes in this dissertation.

Interview Protocol. The interview questions were developed after studying the existing literature (see Appendix A for a list of the seed questions), and they were used in the following way. Prior to conducting the interviews for the actual data gathering, the interview questions were pilot-tested with several faculty members and students in the department of Instructional Psychology and Technology at BYU. Each of these people were encouraged to provide candid feedback for the final design of the survey instrument to be used.

Each interview commenced with an effort by me to build rapport and develop trust. In order to avoid missing unpredicted and valuable insights the first questions were intentionally vague, allowing participants to speak about whatever they feel are the most important issues. For example, one of the questions asked them "to describe what it has been like for them to develop instruction for learners in a different culture." If the subject

raised a topic to be covered by a later question, I immediately encouraged the new direction. Although interactions like this might influence to a degree the way in which interviewees respond, the goal was to provide a setting where emic views were expressed, and the issues were described in reference to the interviewee's own experiences in their own words.

Following broad questions, the interviewees were asked a series of more specific semi-structured questions intended to extract helpful data about their perceptions regarding the research questions that had not been divulged under more general questions. Particular interest was paid to any emerging discussion regarding unique aspects of how the background of instructional designers (e.g. training in ISD, ADDIE, etc.) might have interfered with or facilitated cultural responsiveness. Additionally, following the last prepared question, the interviewee was asked if they felt that the interview was effective in collecting data for the domain desired (i.e. did it cover all of the important issues, cover issues that weren't important, leave out important questions, and so on).

Great care was maintained to ensure a consistent qualitative analysis of the experiences of each participant. Careful steps were taken to remain consistent and eliminate as much researcher bias as possible. I attempted to exercise care to "tease out" relevant data without "leading" the subject to make statements to support his hypothesis. This effort required a level of sensitivity, finesse, balance, and professionalism. Frequently during the interviews, I stopped, restated the question or response, asked for specific examples in order to ascertain whether the interpretation of the response was correct.

Upon completion of the interviews, I kept the recordings and used written field notes to permit selective quoting. To preserve the confidentiality of subjects, I removed from transcripts any references to the specific participant that might result in the identification of a particular interviewee, although participants were given the option of having their real names used if they insisted on it. In addition to recording and reviewing the interpretations with the interviewees, I created field notes documenting personal observations and subjective thoughts and feelings during and after each interview session, which were used to form the initial themes of analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Patton (2002) suggests that case studies give more in-depth understanding to the phenomenon of interest than empirical studies (p. 230). Borman and Preissle-Goez (1986; as cited in Goulding, 2002) state one reason why this is so:

> The emphasis of the paradigm is upon remaining sensitive to the data and to input from the field. When initial questions of procedure appear to clash with incoming information, the paradigm permits researchers to abandon unworkable lines of inquiry and reformulate new ones that have a better fit. The resulting nested working hypotheses help guide a course of enquiry that leads toward results that closely adhere to the phenomenon and have great authenticity. Rather than simply being an ill-thought ad hoc operation, the looseness that characterizes qualitative research is one of its defining features and greatest strengths: It permits the researcher to correct mistakes. (p. 52)

In other words, the analysis of data and creation of working hypotheses are formative with the case-study approach, they occur all along the way to allow for modifications, not simply after all the data are collected.

Constant Comparison

Quotations and notes taken on the interviews were coded and studied to determine whether patterns and commonalities could be identified and conclusions drawn regarding the instructional designers' experiences. Other materials provided by the instructional

designers were studied in the same manner, and in comparison to the conclusions drawn from the interview analysis. A fundamental feature of grounded theory is the application of "constant comparative" method, which is explained by Spiggle (1994; as cited in Goulding, 2002):

> Comparison explores differences and similarities across incidents within the data currently collected and provides guidelines for collecting additional data…Analysis explicitly compares each incident in the data with other incidents appearing to belong to the same category, exploring their similarities and differences. (p. 493-494)

This process facilitates the identification and coding of concepts, which can then be used to explain the relationships between and across incidents.

Theorizing Process

Morse (1994) describes the cognitive processes that are commonly involved in this type of qualitative research: (a) comprehending, (b) synthesizing, (c) theorizing, and (d) recontextualisation. Following is a description of how these apply to this research:

1. Comprehending involved reflecting on my own experiences and then engaging in dialogue with others (interviews) to record their experiential descriptions. After this, I read and listened to the texts (e.g. interview transcripts or recordings, etc.) in full, in order to gain a sense of the big picture.
2. Synthesizing is a hermeneutic endeavor (Thompson et al., 1990), as case study transcripts were coded for ideas or concepts and analyzed to identify emerging themes and to decide whether it was possible to identify ways to reduce data to recurring experiences. In other words, this was when common elements of the data are categorized and labeled.
3. Theorizing resulted in "the best comprehensive, coherent and simplest model for linking diverse and unrelated facts in a useful and pragmatic way. It is a

way of revealing the obvious, the implicit, the unrecognized and the unknown…This involves asking questions of the data that will create links to establish a theory" (Goulding, 2002, p. 21). Although a comprehensive theory was not the intended result of this research, an attempt to tentatively relate the information in a simple and coherent way will be made later in this report.

4. Recontextualizing comes from writing, rewriting, and providing new insights, relating the emerging theory to the context of established knowledge. "Ultimately, the goal is to be able to place the results in the context of established knowledge and to claim new contributions" (Goulding, 2002, p. 21).

I spent countless hours analyzing common and unique circumstances within each interview first and then across the instructional designers to draw conclusions regarding the impact of culture in their lived experiences and ascertain whether there were significant similarities among their experiences. Those findings were compiled and will be presented in two ways. The first is that three of the representative cases were fleshed out and presented in the words of the participant. Second, there is a chapter where the main themes emerging from this research are discussed, including direct quotes from all 12 interviewees.

Trustworthiness and Qualitative Standards

Much has been written about the importance of a qualitative study following standards of rigor so that the conclusions of the research can be justified. The standards typically existing for positivistic research (such as reliability and validity), however, would not be useful for judging the quality of a more naturalistic research design like this

study. One difficulty in evaluating qualitative research is understanding that no two qualitative studies would ever be conducted in exactly the same way. Even the same data could be taken by multiple researchers and interpreted in different ways (Goulding, 2002). Although there are also many different ways to evaluate qualitative studies, the main goal remains the same: to establish the researcher as a trustworthy gatherer and analyzer of the data.

One of the most respected sets of standards designed to help a qualitative researcher establish trustworthiness is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These authors suggest four methods for establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. I used these standards to guide my inquiry in conducting a rigorous and trustworthy study. A description of each of these standards and methods I used for establishing trustworthiness follows.

Credibility. Credibility methods help ensure that the research results are as believable as possible by requiring the sampling, collection, and analysis methods to be appropriate for the purposes of the study. Credibility also implies that the conclusions drawn from the data are justified as an accurate portrayal of reality existing in the experiences of the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest seven techniques for establishing the credibility of a study. Of those suggested, this study utilized them in the following way:

1. Triangulation - A form of triangulation is used, through multiple interviews including some artifact analysis, peer debriefing and member checking.
2. Thick description – discussed in the Transferability section.

3. Peer debriefing – Several experts in understanding cross-cultural issues helped clarify and correct ideas throughout the gathering and analysis of data.
4. Accounting for negative cases - As I reviewed the data to find evidence for patterns, I also looked for negative cases that could disprove my theories. If negative cases are discovered, the developing theory was critically examined and corrected as needed.
5. Using member checks - I performed member checking with my interview participants during the interviews, checking my understandings of their experiences by restating what they told me. When an interpretation and synthesis of an interview was created as a case study and included in my findings as data, I emailed this section of the dissertation to the participant to ask if I interpreted their experience and position correctly. Their corrections tended to be minor (e.g. wording, grammar, and so on), and I integrated their comments accordingly.
6. Using an audit trail - In my field notes, memos, and other writings, I described what patterns and themes I was identifying, allowing me to conduct personal subjectivity checks.
7. Persistence and prolonged engagement – I was sufficiently persistent in my deliberation and interviews to collect adequate data for the purpose of this study.

Transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that the best way to increase the transferability of a body of research is through thick, rich description of the data and conclusions so that the readers can make a decision about whether their own contexts are

similar enough to those described in the study to extend the conclusions to their settings. If the contexts are sufficiently similar, then the readers may transfer and apply my conclusions to their own situation. I attempted to give a thorough description of the case studies as explained by the participants, using as many quotes from the interviews as seemed appropriate.

Dependability. Although it is difficult to describe specific methods for establishing dependability that are different from those used to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba, 1981), one method sometimes used to determine dependability is to have an inquiry audit performed by an outside researcher. To allow for this possibility, I maintained a research journal of my major thoughts regarding methods, actions, and decisions throughout the data collection and analysis process, as well as all the collected memos, coding structures, and files. This research journal is available to my dissertation committee, and anyone who may be interested in it.

To allow the reader to perform a simplified inquiry audit of sorts, I have included in this report summaries of the themes generated from the qualitative data. In the last section of this chapter I have also included a brief summary of some of the main assumptions that I hold. This will provide the reader with at least a sense of how I arrive at my conclusions.

Confirmability. I attempted to establish confirmability by referencing any similar research studies in the literature and by confirming my insights and observations with other instructional designers who are familiar with this research. Lincoln & Guba (1985) also suggest using an inquiry audit to establish confirmability, but the budget and scope of this project does not seem to warrant a complete audit. Instead, some of the more raw

data is presented in Chapter 4 prior to my analysis in Chapter 5, so that the reader may perform an informal evaluation of my conclusions based on the data.

Limitations of this Study

Although my intention in this study was to ask meaningful research questions, and the results should be of interest to a variety of people, there are several limitations that should be noted.

Limited Generalizability

Although limited generalizability is a feature of every study, the nature of this kind of qualitative research and the small number of respondents further increased the opportunity to enhance transferability rather than generalize the findings in a statistical inference sense. Researchers suggest that a study such as mine should offer extrapolations, which they define as the "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (Patton, 2002, p. 584). As Goulding (2002) stated, "Because 'truth' is enacted and theories are interpretations made from given perspectives, it is important to realize that interpretations are temporally constrained" (p. 43). She continues by saying that research like this "should always be seen as provisional and subject to future elaboration, and it should be recognized that they are limited in time; they may become outdated or in need of qualification" (p. 43). The goal in this study is to offer a rich enough description that readers can draw their own implications for their unique contexts.

Availability of Participants

Much of the results were influenced by the availability and willingness of the target population to participate. The depth of the data was contingent on these practicality

issues, and should be noted up-front. Also, the cultural contexts which are covered, and ended up in the data, were dependent upon which participants had the availability and interest to become participants for this research. There is the possibility that much information was not included in the collection, synthesis and results due to issues of access and practicality.

Limited Scope

Additionally, because culture and therefore concepts of cultural competence are constantly in flux, the results of this study will be tentatively placed on the landscape of a changing global society. The few questions covered in this research can only touch upon some of the existing concerns, many more of which could be addressed, and many of which will change over time.

Potential Researcher Bias

It should also be noted that I am not separated from my own cultural presuppositions and paradigm. Although I have lived in or visited 20 other countries and interacted deeply with multiple cultures, I still have past experiences and current perspectives that influence me as a researcher in both positive and negative ways. Yanchar and Williams (accepted for publication) argue that the "metaphysics" or assumptions underlying our science, methods, and theories are too often held uncritically, because they are unconscious, and are thus transferred to others more easily (being propagated by insinuation) than what is directly argued. They propose that although we cannot escape the theoretical assumptions we make, we can at least take efforts to make them more explicit and coherent. Although this research might not completely match the standard of the "critical methodology" that they request, as the main "tool" of this

research is the researcher, I do want to move towards what Yanchar and Williams ask for by offering a synopsis of some of the assumptions I have become aware of that I personally have.

The following list is an attempt at making explicit what my assumptions and possible biases are, in recognition that they are fallible and in need of critical examination. My current view is as follows:

1. Humans have agency. By this I mean that the acts of people are meaningful because they have chosen among a range of alternatives and could have acted otherwise. Human agency is at odds with the assumptions of positivism, determinism and mechanism that are common in discussions of psychology and education. The assumption of agency means that people cannot be talked about in the same kinds of deterministic terms that are used for the natural world (Rychlak, 1987; Williams, 1987, 1992).
2. There are moral universals (e.g. golden rule – that we should not do anything to others that we would not want to have done to ourselves).
3. The Western conceptions of time and tendencies towards reductionism and Descartes-like dualisms are faulty and inadequate in understanding the multifaceted complexities of human psychology and culture (Slife, 1995).
4. Humans naturally desire growth as a prime goal (Dewey, 1926; Hall, 1976).
5. One of the best ways to grow is when humans have others they care about and invest a good deal in helping them grow too.
6. The central aspect of instructional design (and any profession) should ultimately be the focus on helping others (Inouye, Merrill & Swan, 2005).

7. One of the best ways to help others is in a two-way, dignity building, give and take relationship (for a description about how this plays out in an instructional setting, see Gong, 2002).

These assumptions do influence how I see the world. For an example, you can see their influence in some of the following tentative "principles to remember when working cross-culturally" that I have identified during the process of reading the literature and conducting this research:

1. Objectivity is an illusion; we can not completely shed ourselves of subjectivity. But this is not to the extent that it is futile to try and understand others (Fay, 2004). We can do a much better job at trying to understand and be as explicit about our assumptions as possible, while at the same time trying to understand things from other people's perspective and world view.
2. Complete cultural relativism is also a myth. We can find deeper principles that are the same for people across cultures (e.g. respect) even though they might have different applications (e.g. keeping head covered vs. taking hat off). In opposition to extreme cultural relativism, "anything" does not "go". Valid cultural differences/ideals should not be confused with greed/selfishness etc. Whenever anyone does something for their own gain at someone else's expense – that is wrong.
3. Although we like to speak of cultural differences in terms of dichotomies, the reality is that it is often more a matter of degree. We all want to save face, we all see the value in rules, we just place higher value on some things in certain

circumstances, predisposed to these tendencies by our culture and past personal choices.

4. There are, however, definitive differences in our world views: what we notice (perception), how we feel about it (values), what we recognize as legitimate ways of knowing things and making decisions (knowledge and reality), and what we think about ourselves, human nature, gender, deity, etc (identity and purpose).
5. It is not necessarily a good or a bad thing to introduce new things (ideas, technology, etc.) into another culture. There is a possibility of creating a global culture (so we can communicate, interact with, and understand each other) without losing the richness of local cultures (Ess, 2001). We should try to think through the consequences in context, check our own motivation, and respect the agency of others. It might even be the cross-sections of cultures that stimulate perceptive people to create new innovations that are better than people from either culture could come up with on their own.
6. We should not take a deficit view of any other people; e.g. that we are the benefactors and they are the beneficiaries – it should always be a two way exchange (even if simply gaining what we can learn from them). Just because you have always done things or thought about things one way does not mean there are not alternative and equally valid ways to do those same things.
7. Although culture does influence us to think/act in certain directions (along with our genetic inheritance, our education, world events, etc), it does not

determine us. Our choices matter, and as human beings, we can reinvent and transcend the past to forge out our own future.

8. The more that we can seek to understand others, the more we can learn from them, find things that resonate with them, and find things that are applicable to us and them. This can help us to separate deeper principles from particular applications.

My intention in including this section is so that the reader can be aware of and critically examine the assumptions that have helped to mold the conceptualization and execution of this study, and come to better informed conclusions about the findings and hypotheses generated from the collected data. Although I have sought to mitigate the effect of my own biases through meticulous self-observation and self-analysis, member checks, and peer debriefing, it should be explicitly understood that my insights as a researcher are both limited and enriched by existing underlying assumptions and prior knowledge and experiences.

Chapter 4: Report of Data

Introduction

This chapter has four sections. It begins with the perspective of a learner from Sri Lanka who took an online course from the US. Then it contains three case studies of participants who are grappling with some of the issues involved in creating online instruction cross-culturally. These cases were included because they are representative of the range of issues that came up in all 12 cases. This chapter simply recounts their experience (as documented in response to interview questions) in their own words. In Chapter 5, I break their experiences down to identify possible general principles, adding supporting statements from all 12 cases in an effort to begin suggesting a substantive theory of instructional design of online courses across cultures.

Gertrude's Story

User perspective is paramount. In order to prepare the reader for the instructional designer cases, it is helpful to understand a profile of a learner taking an online course from a developing country. The intent is that this story will paint a better picture in the reader's mind of why instructional designers should become concerned with culture, and give a better perspective on the types of difficulties and complexities instructional designers encounter when they work cross-culturally. In Case A, Barbara, who has worked extensively in Sri Lanka, even read and responded to Gertrude's story. It is hoped that by providing this story, when the instructional designers in these cases speak of "learners", the reader will not think as much of a generic conglomeration of unknown people, but rather think of numerous living and breathing, real human beings, of which Gertrude is one.

Gertrude was born and raised in Sri Lanka, and I met her and recorded her experiences while we both were attending an international conference in Taiwan. In order to give the reader a better idea of the context in which Gertrude has lived, I begin with some descriptions of the history and current situation in Sri Lanka, and then move into Gertrude's story.

Sri Lanka Background

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean, south of India, in Southern Asia, with a population of 20,064,776 (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). The Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the 6th century B.C., probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced beginning in about the mid-third century B.C., and a great civilization developed at the cities of Anuradhapura (kingdom from circa 200 B.C. to circa A.D. 1000) and Polonnaruwa (from about 1070 to 1200). It has been occupied by a south Indian dynasty (14th century) establishing a Tamil government, the Portuguese (16th century), the Dutch (17th century), and the island was ceded to the British in 1796, became a crown colony in 1802, and was united under British rule by 1815. As Ceylon, it became independent in 1948; its name was changed to Sri Lanka in 1972. Tensions between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil separatists erupted into war in 1983. Tens of thousands have died in an ethnic conflict that continues to fester. After two decades of fighting, the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam formalized a cease-fire in February 2002, with Norway brokering peace negotiations (CIA World Factbook, n.d.).

Sinhala is the official and national language; 74% of the population speaks it. Tamil, also is a national language; 18% of the population speaks it. English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 10% of the population. The

general assessment of the telephone communications is that it is a very inadequate domestic service, particularly in rural areas; but that it is likely to improve with privatization of national telephone company and encouragement to private investment; good international service (1999). Although competition is strong in mobile cellular systems, telephone density remains low at 2.6 main lines per 100 persons (1999) (CIA World Factbook, n.d.).

In 1977, Colombo abandoned statist economic policies and its import substitution trade policy for market-oriented policies and export-oriented trade. The struggle by the Tamil Tigers of the north and east for a largely independent homeland continues to cast a shadow over the economy. About 800,000 Sri Lankans work abroad, 90% in the Middle East. They send home about $1 billion a year. In late December 2004, a major tsunami took nearly 40,000 lives in Sri Lanka and caused massive destruction of property (CIA World Factbook, n.d.).

The rest of this section is a typed transcript of statements made from Gertrude to the author on July 7th and 8th, 2005 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Following this section, the chapter contains three additional sections that compose three case studies of instructional designers, also in their own words.

Meet Gertrude

I was born and grew up in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a male dominated country, and although ordinarily women normally aren't able to even travel around like this, I am kind of violating all of the existing rules and attitudes. I like to do things my own way (giggle). I have three Masters Degrees, two postgraduate diplomas, and I am working on my PhD. All together, I will have seven degrees very soon. It was difficult to get into Sri Lanka

MBA program, there was a very difficult entry test, and I was one of only three women in the whole program. Then to get an executive position as a woman was very difficult too, but I did it. I moved my way up through various positions to even become a managing director.

These days you can take a course online, depending if you work in the embassy or what organization you are related with. If you do get a degree online, there is a status for it, because you are getting a course online from overseas.

People's motivation is for social recognition. Ten years ago, having a Masters was a social status, a symbol for recognition, now having a PhD is a status symbol. If you take it online from a different country – there is even more social status. It is social status because only few people have access to computers, and if you take it in English, it is also another social status thing.

Having a car is another social status thing. People even sacrifice personal happiness for social reasons, but I am totally against that. I want to be happy regardless of what the neighbors think of it.

First Online Course

I took my first online course about three years ago. It was presented in a professional way, lots of good information, but each of us understood it and responded to it in such different ways. In our course were students from India, Philippines, Europe, Africa, and America. Our focus was so different, and the professor didn't understand what most students think, or understand their performance – there was some conflict there, and the professor didn't accept it. I think lack of cultural understanding made it less successful…

Was it her personality or the language? I don't know if it is depending on the person? Language, reading, pedagogy, and attitude of teacher all caused difficulties. Whatever it was, in my opinion the professor and course design was not flexible to alternative ways of thinking and doing things.

One thing was that there was no kind of monitoring system, no way to monitor things, if people were reading, etc. She assumed that people were reading and doing assignments at one end. On the other end students were expecting feedback but technology made it less accessible to many students…

Ok, each week we had two to three assignments, an unbearable amount of work. Each week we had to read more than 100-200 pages, sometimes more, because of the stingy professor. No doubt at her capacity she can do that kind of stuff, but we are international students, we're just beginning. I am not a fast reader, so I wasn't ready for the US system. I can read maybe two to three pages a day, max.

Communicating with her was hard, she didn't respond to every email. We didn't get the feedback she gave us. We said we felt like professor didn't have a human heart, hehe.

At the end of the semester, I looked at my grade and it was very, very low. I was very upset. I sent her an email at the beginning saying that I didn't want a low grade, so what else could I do? This was a mandatory course, we had no other choice. They did not know how to be responsive to the students. So I changed my major to a different program because I did not like that.

Technological and Economic Issues

Access to the Internet is difficult in Sri Lanka. Unless it is in your office. The telecommunication is very undependable. The power shorts very often. The only source we have had for power generation is hydroelectricity – so when the rain is not there, we have no electricity. Even when I live in the administrative capital, where all the key offices are, we had shortages sometimes 5-10 times a week.

There is a monthly fee to get access to server, and you also pay for each minute you access it (this is called a server fee). For 50 hours Internet, and monthly fee, it costs about 12 to 14 US dollars. In addition we have to pay the phone bill for all of the minutes we spend online.

The average monthly income is about $50. If you have a college degree you can earn more, about $60/month. If you are an executive director, chairman, secretary of ministry, and such, than you can get paid more. For high government positions, including tax you have to pay, you can get up to earning about less than $300/month. And then with my PhD, maybe I'll get $400/month. However, 99% of the people are in the less than $50/month salary range.

Blackboard

Professor asked us to write something online on the Blackboard [the interactive computer classroom space] about an idea. Most of us students were not prepared for that.

The typical class in Sri Lanka is lots of lecture. No questions allowed, maybe because they don't know the answer, and they don't want to loose face? I don't know. Even in the Universities, it is totally lectures. Assessments are always essays, and you just repeat as close as possible what the professor says. There was no reading material at

all then, so we have to depend on the teacher. Because we had no English education, and most books were in English. Now we have more stuff to read, so hopefully that will help.

I would do it differently, and not use Blackboard and Gradebook. Because that is harder for us – we don't want to loose face. That is a big deal. Compared to American students, our writing style is so different, our speed is so different. I was shy to loose face, hehe.

I didn't write much at all, mostly only the American students wrote. I noticed one American student wrote a comment – and professor gave a very nice comment, but her English was so good.

This is our first semester and we are not very good yet, and we did not want to show our weakness in public. We didn't want to admit it all, and especially not publicly online. If she would have done it through email, that would have been a lot easier than Blackboard, Gradebook, and such – that technology not work like she expected.

Growing up in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka we are told not to ask questions. It is coming from our childhood education. In our education if you ask questions, then you fail; you don't get your degree. And we want to get a degree, so you obey your teacher. So that is a big cultural difference, and most Americans just don't understand.

In the morning of the first day of term and in the afternoon of the last day, each class of students is in a line, you kneel on a leaf, you bow to the ground and with your hands pressed together, same as in Buddhist temple, and bow to the teacher. It is a form of worship – we worship the teacher, same as in Buddhist temples to the priests or the Buddha statue.

In a way, you are also supposed to worship your parents. When I was young I was brought up by my grandmother – I was the oldest of all my cousins. My grandmother was a strong woman, dominated in the home, and if I lived with my parents, I had to take bus to school, but my grandparents live right next to school. Those days, my grandparents were considered to be affluent in the area, respected socially from everyone in the area. But my grandma was so strict. I hate that kind of strictness from my childhood, whatever she told me to do, I break. I pretend like I listen and obey, but I don't obey. Ha ha. But I do what I want.

Differences in Instruction

I studied in a rural school, and I studied in our language, Sinhala. My husband studied in a Catholic urban school. He studied in English from a child, and so he is so methodical, more like the English speakers. Some things I learn in English I can not express in my own language.

Everything about the way people categorize and learn seems different in the US. I see things from my own cultural perspective, from my experience. I see things much different from those in America. I try to think, how is it different in the US from my country? I couldn't easily pick up on the system, or the way they are doing things.

A simple example, I didn't know how to write a paper in the US style. Topic sentence, then explain, another topic and then explain. That might be due to differences in education, because no one told me. No one in my country taught me that – even after 3 master's degrees. I learned that from the US – I like that system – the US system is easy.

Also, I did really like group work. We did not have anything like that in Sri Lanka until my postgraduate. Even though my time didn't let me be as involved as I wanted with my group, I like that idea.

Relationships and Breaking Rules

In Sri Lanka you don't address family members by names, but by relationship. Younger Sister is "nani", younger brother is "bani", older sister is "akah", and older brother is "aiya". In grade school we use the English word to call "professor" or "sir" or "madam" or "doctor". If you don't address them like that, people will get angry and you will not be able to do your work.

People in the US tend to stick to rules so much. Even when people know other people they will still keep the rules. They will not be flexible. But in my country, in our culture, we break all the rules, things are more flexible. If you have a good relationship with a person, they will break the rules in your behalf.

When taking a course from US University I was expecting the same kind of a thing – develop a relationship, so they break the rules in my behalf. Even when I develop the relationship, they still not break the rules. Relationships are different and rules are different in the US.

Family life in my country is different and many times people have urgent situations too, especially with relationships, which distract them from attending classes. Sri Lanka is seemed to me more concerned about their family needs, emergencies and such. For example, also things like the tsunami. Some documents say 40,000 died – more than 2 million are now in refugee camps.

Going to the US

When I went to the US a couple of years ago I had so many problems trying to decide how to behave. How do I talk to a professor? How do I talk to a friend? How do I behave when I go to a friend's home? Because of our cultural upbringing, when people offer me something, we are shy to accept – even if we want a certain thing. So I wondered if I should accept offers or not?

You can not judge people in the US based on what you see on the outside. What you see on the outside might be totally different from what is inside, public and private. It seems less that way in my country where people tend to be mostly same in public or private.

The term "America nice" means that on the outside so friendly, good, etc, but inside - not so; friendly, yes, but more hard to get to know, more cold, closed, and distant.

Current Interest

I now want to do research to find better ways to reach international students. My belief is that current dimensions about culture are too general. Hall and Hofstede identified national cultures – based on whatever the findings. My argument is that if we develop programs and training based on stereotypical national cultures and dimensions it is too generalized, because each individual has his or her own culture developed since childhood. Individuals think based on their own individual world-view perspective, experience, attitude, and such, regardless of their national culture. That is my problem – how to design for individuals.

I am still looking for evidence to support my ideas. I just don't have much evidence to support my ideas – because everyone else focuses on individualistic vs

collectivistic, and other nationalistic dimensions that are talked about all the time. But I'm thinking about my own family – even though they are the same biological background, same food, and similar background – we are sooo different. And like me, I am kind of violating all of the existing cultural rules and attitudes (e.g. not having an arranged marriage, getting so many degrees, traveling around). I don't have much yet, but I am trying to develop it. My target group is non-traditional adult learners in small communities. Not much research is done there.

I also feel I have some kind of obligation to help people in Sri Lanka learn how to communicate with people outside of Sri Lanka, marketing, knowing what products other cultures like. Less than three to five percent of small businesses in Sri Lanka survive after four to five years, for many reasons. Sri Lanka is a small country, and small market – so exports are absolutely important.

Exports should be something preferred or required by outside our community, but without knowing any of the differences, my people just create things they can think of in their own community, but then have no success in marketing them outside of their own country.

Case A: Barbara

Background

I came as an anthropologist into distance education. So still, I am first and foremost an anthropologist. Most of the instructional designers I have worked with have also come from other backgrounds, like teaching or editing/writing or even fields like nursing, and not from instructional design itself. Instead of initially wanting to be an

instructional designer, they came from some other field and then end up doing distance education, and instructional design.

In terms of my own development as a distance educator, I started working at Athabasca University in the early 70s, mainly as a writer of social science courses, focusing more and more on anthropology as Athabasca developed its undergraduate program to a greater extent. My emphasis increasingly over the years has become more and more on cultures of learning, rather than cultures at large. Because of my work in distance education, my focus has been more and more on how people learn in different parts of the world, what learning actually means for them, how different logics affect how people learn, and how other goals affect the way they learn.

Currently, in my international work I don't directly do the designing. I work with other people, assisting them to learn how to do a better job of designing. I am not here in Sri Lanka to do the writing or even the basic design. I am here to work with our colleagues in other universities and post-secondary organizations and institutions to help them in doing a more effective job of what they are already doing. So at this point we are not sitting in our office writing materials. We are here in a capacity building mode, a training, and support and assistance mode.

The project we are here with in Sri Lanka is called the Distance Education Partnership Program, which is part of a much larger program funded by the Asian Development Bank, called the Distance Education Modernization Project. There are 3 components to the project, ours is only one part. In the other two parts, one deals with the Open University of Sri Lanka, and the third component is supposed to set up a national

distance education network of over a 100 centers, most of which already exist, but will be upgraded in terms of equipment and connectivity.

The intent of this project is to try and bring more and more online learning to Sri Lanka. We have backed away from that at the moment, because clearly that would not be an appropriate move at this time, to just dump everything online. Connectivity is very limited. Broadband exists only in Columbo, and even there it is enormously expensive. They installed broadband here in our apartment and then told us it would cost $400 US a month to keep it and we said, no thanks, we can live without it. Yes, it is just phenomenally expensive and out of reach for people.

So online learning is not the way to go, but we are still going to try and encourage people to give their students more access to the Internet – for example, by developing course websites where even administrative information could be put. So that is the nature of the project we are running here. There is a lot of training involved. We are here for two years, off and on. And at the end of that two years we are supposed to have brought 8 universities as close as possible to being online, as well as other organizations including other professional organizations in the country, like accountants and librarians and so on. So that is the nature of the project I am working on at the moment.

Experiences Where Cross-cultural Differences Became Apparent

Thailand. I encountered some interesting experiences in Thailand at an open university we were working with there. This is almost 20 years ago now. What surprised me was actually the other Thai colleagues we were working with there, especially the ones that had been educated entirely in Thailand. We discovered that they were thinking in much different ways than we were accustomed to, and they were thinking about

instruction in much different ways than we were accustomed to. And it came as a bit of a shock to the system, even for me as an anthropologist. It hit me that we had been working with people for whom instruction has been a much different experience than it has been for us.

What was it that caught me off guard in Thailand? For one thing, we realized early on, but probably not early enough, that the relationship between teacher and student is, I would say, entirely different from the one to which we had become accustomed. There is a relationship of respect that is quite phenomenal. Teachers are revered in Thailand, there is no other word for it, they have close to divine status. That partly comes from Buddhism. So that is one thing that struck us with great force.

Another thing that struck us with great force is the phenomenal need to maintain and save face. That humiliation is the absolutely worst thing that could happen to anyone, including a student. So, as a student in Thailand, I would be very reluctant to ask a question, because that might risk making me look foolish, so you just don't. You just don't ask questions. You take down what is said to you, and you might discuss it with your peers afterward, but there is not the same give and take in a learning situation that we're almost forced into, especially at graduate levels, in our culture. So that struck us with great force as well. Because this was clearly not the questioning learning atmosphere that we were working with here.

I would not go so far as to call it rote learning, because I think that is too often used in a demeaning way. And I do not necessarily think that there is anything low level going on here, it is just a totally different approach. Yes there is enormous respect for teachers, a great fear of looking foolish and being humiliated. And hence, what it looks

like on the surface to us to be a much more passive approach to learning. But I think that is much more appearance than reality. I don't think students were simply absorbing things like sponges, taking them in and then squeezing them back out on exams. There is much more sophisticated processing than that going on of which we didn't have much opportunity to get close to. We didn't have much chance to really get to know what was going on.

This was partly for lack of language. We worked for quite a while in Thailand, but we never got further in our Thai language than being able to bargain in the market or order in a restaurants. Thai is a very complex language that we didn't come close to knowing. And again without the language, you can't really get very close at all. It was just continually fascinating and often puzzling, working there. We loved working there, but it wasn't an easy context because it was sometimes like working on a different planet.

Sri Lanka. So in Sri Lanka, for example, we find ourselves in a culture where the examination is everything. The focus is not really on learning, the focus is on how well you do on that one examination. Which means that the focus is pretty much on getting though the material and being able to put it down in a way that satisfies the examiner. And people don't have a lot of access to reading materials either. Books are very expensive. If people have books at all, they have to share them, or go to the library to try and read one of the two copies that they have on the shelf.

As a consequence, there is not a lot of emphasis on reading here. Instead it is more a matter of taking notes from what you hear in lecture or even from what you see as the professor writes on the board. You take that down, you learn it as well as you can and you feed it back on an examination. There is not much in the way of continuing

assessment, you know, because continuing assessment is expensive. Somebody has to mark it. That is changing to some extent, but we are quite stunned here by the emphasis on oral learning, people learn by what they hear.

There is one very famous story here where a couple of students at the open university here came to the professor of the course with the materials that they had received and said, “We can’t understand this.” So all he did was read it out to them and they said, “Oh, now we understand.” They are really not accustomed to learning by the written word. And that has struck us like a ton of bricks here.

Canada’s First Nations People. Another experience I had was working very closely with Canada’s first nation peoples or aboriginal peoples. There were a number of tribal councils in and around Edmonton where the university was located at that time, that wanted better access to university programming, but they wanted the university programming that was more in accordance with the needs that they had defined, the educational needs that they had defined for themselves in areas like health education, for example. And one of the programs that I worked quite intensively on, was called the health development administration certificate, which was training people to be health administrators in their own aboriginal communities, with their own band councils.

And that was a real eye opener, working with native people because they do also have a different approach to education. There is much more respect for the elders, and what the elders have to say and what the elders had to teach. Elders were very much involved in the educational process.

There is also a high level of spirituality involved in native education, to the extent that every formal meeting that we would have with a band or tribal council would begin with a prayer, said by one of the elders at the meeting.

Everything was framed very much in the context of spirituality, and this is something that Western academics just simply aren't attuned to, we're not accustomed to it. As an anthropologist I was probably more accepting of these ways of going about even formal meetings, and the need to frame whatever curriculum we were developing to incorporate an element of spirituality, but a lot of my academic colleagues tended, understandably, to say things like, "It is not appropriate to, in an economics course, you know, inject an element of spirituality – no, we can't do that"

There was a lot of give and take needed on both sides. I always felt that our native colleagues were much more understanding of us and our needs than we were of them.

That's usually the way it is, actually, even when working in overseas context. We are usually working with people who have usually been educated in Western universities, by and large, and they know us. We're the ones that really have to work hard to get to know them. They have come much more than half way to meet us on our own ground, and we are the ones that have to work very hard to try and meet them at least half way.

Adaptations to ID Process When Working Cross-culturally

I think if there is one mistake that people make in instructional design for cultures other than their own, it is that they try to work with some kind of a standardized template. That just doesn't work, you can't do that. The kind of template that we use as western educated instructional designers is a product of our own culture and I'm not sure that it necessarily works everywhere.

There are elements that possibly do. I mean, I think everyone benefits from focusing on learning objectives for example and trying to structure material in a logical way. But even having said that, there are other logics at work in the world as well, not just ours. And I think we run the risk of just trying to turn everybody into little versions of Western learners, which is not entirely defensible. I'm not convinced that our way of learning is the best. It is probably one of the dominant ways of educating people in the world today, partly because of the dominance of English. But it is far from the only one, I mean there are cultures that use many other kinds of approaches to learning.

What is an example of what I mean by a template? Well, a standard template of instructional design is to start out with advance organizers, and then define your learning objectives, and then structure activities that enable your learners to achieve those objectives, and then give them feedback on how well they've done those activities, and then give them some kind of typical assessment so that they can determine for themselves how well they are grasping the material and how well they are achieving the objectives, and then finally testing them in some kind of a summative sort of way so that others can assess their progress towards accomplishing the objectives. It is all kind of cut and dried.

But you might be dealing with a culture where the learners are accustomed to a more, let's say, spiral type of logic, where they are kind of circling around and around until they determine what their objective is. You know they might not start out with an objective at the beginning, but it is more a matter of defining it as you go, this sort of standard approach is going to be very much a challenge to the way that they have learned how to think. It is going to be problematic.

So how do we try and meet learners from other cultures at least half way? The first thing that comes to mind is that it is not easy. Mostly, we just don't have time. These projects are hugely demanding, just to keep up with the terms of reference that we've been supplied, in order to meet the demands of our contract. And plumbing the depths of culture is just never among our TORs (Terms of Reference). Sometimes I think it should be. But it is not, that is not what the Asian Development Bank is after. In fact I am very suspicious…

What is it they're after? Well, in this case their goal is really to bring Sri Lanka into what they consider the modern age in terms of its distance education provision, i.e. much greater use of the computers and especially the Internet. There is a lot standing in the way of that. I mean the infrastructure just isn't here yet.

And the learning culture here in Sri Lanka is certainly not one that lends itself readily to those kinds of approaches [using the Internet and computers] either, which have tended to be very heavily text based and very heavily reading based.

Also, I find myself trying to sort out in my mind the differences in what we might want to call culture from the influence of what I might put down to just the need for power or simple greed. We encounter all these influences among the people we work with, not just here in Sri Lanka, but back in the context in Canada as well. And trying to sift out what might be cultural influences from all these other just very human characteristics is neither easy nor straightforward.

And even though we are here for almost two years, we are not even given that much opportunity to really plumb the cultural depths here. Because we operate in English. We are not making any attempt to really operate in either Sinhala or Tamil, the two

languages of Sri Lanka. We don't have time to learn very much, if anything, of those two languages. The people with whom we are working speak very good English, for the most part, and they are very keen to improve their English. So there is just no motivation really, for us to get to know their language and much more about their culture.

You can't possibly get close to a culture without knowing the language, no way. I firmly believe that.

Without knowing the language, how can we even partially understand and mediate for cultural differences? It is a matter of effective communication, which for me involves more effective listening than talking. You need to learn to listen effectively. You can't wipe your mind of your own cultural biases, you are who you are and your own cultural biases are going to inevitably influence even the way that you listen to someone else.

But one of the things that I learned early on working with native people in Canada is that silence is probably going to be one of the hardest things that I, as a Westerner, am going to have to deal with. We can't bear silences. We have to fill them up, right? Whereas native people are quite content to be silent with each other, just be quiet, and you speak only when they have something to say. That is a very hard thing for us to learn.

Silence is very difficult for us to bear.

If you can learn to not just cope with silence, but actively know how to use it, you can be tremendously effective. Because it does show that you are learning from respect for others people's ways of being and ways of communicating, if you can manage those silences.

Sometimes the most effective thing that I can do in situations even here in Sri Lanka, is to sit and look pleasant while all this stuff goes on around me. I'm working quite furiously to try to understand what is going on, but I can often do that much more effectively by just staying quiet watching and listening than I can by saying anything. Looking attentive and staying quiet is one of the best things you can do.

When designing cross-cultural online instruction, the first job would have to be finding out what they are doing now. You would need to allocate enough time to just do that – to make sure that you had sufficient time with them and were listening as effectively as possible to what they were telling you to determine what your starting point is. You can't assume that you can start from where you are, you have to start from where they are. And then your task becomes one of finding some kind of common ground so that you can move forward and help effect a change for the better. Presumably they have called you in there because there is something that they want to do differently.

There is some problem that they are trying to solve that they think you can help with. So you have to spend a lot of time really probing that problem and determining what, if anything, you can help with, that will help them get closer to a solution. Sometimes there isn't anything you can meaningfully do. Sometimes you are not the right person, or distance education is not the solution and you have to be open to that possibility as well. Distance education is not the solution to everything.

End Product/Experience Different When Culturally Appropriate

Well, I haven't discovered any other ways of learning at a distance, than the ones that are of a very Western influence. This is because, frankly, I don't think that the people in the countries that I have worked would have ever come up with distance learning on

their own. The need for being face to face is so paramount in a learning situation that it is hard for me to imagine that, for example, distance education would have ever developed in a country like Sri Lanka.

Yes, I do think that distance education is a profoundly Western way of going about learning. And it is obviously happening in all these countries around the world, but largely because of donor agencies funding the work of Western consultants like me, who bring our Western models here on the assumption that it is going to provide a lot more access of learning for people, and with the same level of resources, provide opportunities for learning especially at post secondary levels to far more people, and hence make education much cheaper. That is the prevailing assumption.

The other Western thing about traditional distance education is simply the structure of it. Beginning with the objectives and then proceeding in a very inductive way. That's profoundly Western, and not necessarily typical of the way the world thinks.

So how do I approach designing instruction for other logic structures? There are technologies that could lend themselves to a more deductive logic or circular vs linear logic. For example, a major characteristic of CD Rom, being able to jump around all over the place, might be really valuable for this.

In a general sense, the final instruction would look different if developed by someone who is culturally sensitive than someone who isn't. For example, it might incorporate a lot more stories. Story telling is such a major part of so many cultures that we work with, and story telling is not something that is readily incorporated into our way of designing materials, so that is one difference I can think of.

The courses might not look nearly as linear as ours tend to, and on first glace we could look at those courses and think, that is not very good instructional design. Well, sure, because it is not our instructional design, but who knows. You can only tell how effective it is once the learners have actually worked with it and you've had a chance to evaluate how effective it is in their being able to achieve the objectives that they need to.

Having a different structure, avoiding the common automatic template, being responsive to other forms of logic, being sensitive to the unique relationship with the teacher, being sensitive to the need to save face, being open to things like including spirituality, are all things that might catch a Westerner off guard as to how others learn differently throughout the world. At least those are a few of the ones that have leaped out at us through the years as we have done this kind of work.

Other Notable Comments

After reading Gertrude's story, I would say it is terrific and I think points out many examples of what I have mentioned tonight. Gertrude herself seems frustrated by what she sees as the limitations of the learning culture in Sri Lanka. And she's been exposed to other ways of learning and she seems frustrated by peoples' either inability or unwillingness or just lack of opportunities to read, and she seems like someone who is intent on reading anything that she can get her hands on.

And that must be incredibly frustrating here in Sri Lanka, because there is such a lack of reading material. And what there is, is so expensive. That's not to say that there aren't book shops here, there are a lot of book shops and they are crowded, but they seem to be patronized by such a small slice of the population that have enough money to even consider buying these things. They are the anomaly. I mean, if you are earning the

equivalent of $60 US a month and a book costs you $7 or 9 or 11 US dollars, it is just unrealistic to think that you are going to spend much of your time in book shops. You just can't. And the library system is very, very limited. Books are very precious commodities in countries like this, and it would be enormously frustrating for someone like Gertrude.

She talks about access, costs, but also pedagogy. She mentions respect for teacher, a need to save face, not wanting to ask questions, what it is like to communicate in foreign languages. She touches on the differences in writing structure, and her approach to linear logic, but the interesting thing was that she liked the linear writing style better, even though she was brought up with a different approach.

When asked how I determine the ways people currently do things, how do I know there is not a better way to do things – I don't know exactly how to answer that except to tell them that inevitably we introduce our Western ways. We don't know that they are any better, but inevitably we do that because that is what we get paid to do. And that is really what it comes down to. The funders that make any of these programs possible – these agencies are full of people with very Western ideas, and that is the way in which things are moving, and that is what we end up doing. So I think we are part of the Westernization of the world, whether we like it or not. So, you know, we bring with us an approach to pedagogy that puts emphasis on learner centeredness in all aspects of the learning process, from curriculum design, from creating meaning in particular courses to what comes out the other end. And this focus on the learner is embedded in distance education. And those are what we have here in cross-cultural contexts.

It is ironic that our focus claims to be so learner centered as far as the teaching learning circumstance, but when we go to these cross-cultural contexts, we don't even

know the learner. We want it to be learner centered, but we don't take enough time to find out who the learner is. It somehow doesn't transfer in our minds, we still have this instructional mind-set, we still take the position of the teacher.

What is the drive for online learning in some of these developing countries, then? Is it for economic reasons, for status reasons, or to signify some kind of relationship with 1st world? I think it is all of that. I do think it is part of a much larger agenda of globalization, which sees the use of the Internet to powerfully transform economic relations, there is this assumption that it will be as powerful in transforming education. Making it easier to access and at the same time cheaper to manage, i.e. reducing the need for expensive teachers. Really, that is one of the goals.

And of course, there are some very high powered multi-national companies involved, on the hardware and software sides, basically wanting to develop markets for these very expensive products. Which are expensive not only to acquire, but also to maintain and upgrade on an ongoing basis and so on. They are developing markets.

And there is a global agenda to drive down costs by replacing teachers as much as possible.

Countries like Sri Lanka are of course concerned with wanting to look modern, wanting to make their educational systems more efficient. And ultimately there is a desire to transform education in useful ways. But those of us who have been in the business for a long time are not nearly so convinced as those designing the projects for funders like the Asian Development Bank that using computers and the Internet to a greater extent are going to transform education in Sri Lanka in useful ways.

The circumstances where I have seen distance education most effectively is in teacher training, for training teachers who otherwise would have remained untrained. And that holds true around the world. In that regard, I think that distance education has been quite a boon, working in two ways. They can bring all their experiences from the classroom into the sessions that they have with tutors and other students in the same situation. And at the same time they can apply what they are getting from their materials, directly as they get it into the classroom. And it can be enormously powerful combination, and I think the success rate in teacher training programs are probably higher than they are for almost any other sector in distance education provision. Because teachers serving teachers in school have had no training at all in how to manage a classroom, how to design an effective lesson plan, how to set effective examinations or design effective classroom activities and so on, they do benefit enormously from the opportunity to learn while they are actually working in the classroom.

Now having that said, I don't think that we have much if any evidence that it is making a very profound difference in the education system overall. I am not aware of any data that tell us that what is going on in the classroom has been significantly improved and that the education of the kids has been dramatically improved, and I think that is because there are so many other factors at work in education in these countries. I mean these kids have enormous problems to deal with in many of these countries. In many of the countries in Africa, the problem is AIDS, many of these kids are left orphans by parents dying of HIV/AIDS. School teachers seem to be particularly prone to HIV infection, and those are problems that no amount of teacher training can tackle very effectively. So there are all kinds of problems that distance education can't even help

have an impact on. But that is where I've seen it operate most effectively, is in the classroom.

Case B: Marci

Background

I've been an instructional designer since 1976. I had a master's degree in 1979; at that time I worked with the TICCIT project. I have worked with mainframe computers for 30 years (including PLATO). I also worked with some of the first projects to use video disc, and the first CD Rom that was created. I've been a witness for all of it.

Most of those years my work has been cross-cultural to some extent. For example, we were using PLATO to teach vocational ESL for Spanish learners, I've designed a lot of courses for second language learning.

I have also been an educator, early in my life teaching in Mexico for 6 years (I married a Mexican, and my daughter was born in Mexico City) and later worked in a large school district's central office as bilingual coordinator.

I worked for IBM for a time. Because sending people to learning centers was expensive, they hired our team to find some training solutions. I took their instructional design process, which was a systems approach to instructional design, and I was supposed to transform it in a way that could help IBM course developers to create better instruction. I learned a lot on that project, debating whether to use software that would tell you what approach to use, to use more stand up instruction or use more CBT, among other things. Over the years, my work has mainly been in three areas: teaching and training, program development and administration, and instructional design.

I took time off from work when my son was born, and then went back into the workforce as an Instructional Designer for the last 13 years. I suppose I have worked in Instructional Design in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and now too.

When I came back into Instructional Design to get my PhD, I realized that a lot of the things that instructional designers were doing and talking about in the 70s are still valid and useful today; if people pay attention they can get a lot of value from it. When I took an ID foundation class, I learned about new theories and realized that they had so much of the same old stuff, but just with new names. I have notes and notebooks from 30 years ago that I still use today, and I find that people are still people and learn essentially the same way. People think their theories are brand new, but most of it is not new, we have seen it a lot of it before.

So when I looked at these new instructional design theories I just asked myself, what are they calling it now? That is why I am glad that I learned to take good notes, which incidentally most international students don't know how to do, and so they don't do it. Sometimes it is a sign of disrespect to take eyes of the teacher, in other cultures.

I guess it is also true that I have learned so much more in the last 5 years (since 2000) about cross-cultural issues than ever before. There are so many just newly published things in this area that people are putting out there.

Experiences Where Cross-cultural Differences Became Apparent

I didn't understand any of these cultural differences or assumptions at first when I was designing in the 70s and 80s. When I was first introduced or encountered the problem I didn't have words for it and it wasn't in any of my training.

Time. How we view and deal with time is heavily influenced by culture. Most Americans want to plan everything out and get it done according to plan. People from other cultures will say what they think you want to hear, "I'll get it done by tomorrow," only they have no intention of having it done by then. Or maybe it just isn't going to get done at all, it isn't going to happen.

Using GANT charts and things like that in instructional design might limit some of our responsiveness to cultural issues. For example, one of my friends went to Canada. He had frustration working there, the company president was from India, although most of the engineers were Canadian. He wanted them to keep on schedule, and they would just pay him lip service. So he would try to force them, but he did not know how to communicate with them in their way. They want to spend that initial time first visiting with you and eating with you and getting to know you as a person, and that might take a month! Then they'll say, "Ok, now we know him and have him figured out and know we can trust him, we can work with him, we'll listen to what he has to say," but until then they'll reject almost everything they can. He came back so frustrated because he doesn't understand this. I can understand exactly why, he thinks he's tried this and that. Well, it is not going to work.

If you don't spend that time getting to know people up front, people won't work with you very well, they're going to dig their heels in, they're going to slow down the whole design process or manufacturing process or whatever. Instead of following your schedule, they're going to do it when they feel like it. It is easy to rush into something and get rejected, somehow you didn't fit the bill, you didn't mesh enough. So they're not going to accept you, they're not going to accept what you want to get done – they aren't

going to cooperate. And they make that decision because of the way people start. You can say, “We just want to get going, that’s our style,” but it is very likely that this approach is not going to work in many other cultures.

Honesty. Even what we consider about honesty can be twisted in different cultures, and that was a big shock for me when I taught in the Mexican schools. Our concept of honesty isn’t like theirs. Even the words we use might seem similar, but to them the meanings of it are not the same. And my students would be cheating all the time at the school where I taught, and I didn’t like that at all. I said, “No, you have to learn English yourself – I want you to do your own homework.” I would have to write three versions of tests sometimes, so they couldn’t just look across at a neighbor’s answers. They had 25 different ways of cheating I had never seen before in my life; they would hide notes in peoples hair, in their clothes, they had pens with slits that they could alter to see more words in their pens. They had all kinds of fancy ways to cheat. And I would be just as fancy fighting back.

Sometimes I’d rip up their papers right away if I thought they were cheating. I did not want any cheating in my class. But they don’t see it that way exactly; they see it as being a good friend. If your friend is in trouble, you’ll help them, right? And if your friend doesn’t know the answer, you’re going to help them, right? That’s the way they see it. I did not adjust to that, because I feel that if you are going to go to college, or on the job, you’re friend isn’t going to be there for you, you need to know it on your own. So on the final test I took them to the gym and spread them all out 30 feet from each other.

I could go on for hours, you know of all the things you notice and you have to decide if it is something that you should adjust to, or if there is a better way, but many

times people don't even know they are an issue because of the assumptions they make. The assumptions people make are the biggest problems, and for instructional designers, they make way too many assumptions – about almost every aspect. They make a lot of assumptions.

Discourse Style. One of the first times I caught my own assumptions in a cross-cultural instructional situation might have been when I taught freshman English classes at a university in the 70s. As a graduate student I needed work, so I was teaching freshman English classes and was surprised by the Asian students. We spent all semester working on what is a thesis statement, and how do you get it in there, and how do you support it (the Western direct line of thinking). Then I'd get the compositions from the Asian students and I couldn't find the thesis. Or if they had one, when they finally wrote one, then I would look for the evidence, and I couldn't find any. Their writing was just very indirect, and circular, and you had to guess the meaning.

Well I have come to find that is the way they communicate. That is what they prefer and that is what is acceptable when they write papers in much of Asia. And so I was really frustrated, until I realized that's what was happening – they think differently in different languages.

I have discovered that the Romance languages can zig zag all around and meander around, and it is ok. It is also perfectly acceptable, for instance, in the Semitic languages, for their way of thinking to be more parallel, and they have unrelated things in between. So different family language groups will communicate and structure their discourse patterns differently. Now, once I teach international students or teachers of international students about that then it clicks and they realize, "Oh, that's why I've been having such

a problem – and it really does matter that we're very direct in English?" Well, yes – it really matters, and that is a huge hurdle.

I suppose I was also aware of cultural differences in instruction and in our lives before that, when I married a Mexican, and lived in Mexico, and my daughter was born in Mexico City – oh my goodness, there were a lot of things. Although I lived in Mexico, and I knew about differences, but I didn't know how ethnocentric I was even though I had lived in Mexico for more than three years already up to that point. You know it is going to be different, but you still don't realize the assumptions that you bring with you, and you hang on to them. You think other people have those same assumptions until you get some wake up calls and experience so much suffering because of those assumptions.

I definitely learned the most from actually living in a different culture, especially from the extra demands of being married. This is because, more than being a tourist and more than working in another culture, by being married, I needed to get into their heads and their values and what matters or not. The value of what I learned from that I have been using my whole life since then.

Ethnocentrism. We grow up with our ethnocentric lenses, and we think that something is the way it should be because that's all we've ever known. It is easy to think that everyone thinks and feels the same as you, and so you don't realize that you can do many of the same things in a different way and it's perfectly acceptable. It's just not the way you've always done it. And you think, well I guess that is perfectly acceptable, there's nothing sinful about it, and you just learn to adjust.

I want to ask American instructional designers if they have ever taken a course prepared by someone in a different culture or country? I wonder how they felt about it

and what differences they noticed? I wonder if they can even see what it might be like for everyone else to take the kind of instruction that the US keeps putting out all the time?

I took piano lessons in Mexico, and they took a totally different approach. I had to play lots of scales all the time at the beginning, and it was good. It helped me to relax, and I got bigger picture and some instant skills that I never would have had going from beginning to intermediate skill level the way I had done in the USA. They even had different ways to call the notes, and I just liked it better. People do not learn how to play piano same way all over the world.

I have learned over the years how extremely important it is to be an insider. I don't know how people can assign a designer to create a course for people if they don't really have much experience with those people, or haven't been in their homes or haven't hung out with them or know what their values are – because outsiders miss a lot.

Especially important is the audience analysis, which is the first step – If you don't get that right, you don't have many clues, and you are going to miss a lot. If you don't get that right, all that time and effort and money will be wasted – the end product isn't going to work as well. That's why I think it is so important for project managers to find instructional designers that have some prior insider knowledge and experience with some of the audience that might not be the one they grew up with – Otherwise they have these ethnocentric views where that is all they know and they make all these assumptions and I have been on projects where I'd say "You can't give this to the Germans – they won't like that" And they'd say "Well that's tough (this was at Ford) When they signed on with Ford they had to know English or we weren't supposed to hire them" And we kept taking training over to Germany – and I'd say, "The German trainers are translating everything

into German anyway, and they're going to change the way it's presented – shouldn't we help them out a little?" And I'd bring in all this information about internationalization and localization and what you should be doing, and the manager said, "We're not going to pay for that. Nope. They can speak English, and they'll have to make do with it." Sometimes it is a cost and time issue, but sometimes it is more just Hubris, I think, just a proud attitude, "They know English, they're a part of this company, tough if they don't get it." Some managers don't care.

It is interesting for me that even if foreign people have lived in the US, they still haven't changed in many of the ways that they view things. I suppose because I had already taught in Mexico before I had ever heard of instructional design, I already had some awareness, and it was a part of what I designed from the beginning. I've just learned more and more as I've gone along and have become more aware. I knew it was a problem, but I didn't have words for it.

I took a course about adjusting culturally before I went to Mexico, and it did help. But someone had to be very explicit and point out what some ways of doing things in Mexico actually meant to the Mexicans, and then I could deal with it and realize that it wasn't something I needed to take personally in their actions. But I have learned so much more in the last 5 years (since 2000) with the just newly published things that people are putting out there. I've picked up on a few things early on, but only in the last five years have I gone to a totally different level and had a lot more awareness, and I have learned more specific things about intercultural communication.

I've learned more vocabulary to describe the situations, from what I have read and workshops that I have attended. Like semiotics, for example, and things like that I hadn't

heard of that 6 years ago. Or once I understood the concepts of things like high and low context communication, I discovered that so much is related to different context views and reactions in frustrating situations. Once people find out about that, they understand more about the difficulties they've been having.

Semiotics is how you use different words in different situations and the influence of the interaction of the words and their meanings. For example, I will bring candy that I got from Chinatown in classrooms, and the Westerners didn't know what it is. It is called "Haw" fruit, and kids love it in China, so those from China will have something they associate with it and it means something to them, including the situations they use it and don't. In China, "Haw" fruit is just for kids. You stop eating it when you are a teenager. I ask people, "Why? Do you not like still like it?" They will respond, "Well, yes, I still like it, but it is just for kids." So you would only know that if you understood the cultural context. We can say a word in any language, and there is the schema that people have about it. For English words you just know all kinds of things about them (e.g. Mount Rushmore, Benedict Arnold, Communism, etc.), and it has good connotations associated with it or not, and that's the thing that is the semiotics. There are whole groups that talk about semiotics in different ways, but that is one way. I first learned about semiotics at AECT actually. Mainly I like to go to all the international things at conferences that I can, and in the last 5 years I have learned a lot.

And it is so valuable learning vocabulary to describe things you know or you've experienced, but can't verbalize without lots of words to generally get the idea across. If people know the phrase or certain term, then you can communicate a lot easier and get

somewhere, and I think that is what instructional designers need a lot more of – vocabulary to recognize more of the implications of culture in instruction.

Adaptations to ID Process When Working Cross-culturally

As I have increased my vocabulary and awareness about these things, I have become more sensitive. Other people will just try to jump to something, and you say, "Whoa, no, lets get back to this other part, we're not going beyond this until we've answered more questions and done more investigation and have more data to go with. Because you're assuming they can do this, or they want that, or that this isn't acceptable so we can't do this thing." And you're making these assumptions and so you have to slow the process down. So many people just want to zoom along, but they are going to be in trouble later and they are going to waste all their time and money and effort if they do not investigate the cultural and learning situations well enough at first.

I am now starting to understand where people are making assumptions and when not to make those same assumptions. Or else to guide, teach, educate them as well. To say, "If you do this, consider this might happen," or, "I know from experience this is going to bomb, it's not going to work, and your just showing you're ethnocentrism really big here." We need to educate more designers and especially educate the clients.

Often they want a project done, and you feel that you have got to do what they want. But often they don't understand a lot of these things, and so early on in the project you need to educate them or give them alternative suggestions. You can show them how an alternative way might be pretty much the same, but if we approach it this way their results are going to work out a lot better. It is important to show them if they have

expectations that do not match reality, and keep pulling them back to reality, if you have a clue about what it is.

If you are going to be working in a different culture extensively and collaboratively, or if you are going to present to people at some training, some industrial training or something, and they are in one of these other cultures, then you better have a lot of face-to-face time with them before you get to the real nuts and bolts. And you better have all kinds of other relationship building things that a lot of Americans think is a waste of time. But it isn't - you have to have the context and extra contact.

I also just know how important it is for that audience analysis, to know who you are working with and what level they are on. Sometimes they already have a lot of the skill or knowledge base you are creating training on and so you only need to prepare a little, there is no need for over-kill.

I found this questionnaire to give to people to find out where they fall on the high and low context scale. At a minimum, you could administer something like that or interview them and find out something about them. So much is tied to things like that and their preferences.

I could go on for hours, you know, of all the things you start to notice about how things are different and how the design process should be different, but the assumptions people make are the biggest problems – and for instructional designers, they make way too many assumptions, about almost every aspect. Three assumptions they make that come to mind right away are as follows.

First, native English speakers think if others know or can speak English, then they should be able to understand this course or program, because we deliver it in English. That is not true, because there are so many different levels of English.

There is social English. That everyone pretty much knows, hello and goodbye, etc. But in schools or industry there is going to be specialized vocabulary or academic vocabulary. Also, you are going to have words that are pretty much the same but they have collocations. A collocation is a word or a few words around it that are always used together to mean a certain thing, but if you looked up the words in the dictionary individually, it would mean a completely different thing. You won't find the meaning, because the collocation is not there, although a few dictionaries now are starting to come out with some of the collocations. But native English speakers don't understand, that even if their words are in English and the user generally understand English, you still have to invite them in to your community of practice and explain what these things are in the situation (like it says in the book *Crossing the Curriculum*).

Usually in the training part, whatever you are doing, you are going to do that anyway – using words or concepts in context. But a lot of users, right there, they are in trouble. They are not going to pick up so many things you take for granted, unless they are explained explicitly. They can see the word and read the word and still not understand the word and exactly what you mean.

Already in the world, native English speakers are in the minority of English speakers, and they will never be in the majority again. So right there we are in trouble, making assumptions just because users might speak English. You have got to give users

more scaffolding, more support, more examples, or a good glossary and/or pictures – so they can figure out what it is and have a clue and not be so frustrated.

Second, assumptions about the style. For example, even Germans and Europeans say we in the US are so authoritarian, and they don't like our training style. They don't like it and they don't want to come to it and use it. And so it is the style of the approach… "You do this and you do that," – a very direct and get on with it style – and they want a different style. There is an article from ASTD that addresses this issue that I've learned loads from.

Third, assumptions about the interface. Many users from other cultures don't like how we set it up online either. They often don't like the web site design. Some don't like that we make them go through lock step, and others don't like it if it is too fluid, they want more structure. It is how you got your interface because of the way that we think, and they don't think like that. So a lot of users have got to be guided and catch on, "Ok this is generally the American way of doing courses," but usually they're not happy about it. To them it is not intuitive. They have a different style of thinking and their approach is different, and so they don't like it.

Most of the users from other cultures will struggle through courses that are made with these assumptions, and most will drop out for these three reasons (level of English, style of instruction, set-up of interface).

Instructional designers and clients too often have an idea of the end design and just want to skip straight to what we know as the middle of the process (just want to get right to the step of designing the product, the lessons, the media, etc), they haven't done enough of analysis; haven't tried out some things to see their reaction; they haven't asked

enough questions; or haven't gone to observe them in the workplace or at home or at school or wherever they are actually going to be using your project; and they haven't done enough of the audience analysis, because they could find out a lot right there. Sometimes they can do a quicker design process and then a quick little pilot, and that helps, if they have time and money for it. It helps so they can find out that they don't need to have what they were planning, or that it is not going to work very well, so they can go back and fix it by going back to the drawing board. I think all that you can do in the beginning phases really pays off in the end.

End Product/Experience Different When Culturally Appropriate

There is a culture shock for many learners from other cultures who first take an American course, because they aren't used to the value systems that we have in our classrooms and in our instruction. Unfortunately, there are many attitudes that teachers or instructional designers can have which can be destructive, but there are ways to overcome them. You have to be sensitive.

There is difference in results between an instructional designer who does know about some of these cultural considerations and one who does not. Some things need a lot more steps, visuals, lessons, etc, to get to an acceptable result. Some people don't want to take time or money or allow for that many more lessons or processes, or practice and activities. But most of the time they need a lot more practice than they usually get. Teaching isn't telling, and you can't just put it out there and expect them to get it, because sometimes they need a lot more. So what are you going to do, just dump everything on them even before they are ready? What are they going to take away? Or are

you going to go a little slower and at least going to give them a perspective and teach them something well? You've at least got to talk about this.

Too many instructional designers skip too much. I think it is because it is easy for the client to think, "This is what I want, just teach them this part," and thinking they can then skip a lot of steps, and so the instructional designer will just go along with it. Then everyone using the course will go away thinking, "Well, I got lost after the first day and then was bored or frustrated the rest of the training or course, so why bother?" Designers need more upfront time in planning, getting data, and also need to not have such a huge project, because the user is not going to get to the end of it – they're just not.

There are some other ways the end product will look different if it is sensitive to some of these other cultures that are different from ours. Lots of times there will be more visuals in the training or end product, we need some more universal symbols. I find that a lot of the things we use are communicating things that we don't want. The symbols we use in our culture to represent something might either be offensive in other cultures or just totally miss the idea we were trying to communicate. So we need more market survey type of things, user research or surveys, to see if they even get an idea of what we intended. Get some prototypes and run them past some focus groups. Then some products will have certain colors or lines certain ways, and use things that will be familiar and pleasing, that users will gravitate towards instead of reject. Be aware of these things.

We need to localize and customize design as much as possible, if there is the money for it. But if they say, we just need a universal thing, then at least adjust the universal symbols so not have offensive symbols, or colors or placement of things. It is going to look different if you really care about your audience. It is not going to look like

what we always put stuff out in our country to please us, what we're used to. It is going to look different, and it should. If you have one that looks so American, then take it to some people and ask them what bothers you, what do you notice, and then do something and don't make it totally American looking/acting.

There is more too, if the instruction is in English. There is an academic English they need to be taught, which is much different from what they need to know to pass the TOEFL test. In a book called the *Calla Handbook*, they take the theories and methods and then go by the areas (Math, Science, Social Studies) and how to adapt to that area. Also we assume they know certain metacognitive strategies (e.g. Venn diagrams; brainstorming activities alone or in groups, methods of note taking and note making; etc), but more often than not, they don't, and we need to teach them how to do those things before we ask users to do them. Once they know what that strategy is then they can use it in any other of their classes too. Those conceptual tools are so valuable for these international students.

I also find a lot of value and power in something called the SIOP model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). It was originally intended for teachers in the school system, but my goal is to integrate some of the concepts into online learning because they are just so powerful for helping any student, but especially international students and students from other cultures. At one TEOSL convention in Anaheim, CA I went to a school where everyone used the SIOP model in their teaching, and everything was so different than in most public school classes; there was power in it! I actually first learned about this model as I was teaching a class about it. It is even easy to measure if someone is good at the SIOP model. There is a scale (0-4) for each of 30 points so that

anyone can observe and rate you and give feedback for improvement. It is mostly used face to face in traditional schools currently, but my inspiration/goal is to put some of it online. I want everyone to know about it, but I have learned to not use the acronyms until people can see the need for it, otherwise people think it is going to be too difficult or confusing and tune out. I also learned to just present some very simple things at first when I introduce this model that teachers or designers can do, so they don't get overwhelmed by everything involved in using this model.

There are many very simple things you can do to help learners. One is that you can reverse the order of your lesson; teach the lesson backwards. The traditional way to teach a lesson is to have learners read a chapter and do an activity and then after that we'll talk about in class. In SIOP you first tie what you will talk about to previous learning. Then you can introduce the new stuff by having some pictures and realia that gives them some experience to relate to what it is you are teaching about. You guide and then read a little, before they can then go do an assignment. This is so they can have more of a schema in their mind beforehand, something that they can have in their mind for the new concepts to tie the new learning to.

Another simple thing is that you can have both content objectives and language objectives (e.g. learning to add an "s" for plural nouns) for each class. You also define all the necessary words that you will use for that class and have them written and on the board.

Another easy concept is Low Affective Filter, which is used in second language acquisition and means just to make it a very un-stressful environment; if there is less stress then they will learn more. You can do this by having a companion, or some fun

things, or interesting things, and by not expecting international students to give opinion right at first. We expect people to stand up and speak out in our Western style of education, even when others don't, but that is hard for them. Getting used to speaking up like that is going to take a long time for most students from other cultures, so that is something you work toward doing at the very end of a unit or a course. So my goal is to get people to help people slowly take one small step after another (scaffolding) out of their comfort zone. Start with low risk (greeting people) then move up more and more risk until they can do a lot of other things, like: state their own opinion – and directly; to say "Hi" to a teacher in the hall or something like that (many international students would never do that, they see it as a sign of disrespect); and to participate in class discussion (which is very hard, they'll avoid as much as they can).

We get graded on things like participation and ability to state our own opinion here, but so many other cultures don't. They don't know the situation or how important it is to us, and how much it counts in our culture. When learners can break out of their original mind-set and expectations, then they cross that bridge and set their thinking free. They then can do a lot of things, they feel empowered, and they can see the difference between old way of thinking and new way of thinking. But until they get to that point, (and are even aware of it yet), they just know and act according to their culture. They know that in their culture certain things do not show respect; or they don't want to ask a question to someone if the other person might not know the answer and it might embarrass them; or they want to save face; or avoid being yelled at, even avoid things like corporal punishment (which is often what they are used to). It is interesting that if

you don't act like that, which is what they are used to, many international students will initially wonder if you are a good teacher.

Having a learning guide is also important, to provide scaffolding and encouragement. I also want to reproduce this kind of experience online (with a learning companion or a virtual learning guide). This could be done by video taping someone, cutting out the background, and then they can point out things, give encouragement, etc.

Those are just a few simple things you can do, and should be aware of.

Case C: Derek

Background

I was born in Guangxoau, China and immigrated with my family to Hong Kong when I was six years old. In those days, the only people that were allowed to immigrate were the overseas Chinese who had moved back to China during the early days of communism. My father was born and raised in Malaysia, then in the 50s the communist regime did a lot of recruiting of overseas Chinese to come back to build the country. In the 60s no one was allowed to leave, but things were relaxed a little in the 70s so that some people could apply to emigrate, not back to Malaysia, but to Hong Kong.

Today the Chinese government is trying to be more open and more democratic, but their main focus is still on the economic concerns of the country. It is such a large complex country that problems could arise if change is too quick. There are so many people who are still uneducated, unhappy with life, and the government is trying to provide a better life for them.

When I was an undergraduate studying Information Systems in the US, one of my professors told me about Instructional Design and Technology, because he obtained his doctorate in this area, and it sounded fascinating. Although I went back to Hong Kong to work for a time (with a management training firm), I still considered this additional degree an option. Later, I furthered my studies in another American university and got both the master and doctorate degrees in Instructional Technology. My formal graduation was in 2002. I now teach at a university in Hong Kong and also work for a university in Hawaii, and do some collaborative work with a Mongolian medical university.

Coming from Chinese background to study instructional design, it was interesting and unusual. I find it to be a very soft field, in the sense that it is cross-discipline. When you talk about Instructional Design, especially in usability types of things, it has a lot of human factor. It has a lot of the instructional designer's skills in communication with the client, understanding the need of the client, the content experts, and also the end user, and that is very human focused. You need to have somebody that really likes people, who likes to communicate with people so you can understand the needs of the learner and the needs of the client.

However to Chinese, especially those who come from hard science, like computer science, they are generally not very good with that. The Chinese people don't generally talk about those soft human skills that much. Even what you see in a classroom, for example, is different. Classrooms in a Western society focus a lot on the individual learners. You know, a concern for how to understand the learners, how to cater your instruction to the individual learners, how to communicate, how to help them solve their

problems and concerns. But in the Chinese classroom, the focus is often on the presentation style. By this I mean how you present it effectively to the mass, and so that the mass will start participating, so that the mass will start getting involved in your presentation. So they will get interested in your presentation, understand it, and accept it.

So that mode of instructional design is quite a different concept. In fact, when some Chinese people look at the field of Instructional Design, they find it to be too soft. Because a strong element of the discipline is human understanding, that it is a little difficult for them to comprehend. Over the years I have known of two or three Chinese graduate students that have dropped out of this program. I think all three of them had computer science background. One of them already had a PhD also in Instructional Technology in China, but even in China, Instructional Technology is more focused on the hard skills, the hardware, using Java, or using whatever programming language. When he came into our program, he found it a little too soft and dropped out for that reason and eventually moved to computer science. Another person also moved to a Masters program in computer science. And the other guy also I think moved to computer science too, but I do not know where for sure.

There is a lot that is ambiguous in having focus on the learner that is not present when you mainly focus on presentation. So if you look at the recent Global Conference on Computers in Chinese Education conference, you will find that the better presentations focused on high tech applications of learning technology. They focused on certain types of student programming, and some technology that is very hard, and there were very few of them that really focused on the human factor. There were some that were not very good, and there were some studies that were quite general. When it comes

to the human factor side of instructional design, often times you will find that the Asians are weaker in this area.

I am talking about the general, of course, but as always there are exceptions. There are some Chinese colleagues that are really good in all areas. For me, I enjoy working with people, and I do have some beliefs in education. I believe that technology can enhance student learning, and that the current way of study can be improved, both in Asia and in the US. And that technology is a tool, a means to an end, and that the end is learning. So just because you have powerful technology doesn't mean you will have good learning. I also believe that good instructional design and good instructional technology always come down to just good instructional design that is based on some learning and instructional theories that cater to the human, cater to the learners. Sometimes we get too carried away by the technology that we forget about the most important part which is learning.

Experiences Where Cross-cultural Differences Became Apparent

I think you can look at this from several aspects, and I can come back and talk more about each level.

First, the differences in culture, and difficulties in cross-cultural collaboration in general (e.g. understanding the other culture, the other culture trying to understand us) that is probably true in any kind of cross-cultural collaboration. Right now I am doing instructional design and development, but if I was doing good health management, or selling cars, or lots of other things, I will probably have a lot of these same cultural differences to deal with. So these cultural differences are the first level.

The second level is our concept of teaching and learning, differences in perception of teaching and learning. In the US, we talk a lot about constructivism. In China, they talk a lot about constructivism too, but you don't see many examples in real classrooms that manifest constructivism. And so when you are designing things for Chinese, you also need to teach and convince them about some of these concepts. And so the conceptual differences and conceptual communication is the next level.

The third level comes down to the technology side, the technological differences. These technological differences have to do with the differences in hardware/software. For example, when we were doing things for Mongolia, they basically have never seen this type of technology. They have never seen multimedia instructional cases, they have never seen people using this digital and video in a formal instructional setting, so this is also a difference. Mongolia is less advanced than the US in technology. In certain parts of China, it is as advanced as in the US, but they are using that technology in instruction in ways that are different.

Level 1 and 2 are the most difficult, you need to have lots of experience, and be very sensitive. Then level 3 is a little easier, when it comes down to the actual technology.

Level 1. At the first level, you find examples whenever you are trying to do anything serious in cross-cultural collaboration; you will have problems from differences in culture. Especially if you are dealing with people in a culture who have not dealt with people from your culture yet. So for example, if you are dealing with some colleagues and institutions in Hong Kong, who have Western faculty members, and many Chinese faculty members who have been educated overseas (many of them have extensive

collaborative experience with US institutions), you may find that they don't have much problem understanding and working with you.

Even though I was born in China, I grew up in Hong Kong, and was educated in the US, and so some of my expectations and assumptions about the design process are sometimes Western. It depends though; a lot depends on the context. I find that seems to be true with a lot of people that work cross-culturally. I think it is important, if people want to be effective in cross-cultural circumstances, then they need to be able to adapt and change their mind set. Some people can struggle with that, and surely I have made dumb mistakes in situations.

For example, my friend was meeting with a very high level US official, a lady, and he met her in a formal setting. She is very senior and in retirement age, and that was a meeting for the first time. In the meeting, instead of addressing her by her title, he addressed her by her first name. He perceived it to be a very Western kind of a thing to call someone by the first name, as some of his American professors used to ask him to call them by their first names. We all need to learn those types of cultural things - that is a situational kind of things we need to learn. You don't go to President Bush and say, "Hi George" – you address him by his title.

There are also different types and levels of cultural differences too. If someone in the US goes to London and drops in someone's office without prior arrangement, there might be different perspectives on that. Or someone from Utah coming to Hawaii would experience some cultural differences too. Of course, someone like me, from Hong Kong will experience some cultural differences to people raised in Beijing. And that is to be expected.

I remember in one of the trips where I was working in Beijing and some other places in mainland China, there was one teacher who had a more inward personality. He didn't know what to do with me. He perceived me as a Chinese guy, but representing a Western university, with a funny accent in Mandarin (my first language is Cantonese), so he didn't know what to do with me. He kept whispering to his colleagues about this "foreigner" and he just felt very awkward – but he is kind of the exception. To him, maybe if he was dealing with someone from Tibet, or other places in China that are not the norm, he would feel uneasy with them too.

There is a degree or rate of cultural differences. And sometimes those cultural differences can be an obstacle to the collaborations, but often time, if you are able to convert it and transition it, it can be an advantage, a benefit to the collaborations, because it means that you are bringing different perspectives into the collaboration.

So, when we were developing multimedia instructional tools for training teachers in China, we were bringing in perspectives from different colleagues in China and from the U.S., and their difference in perspectives enriched the end products. So I think for the most part it is an advantage.

I teach a class in Hong Kong, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, it is a Masters level Educational Technology class. My experience is that the staff there understand my needs and requests very well, and they are very effective, very efficient in what they do. Whenever I request something, they will say, "Oh, you have to wait for a while" which means they will get it to me by 4:00 in the afternoon. In Hawaii, if people tell you, "you have to wait for a while", that means they will get it to you next year or something.

In Hong Kong everything is very fast, very efficient and productive, the students are very sharp. So it is a very enjoyable and productive experience working with them. When you send them an email, you get a reply for what you have requested as soon as they wake up. So Hong Kong is a different culture than Hawaii, but how do you describe it? I think that you need to adjust to that efficiency, so I have to become more efficient to keep up with the staff in Hong Kong.

When you get to mainland China, it is the opposite side. There are some people that are still very effective too, but often times, especially in places where they have not yet worked with Western institutions on very serious collaborations; they are more settled into a traditional bureaucratic approach to collaborations. Most of them have seen foreigners, and they maybe have faculty members who are Americans teaching English, but there is a big difference between having someone teach classes for you versus having someone come in and work with you on a very quality product. This is because when we try to produce a quality product, we also try to ask very specific questions and have very specific working plan and procedures, and sometimes others are not used to this, they are more used to treating you as a dignitary friend, and you just come in and they take you to sightsee, and stuff like that.

I worked on a project with Beijing Normal University when they became very interested in using technology to train their teachers. At that time the Chinese ministry of education had a program called the gardeners program. What that means is – the concept of a gardener is very prominent in education in China. They try to use the concept of the caring and diligent gardener to represent a teacher; a gardener will work in the garden and takes care of his plants in the nursery when the plants are still small, he will nurture

the plants so they continue to grow and continue to care for the plants until they eventually blossom into some nice flowers. This gardener program was designed to train teachers. China has 11 million teachers and many of them are unqualified, in the sense that they were trained during the cultural revolution in the 60s and 70s, when many of the teacher certifications were given without really assessing teachers quality, and so many of the teachers did not go through a formal training in teacher education before they got their certificate.

So they approached me and we talked and decided to develop some cases for specific topics that could cater to their needs. We communicated by email and telephone, and eventually I made a trip and went there with the purpose to capture and film the whole thing. I communicated with them and said, I need this example in this field, but they did not communicate properly with the teachers, so the teachers were not ready and did not know I was coming, and stuff like that.

The second time I went over was classic. I had produced the material and was ready to do the pilot testing. I needed so many teachers and so much time to test the CDs and get their reactions. When I went over to mainland China, they had scheduled some teachers, but they took me to a computer lab that had no CD Rom drives. So we were sitting there at the last minute trying to figure out what to do. There was not enough lap tops, so in the end I had to be creative in copying the entire CD to the server which distributed it to each computer, finishing it minutes before the first scheduled teachers showed up.

I find that in mainland China they like to do things last minute, and that they like to make changes to established plan. The plans are not very concrete way in advance, so

you need to be very flexible – and that can be a problem area for people from the West. On the other hand, the power of their approach is that they can be really flexible to do things in a better way and get things done at the last minute. Staff and students are very educated and can work overtime to make sure things are done that are needed. In China, they also don't have staff students like we do over here. They are volunteers. They work on jobs for the same long hours, but that is part of their studies, to help their professors and do whatever they are asked to do.

When thinking of this level with my work in Mongolia, I think my experience with Mongolia has been very good, I haven't had many problems. The Mongolians are interesting because in some ways they are more Western than the Chinese, because of their long relationship with the Russians. Some people in the Western world do not consider the Russians as Western, but in many ways they are very Western. So Mongolians are somewhat Western and very hard working. They do not have the same kind of resources as those in Beijing or the big cities in China. They generally don't have the same money and resources. The Chinese people in general are more into in hosting; they like to take you for meals and travel.

That is all level one. I believe that good instructional design principles and techniques are universal, cross-cultural. It doesn't matter where in the world they are coming from, but you need to find where the people are coming from, what their expectations are coming into it so that you can know what bridges to build.

Level 2. So what are the expectations/experience of teaching and learning in China? There are lots of published articles about the characteristics of a Chinese classroom. These articles describe in a general way the Chinese context – it is usually

more teacher focused, presentations style with less interaction, students are very disciplined, very examination oriented, lots of content (where in the US it is less exam orientated, although there is an increase in this focus with the government pressure, – but still it is relatively less). If you look at a US classroom you will find a greater variety of settings than you will not often find in China; you may find tables rather than desks, you may find a reading corner or other specialized corner. It says a lot about the philosophy of the teacher, the school – in the US you may see posters with alphabet or other main things they want to pass on to the students, but in China you will not see any that. You may see pictures of some famous people, in the back they typically have the blackboard, drawn nicely on with some campaign, some cute activities that they are doing. So looking at that setting you can somewhat see the philosophy behind the teaching.

A level 2 example that comes to my mind is when I lived in southern China, but this was one of my second trips to Northern China. I went with a professor from America and he was giving a lecture at Beijing Normal University to a group of doctoral students in Educational Psychology, some of whom had been teachers. He was talking about a new book he wrote that was about some moral dimension into teaching, where if students really find interest in learning then they can be an active learner themselves.

He was talking about that topic and I think a graduate student was translating for him. I remember the audience response was very much like, “Well this is fine for you, but it is not going to work in China.” And that sentiment was really quite strong. I was there and the classroom was quite packed. So eventually I said, “Wait a minute, I happen to believe in this stuff too.” I went up and the professor gave me some time to address the class, and I talked to them and used some examples from China. I can’t remember the

examples I used, but I remember trying to use some examples that you could see in a Chinese classroom, and talked about how this principle could be translated into a Chinese context. Then people started to see, “oh ya, or that is what you are talking about”, or “ya now I understand”, or “that makes sense, now I agree”, or “ya this is good stuff” – and then people started to say, “oh ya, actually I have an example of this thing too”. And there was a paradigm shift when they started to see the bridge from the same concept but a different application.

To a Western educator, when they come to a Chinese classroom, because it looks apparently so different to what they are used to, sometimes they will also think that what they have learned in the West is not applicable to the Chinese. And I have actually seen this in articles and presentations where people talk about these kinds of things. For example, you have this Western scholar who has been doing collaborative learning or project based learning or whatever, and they went to China for a couple of weeks and they come back to say, this kind of thing is not going to work in China.

And I think what they have missed is they want the concept or theory to apply as is, as it is in the Western settings. They don’t understand the principles behind those theories enough to adapt it to a different culture. If they understood it well enough, then they could actually see that there are applications that work if presented right.

When you are looking at teacher education in general, Chinese are basically reading from the same literature that is read in the US, Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, but sometimes people interpret it differently and often don’t see the bridge between theory and reality. I did a set of interviews with teachers in China and sometimes they said that when they go to a teacher college they always talk about these theories that they never

see applied in the classroom. So now we try to, as we talk about these Western concepts, we try to find both US examples and Chinese examples to use.

So creativity, for example, is something you hear about in Western world all the time. So how do you talk about it in a Chinese context and apply in Chinese classroom? So if you have someone from the West just come and talk to a group of Chinese teachers about creativity, you might do some very interesting group games, use newspaper to build a tower or something. And then some Chinese teachers look at that case and say, well that is great, but I can never do that in my classroom, because my classroom I have 55 students and only two inches to stand things, and there is no way I can do something like that in my classroom. And so for them, they perceive this so called "creativity" as inapplicable in their Chinese situation.

But as soon as they see a case of this good school in Beijing that also practices creativity, then they have a different concept. They might practice this creativity as not a small group building something, but as two people sitting right next to each other as discussing something, and show it to the class. Then after two people create something, they show to the people right in front and back of them and collaborate for a better something. Then the teacher will look at that case and say, "Oh, Ok, so you don't have to stand up, you don't have to have some empty space in the classroom. You can just do it while you are sitting right there, and you can be creative. And being creative will not have a negative impact on your test score, but rather it will help you understand the math or whatever subject concept you are trying to teach."

So then that perceived Western concept is being translated into their construct, and so their construct can take this new information and be expanded a little bit. So this

bridging of construct is very important. Because as soon as people see this as something unrelated or inapplicable to what they do, they will automatically switch off. So this whole bridging is very similar to the whole idea of constructivism – helping people find what they have in their mind already and add to it.

More important than these examples is that they show us that whenever you go to a different culture, you do need to adapt, and if you can look at what the other culture has to offer, you can be learning. Years ago I attended a conference in Washington DC. It was a conference sponsored by Taiwan about education, and they gave a lot of grants to Chinese to attend. One comment I remember was made by a senior guy from Taiwan. Someone was making a presentation about American education, and this Taiwanese guy raised his voice and said that there is nothing we can learn from the US, because they are so different. Of course, in the Chinese group, he was more respected, so people tried to respect his opinion, but at the same time, everybody knew he did not know what he was talking about. Of course there are things we can learn from US culture, from this educational system, but sometimes people can be so unable to see the principles behind the differences and just get distracted from the apparent differences so they don't see what we can learn from each other.

Level 3. When you are going to different cultures, and different countries, you have to understand the differences in the actual technology they are using. You may think a Pentium 5 is a Pentium 5, but it may be different. In some stuff we have created, we ran into the problem of many people using localized versions of Windows for Chinese. Before XP, they used a lot of these localized versions. So we were typing Chinese we

could see on our computers, but when the CD was done and we brought it to China, they could not see it.

We also now built the CDs in a way that is using an older technology so it is more backward compatible. For the US market we were already making CDs that will have better video quality and longer videos, but for the Chinese, we want to make it more available in older computers. For the US they require Windows XP and Pentium 5, or a G4 on a Mac, but the Chinese ones don't. I think the older version will even run on 486.

That's very powerful. It means that someone even in a village with an older computer, as long as he has a CD Rom drive will be able to see the same thing that they see in Beijing. Also we have used CD Rom rather than the Internet. For the US we have a more developed Internet version, online version, but in some of these other countries we have decided that CD Rom is more reliable than the Internet when it comes to multimedia materials. We are still developing the online version, but we are always thinking about backward compatibility. We always try to find out exactly what are the machines the end users will be using.

Last week I was helping to host a group of Vietnamese university presidents and learning resource directors. There we showed them some of these materials and they were very impressed, very interested, but I also told them that if you are trying to create materials for farmers, I probably wouldn't go to online or the latest technology.

I would try to make it into a VCD or even videotape. You can still do a lot with videotape. But the main thing is how do you still put the good instruction design into the medium, practice and application – how to do that with video, and then correspondence. So if we can keep those things in mind without getting too excited or carried away by the

technology then we will have a better chance of being able to use the things that we have developed.

Adaptations to ID Process When Working Cross-culturally

How does this change my process of designing an online instruction? It affects me in several ways. First, we need to stick with the principles of good instruction. This comprises of many things. One is good clear presentation, I still think presentation of vital information that people need to learn and understand is still important. But also participation and application of what they have learned in a real life situation and see if they can understand and apply what they have learned. Those are the types of principles that are often ignored in instruction.

And so, I think when I design things for a different culture, I will still look for ways to apply those principles, but I will also understand that for some of the cultures, like for the Asian cultures in general, they are more used to the presentation style. And if you just give them information, they are also often willing to work at it and try to remember it, and take that information. But still I try to take them beyond that process – and take them into the practice and application or implementation process.

The hardest part in doing this is working with the SME and also some of the local people, in getting across to them the idea of the importance of doing this higher level thinking, application and implementation and so on. Because for them, they have been teaching this subject material for years. And often times they have not involved the process of practice and application.

So getting the idea across for that matter to them is often most difficult, and getting them to see the need to improve the instruction. Because often times people think

that when you are using technology, you are just converting what you have been doing to technology. But for good instructional design, I think you are not just converting, but you are converting and enhancing and adapting – so that in my instruction or instructional product in general, it should not be less than the classroom instruction. If the classroom instruction is very good, we should capture the good parts of it and also see if we can do something that is different and might make it even better than the classroom instruction. And so that concept is often the most difficult. So you need to continue to explain and continue to ask questions.

If you are teaching thinking skills, for example, traditionally the people teaching are used to teaching about the thinking skills, and often they do share examples, but we are trying to convince them that in addition to sharing examples, you need to find ways to help the users apply the thinking skills, for example in skills with manipulating a video, and giving their own insights in how what they see applies to their own classroom. The most important thing is actually applying those principles in their own classroom, and then coming back to report and reflect on their application. So then they can say if they are really able to apply the principles, and in the process of applying, what are some of the problems they are running into.

This is because it is only through that process that we can really know if they understand those principles or not. Often student teachers or teachers in in-service training, when they don't really understand a principle, they will try to apply it and then come back and say, "Oh it doesn't work. It doesn't work in my classroom, because as soon as I let them have discussions they all act out. And so I lose control and I can not teach. So this one doesn't work." What they don't understand is that to have collaborative

learning, for example, you also need to generate rapport and you need to have basic classroom management, and things like that. So they may not understand that, so getting the idea across, always reminding them of principles of good instruction.

How do I find the connections to where people are at? It always comes back to the principles. When some people go to another culture and try to teach, they are so used to teaching the activities, sometimes they forget the principles. But if they understand the principle behind and go back to the main principles, and then ask themselves what are the most important elements in that principles – then you can go to the local culture and try to find examples that will support these principles. And help then find some activities that can use this principles, then people will start understand, "Oh, Ok maybe we can consider these principles."

And it goes both ways too. Well, put it this way. I think that a Chinese instructional design converting for a Western market/audience would certainly struggle with some of the issues that we just talked about. For example, a typical Chinese online class may have more content, greater expectation of what the students should do with fewer explanations. Chinese often times are not as good at explaining things in good detail. They just give the very simple instruction and expect you to do a great deal of work in discovering what needs to be done and what you need to learn. And in the US even compared with the Europeans, in general instructions are given in much greater details. You find that in instructional products, even signs in the streets, or government things. So converting for the West something Chinese had created for the Asian market, you might need to add more instructions, or enhanced descriptions to the core content.

Some of the things that the Chinese are very good at is developing things that are very high-tech, very program oriented. For example, when I was visiting with Tsinghua University, the most prestigious technical university in China, they have developed a course management system that is very robust, and more functions than WebCT or Blackboard, with very sophisticated programming, etc. But I look at that system, and even if you go to Chinese websites, they have a lot of info on one website. It is very typical to have lots of links to everywhere. In general, not as aesthetically appealing, but that is the type of rigor that they are used to, where the user needs to do more work in finding out exactly what they need to do. So this system has some of that, you need to work to find out exactly what you need, and also the user needs to be quite familiar, do quite a bit of work to become familiar with the system. And once they are familiar with the system, yes they can do a lot of things, but in the process of doing those types of things, they need to know a lot of techniques in getting around – because the system is not as user friendly.

And that is very typical of the Chinese, because they are saying this is a technology product, you know, so technology is of course more complicated. And I can imagine these computer science guys working behind the box to get all these things done, but for the customer service, the usability is not quite where it needs to be yet. So if they could partner with someone maybe from the US or someone who is more familiar with the customer support side, and may be able to help them improve the system, so it could be used by a more general audience, instead of as it is now, just sitting within their own college, their own organization, not being widely used.

Ultimately in instructional design process, I think I now know the type of questions that I need to ask. I know some of the basic thinking that goes through the minds of people I am working with. So I am able to ask the follow up questions that will help them clarify their own thinking to know what it is they want.

1. What is the most important things that you want students to learn in this product?
2. How will you know when they have learned it?
3. What are examples of very good students?
4. How do we present and formulate this instruction in a way that will help us achieve those learning outcomes?
5. And what are some of the experiences they have?
6. After that, some of the questions change as we talk, more questions come up.
7. Then we propose some ideas and ask, if we do it this way, will it help the students be able to understand and apply?

Very often the content experts are always thinking about presentation, and so you have to help them think beyond that. And presentation is still important; you don't want to put people to sleep, but besides presentation how do you apply?

End Product/Experience Different When Culturally Appropriate

On one of my projects, for example, we created a lot titles in US, and we have now created some titles in Chinese. If you compare the two you will see, oh, Ok, the basic technology is the same. We did used technology in the Chinese classroom that was developed in the US. And you still see the different cases and in each one of the cases you see the studies and the different perspectives and then you look at the different

scenarios that have been taped. And so that interface itself is similar, basically the same. But what is different is the content itself. In the American titles, we have the US classrooms, you look at it and everything is in English. When people talk about the theories, then they have American classroom videos that they can see, and the American users can connect to that because those classrooms look very similar to theirs.

In the Chinese cases we used some theories that developed in China, although for two cases we actually used principles that had been developed in the US, but we did look for local cases and so we video taped the local cases and put them into the interface, so that when the Chinese users look at those they can say, "Ok, I can relate to this, because it is a classroom just like mine." It is quite amazing.

Going back to the thinking skills one, we have one study that is in math classroom, the teacher that is helping students try to develop speedy or fast thinking skills, so she devised this game where students can come up and then other students can give the two participating students tips and cheering how to define all the shapes that are correct. And so in that whole activity, you find that the whole class is participating, it is noisy, the students are cheering and almost dancing. And as soon as the two students come back to their seats, the teacher was able to practice what she called the three claps. When she clapped three times, the whole class was quiet immediately; everyone put their hands behind their back and sits up straight, so the teacher was then able to make some kind of explanation on what has happened. And that combination of discipline and also creativity and thinking skills training is a good transfer of theories into practice. So that is a good transfer.

I have seen good practice like this in the US too. I remember going to a class in LA where the teacher practiced something he called the High 5, where the students can be doing lots of things, very noisy. Then the teacher raised his hand, what he called the "High 5" until students see it, and when the students see it, they stop what they are doing and put their hand up, until all the students look around and raise their hand and are quiet with their hands up. And so it is very similar to what I have seen in China, because the principle is really the same, just a different manifestation of the same principle.

I think that I will know if the end product, of course, will be good or not by always looking at the effectiveness – always going back to the end users and the stake holders and doing testing. If people accept and understand this material then you know it is a good product.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Results

Introduction

Prior to an in-depth synthesis of the various case studies, I would like to address a few issues. The nature of this data collection method was chosen with the goal of capturing a portion of the lived experience of instructional designers as they are dealing with challenges regarding the creation of online instruction cross-culturally. There are an unlimited amount of approaches that could be taken in analyzing this complicated data. In order to assist the reader, I feel it important to clarify the perspective that will be taken here on a few matters regarding scope and focus.

In collecting the rich detail of the lived experiences of these participants, many issues which one could claim are not purely "cultural" did arise. For this reason, it is important to specify that although some of the issues that these designers were concerned with might not directly correspond to "culture" in the strictest sense, they are, nonetheless, issues that surface as instructional designers are working cross-culturally with educational technology. As such, they are valued and integrated into the following discussion. For example, the limits of technological infrastructure, economic stability or English language skill level could arguably be less of a purely cultural matter than issues like hierarchical expectations regarding the teacher student relationship or perceptions about the goals of formal education. They are still, however, issues that these instructional designers have noticed occur more frequently as they have worked cross-culturally, and which they could make unfounded assumptions about.

Although in academia we tend to speak of cultural differences in terms of dichotomies, the reality is that it is often more helpful to consider some of the issues as a

matter of degree. For example, although international students like Gertrude might be concerned with course load and consider it to be a cultural issue, North American students entering graduate school might have similar complaints and concerns about course load and not cast it as a "Western culture" issue but as an "entering graduate school" issue. Truly, graduate studies could be considered a sub-culture of its own. For a learner like Gertrude, however, the load of reading and assignments might come as a greater shock because she comes from a culture in which reading is not as prevalent and because a particular course is offered only in English. This is especially true if the type of thinking she is expected to do as she reads is different than what she is used to (e.g. questioning the material vs. treating it as expert knowledge to be memorized and repeated on some future exam), which again could be seen as a matter of degree. Willingness to actively participate in creating and/or challenging the coursework, ability to think abstractly, ability to use profitably certain metacognitive skills, preferences for types of assessments, and countless other issues could also be seen as a matter of degree, of importance to both cross-cultural and traditional instructional design.

There do seem to be, however, definitive differences in cultural world views: what we notice (perception), how we feel about it (values), what we recognize as legitimate ways of knowing things and making decisions (knowledge and reality), and what we think about ourselves, human nature, gender, deity, etc (identity and purpose). For example, the fact that someone from Taiwan might notice and label the mango fruit as a "hot food" and thus be predisposed to think of it in a certain way is not a matter of degree, but a distinct difference in perception, values, knowledge and reality to how a typical person from the Finland would think of a mango fruit. Although this is a simple

example, the point is that differences like these are more definitive than they are a matter of degree. An understanding of both differences that are a matter of degree and differences that are more definitive are valuable in helping us to "explore the role culture plays in forming fundamental beliefs and values – not only with regard to communication and technology, but still more fundamentally towards such basic values as those that cluster about our preferences for democratic polity, individual autonomy, etc" (Ess & Sudweeks, 2001, p. 15-16). Our assumptions and values do seem to influence our expectations and reactions to educational technology.

One unexpected benefit of stretching our minds to consider cross-cultural differences is that they are often striking and obvious, and then can help us recognize and respond more to the natural variations of local learners within our own communities and countries. In other words, cross-cultural differences can make more prominent and visible differences that already exist within our own communities and ideally help us adapt instruction to all learners in more helpful ways. Consider this statement by Shawn (quotes will be attributed to the pseudo-name given to each participant):

> There is so much difference between individuals that we don't see all the time – the nice thing about cultures that are so different from us is that [these differences have] a better chance of smacking us on the face, in a way that we can really see that we are different in the way the we view the world and approach things. You can see it and say, "Yes this is something that we need to be concerned about. (Shawn)

As Shawn stated, the differences between the ways we approach the world can become more obvious in cross-cultural situations. The hope is that with this awareness, instructional designers will steer away from the tendency to develop instruction ad-hoc, skipping over user analysis in merely copying elements of past designs, and instead will

be more open to the learner and new approaches that might meet their needs in a more helpful way.

Before speaking any more about cultural differences, I should state my own stance towards the juxtaposition of cultural imperialism and cultural purism (Gayol & Schied, 1997). By this I refer to the different views regarding globalization and the evolution of cultures around the world; some people are striving to preserve "threatened" cultures in their current state, and others are trying to move all people towards a more global culture. As a balance between these two views, "Hongladarom argues that the Internet facilitates two different kinds of communication: (1) communication that helps reinforce local cultural identity and community…and (2) communication that creates an 'umbrella cosmopolitan culture' required for communication between people from different cultures" (Ess & Sudweeks, 2001, p. 15-16). I do think it is important to be aware of the concerns surrounding globalization issues, and I have seen how much harm has been done by certain cross-cultural development imperatives, regardless of whether they were well-intentioned or not. I am not, however, somehow saying that simply because a person comes from a particular cultural background that it is necessarily harmful to introduce him or her to new ways of interacting with instruction, new ways of thinking, and new ways of viewing himself or herself and the world.

Included in this research is a discussion regarding the cultural differences that these participants have identified among learners, in which discussion I am simply exploring the benefits of being aware of these differences and questioning the assumptions that instructional designers typically might make when engaging in the design of cross-cultural online instruction. If the goal is to help people learn something,

particularly in cross-cultural online instruction, then this research presents some valuable things of which to be aware. So, for example, simply because someone comes from a culture where they are predisposed to expect 100% lecture format in their educational experience does not automatically mean that introducing them to instruction that includes explicit application activities is a bad thing. In US educational institutions, just because lecture is often the predominant way, and in some cases the only way, that many high school students are exposed to learning concepts, does not mean that it is the best way. It does mean, however, that if learners are only expecting lectures then instructional designers should be aware of such expectations and be prepared to defensibly reason why a new approach is valuable, and know how they are going to scaffold the new instructional style for the learners. I believe it is possible, after the support and initial learning curve, that learners themselves might even prefer the new approach, as Gertrude came to prefer the Western writing style. One other reason why I do not think of myself as a cultural imperialist is that I am also very open to the fact that many traditionally non-Western approaches could be better suited for learning in certain contexts than the ones which are predominately found in the West.

Questions regarding "what is best?" then become a matter of careful concern, research, and consideration. As will be discussed further in this paper, the general consensus among the people interviewed is that certain universal principles of good instruction seem to exist, but must always be viewed in consideration of the context and the existing mental frameworks of the learner. These participants indicated that some principles seem to be universal, although application is highly contextualized. Much

more research should be done on this issue, making sure not to just study learners from one culture alone and then make generalized statements about all people.

Having addressed these issues, this discussion of results will be structured in the following way: I will discuss these data in light of the original four questions of this research. Although more evidence and quotes could be cited for each of the points discussed, in the interest of time and space only a representative sample of the direct quotes will be used.

Are instructional designers who are working online aware of the differences between themselves and the cultural group for whom they are designing instruction?

All those who participated in this study are aware of differences between themselves and the cultural groups for whom they are designing instruction, while at the same time realizing there is a lot they still want to know. Admittedly, this research intended to find instructional designers who were likely to be aware of cultural differences. In fact, a majority of the participants in this study were aware of at least some interesting cultural differences long before they began working with instructional design. How they became aware of cultural differences will be discussed in answer to the next question, but it is important to note that most of them also admitted that there was still a lot they are unaware of. This section will emphasize that becoming aware that *there are* significant differences between cultures does not mean that you are aware of what most of the significant differences are and of the most important ways in which they influence learning. However, some of the many cultural differences these participants did notice in learner characteristics and expectations will be outlined and discussed, separated into the following four categories: (a) technological infrastructure and familiarity, (b)

general cultural and social expectations, (c) teaching and learning expectations, and (d) differences in the use of language and symbols.

Yes – A Limited Awareness

All of these instructional designers recognized that they were somewhere in-between recognizing that there are differences between cultures and trying to figure out what they are and what impact they have on learning. Jill's comment is representative of an overall feeling by most of those interviewed (italics added for emphasis):

> *Instructional designers think they are assumption free, but many of the assumptions are implicit*… I'm sure that every week or month of experience that you have in this kind of international context opens your eyes to something else, but I don't think it necessarily makes you know more about the different contexts. *I think it rather makes you aware of how much you don't know*. (Jill)

Jill and others felt they were still influenced by their own cultural biases and emphasized how they still had a lot to learn. The following statements illustrate more of the feelings of their own limited awareness of cultural differences. First, Marci explains her view that we all wear ethnocentric lenses and that instructional designers make way too many assumptions:

> *We grow up with our ethnocentric lenses,* and we think that something is the way it should be because that's all we've ever known. It is easy to think that everyone thinks and feels the same as you, and so don't realize that you can do many of the same things in a different way and it's perfectly acceptable, it's just not the way you've always done it. And you think, well I guess that is perfectly acceptable, there's nothing sinful about it, and you just learn to adjust…I could go on for hours, you know of all the things you notice and you have to decide if it is something that you should adjust to, or if there is a better way, but many times people don't even know they are an issue because of the assumptions they make. The *assumptions people make are the biggest problems, and for instructional designers, they make way too many assumptions* – about almost every aspect. They make a lot of assumptions. (Marci)

If Marci is correct, instructional designers (as most people do) tend to assume that others either are already like themselves (in how they think and what they value) or that they

should be (Hewitt, 1984; Ferraro, 2001). Additionally, ethnocentric feelings are frequently unconscious so they often remain implicit and unquestioned. This can limit cultural awareness and responsiveness.

Rose is a good example of someone that is trying to be more aware of and critical of her cultural assumptions. However, even after all her efforts to really understand Egyptian culture (so she would not impose ineffective instruction), she still felt like she was guessing on a lot of things:

> I was very fearful in the beginning that my assumptions about what was 'right' would cause the kinds of learning strategies I was introducing to fail…For this project in Egypt, you know I was bringing a Western methodology and set of assumptions to a Middle-eastern environment. And so what I found myself doing was surrounding myself with the Egyptians and visiting many local environments and trying to find where the two polar opposites met. What were bridges that would help me to just introduce some of these ideas, so it wouldn't be a complete rejection or too much of a learning curve too steep that nobody would meet? …I think it was still a guess, *even after a year of assessment, I was still guessing until we got into it, to see if it would be embraced – and I think the big hindrance is unfamiliarity*. (Rose)

Unfamiliarity with the context and values that others live with is a big hindrance. Yet Rose still struggled to find connections, or what she called "bridges" (which will be discussed in more depth latter), by which she could really understand and connect in a greater way with learners from another culture.

Shawn also talks about how although he feels it is probably impossible to be bias-free, instructional designers can do more to be aware of cultural differences and if students are "getting it" or not:

> *I am very aware that there are cultural differences. Do I understand what they all are? No.* I am more attuned to picking them up when I see them. Especially for cultures I am not familiar with, I am aware that there are differences although I do not know what they are. I can almost see them coming, I can see that I've presented something that is very puzzling to students (hopefully not usually offensive) and you are maybe not sure quite what it is, but you can sense that there is something not quite right here. So in that way I think I am much more

> attuned. *I don't think you will ever get to the stage where you will be able to make your instruction completely culturally bias free.* You are situated in something and you simply cannot know the experiences and lives that people are bringing to it. You can do your best, but *I think we are a long way from doing our best, simply because we don't think about it.* (Shawn)

Shawn's last statement here rings true of the experience of most of these participants. They felt that too often cultural issues are still not reflected on or discussed in enough detail by the instructional design community as a whole. All three of these comments indicate that even though each participant did exhibit a significant understanding of many aspects of cultural differences, they felt like there was so much more that they would like to know; there is still a significant amount of which they are still either unsure of or simply unaware. Although feeling that they have much yet to learn, these participants did address quite a few learner characteristics that are influenced by culture, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

Cultural Differences in Learner Characteristics and Expectations

Although more existing differences between people of different cultures might be identified, the purpose of this section is to outline the differences that these instructional designers noticed, and specifically those that might influence online teaching and learning. For the purposes of this study, I have divided these differences into four categories. Before I begin into the first category, however, I feel a need to begin this section with a cautionary note against over-generalizations and a discussion about the large variation there is between groups and individuals within a national culture.

Individual and Group Variation within a National Culture. Gertrude indicated her dissatisfaction with what she considers over-generalizations made regarding national cultures, and this research uncovered that instructional designers face this challenge in a very real way when making design decisions. Even though people can be from the same

country and general culture, they can still be very different. Even if part of the same culture and country, identified in these data were differences between children versus adults; lay people versus monastics; and academics versus practitioners. This last one is of particular emphasis, because it is common for the local Subject-Matter Expert (SME) to be from the culture of academia, which does not necessarily mean they have a sufficient understanding or knowledge of how to shape content in a helpful way for practioners. Jill explains this in regard to her experience:

> *What you nearly always find is that the learners' needs are not the same as the [SME] thought or assumed they would be. What very often happens is that the materials are given to the experts to write, but the experts are experts in the subject area, they may not be experts in reaching the particular students that this program enrolls...*One common example is that we get asked to develop a distance education program for school teachers because many school teachers in developing countries are under qualified or under trained, and the country can't afford to take them all out of school to go to college (that's expensive on its own, but also people in the school would lose their education without any teacher there). So very often they are designed to have an in-service program using distance means. And naturally they ask the faculty of the teacher development department of a college to put the materials together. And so *the people who write the program materials will be experts in whatever it is, whether it is curriculum development or cursory practice or music or whatever it is.* But they will probably be sitting in the capitol city when their typical students will not be practicing primary school teachers, they will be people coming out of secondary schools and preparing to be teachers. *And the teachers who they are trying to write this program for are actually quite different – they are older, they have family responsibilities, they are already experienced in the classroom, they just haven't had that college education. And so they have to be treated very differently,* but it is difficult for the writers to get their thoughts around the context in which the teachers are actually working and the reality of their problems in the classroom. So that is something that you very often find in the pretest, the teachers using the materials are coming at them from a very different point of view than the writers. *The writers inevitably are making a lot of assumptions because of their lack of experience.* The expectation is that the materials to be written by people who are at the heads of universities, not by the people in the context themselves. *That is a cultural problem, the differences between the academic writers and the practitioners. In my experience, that is something that happens in all sorts of contexts; that the academics and their learners in different programs are quite often in very different environments and it is quite hard for them to make the links*. (Jill)

Educating the SME and other stakeholders is a topic that will be discussed more later, but the point Jill makes here is that there is a great variation between people in the same culture, depending partially on what level of education they have received and in what context they are working. Simply because two people are from Sri Lanka does not mean that they are going to be able to understand and connect with each other as much as you might hope, especially if one is working in the capital city as a university professor and the other is an under-trained rural school teacher. The same is true if one is monastic and the other is lay, or any other of a number of situations.

Understanding how a variety of sub-cultures can exist in a single area is brought home even more as Shawn describes working in his non-native environment of the US:

> We have students at [our university] who come from very affluent white areas, very affluent black areas, and very poor white and black areas. You can't say, all black students are this, because we have some exceptionally wealthy black students and exceptionally poor black students, and of course their experiences are completely different, even from within the same city. *Even if I'm saying, let's not look at diverse populations, let's just look at two black students from the same city, they can have completely different educational experiences, completely different expectations of what they are going to get.* Also, people who might not officially be an international student, because they may have come to the US for the last two years of high school making them American and graduated from an American high school, but they still come with 16 years of whatever their other cultural assumptions are, their other cultures educational process, and they are living at home with a family that is totally in the other culture, so although on paper these people are 'American' students, they are not the same. They are very different from students who grew up here all the time. (Shawn)

Shawn's point is very valid. It is too easy to label someone something and then think that we understand who they are, when in reality the situation is much more complex.

Carrie mentioned one difficulty we often have when working in IDT with learners and especially when they come from different cultures. She touches on the tendency we have to make overly simplistic stereotypes:

> One of the issues that you need to look at in designing for other cultures is to *be very careful that you aren't asking questions that indicate you are taking a deficit view*. That is a framework you have to be very careful of – this patronizing, or this tokenistic attitude. (Carrie)

This deficit view, of automatically looking down on others simply because they are different, can be quite harmful (Subramony, 2004, Zhang, 2001) and should be avoided.

To complicate things further, not only are there so many different sub-cultures, but there is also a lot of cross-over between cultures as cultures are constantly transitioning, and even the same individual will often be in a state of flux. In Case C, Derek provided good examples of how a country and an individual can be in a state of flux. He distinguished how there are major differences within the country of China, between people who grow up in Beijing versus Hong Kong versus Tibet. Derek also indicated the multiculturalism he felt inside of himself. Growing up in China but being educated in the US and working a lot in the West, he noticed the flexibility and contextuality of his thinking and expectations. Gertrude provided another good example of this. She shared her desire to break her own cultural norms and partially described her enculturation process into a new Western online culture, and at the same time, she exhibited in her comments how much of her thinking is still rooted deeply in her cultural upbringing.

With the realization that cultural differences can not be reduced to a mater of characteristics on a national level, it is still important to recognize that there are cultural differences that instructional designers should pay attention to, because they do vary based upon who the targeted learners are. Rose explained the importance of it this way:

> First, a lot of what we talk about in a Western system just won't work because others just don't have it. A lot of things are simply impossible (e.g. like if they don't have email), that takes a whole section out. So then you are left with what is possible.

> Then with what is possible, what is allowed? You need to see if the government will disallow anything.
> And then there is what people will accept; how far do you want to (or can you) push the envelope? Once you get past constraints, your choices of methodology get narrower, and you ask what would people accept or even be willing to try and do?
> And so you come in with your bowl of possibilities and you get a narrower and narrower platform to work in....because of what people will accept, what the people in power will allow you to do, and what is physically possible. (Rose)

Rose clearly makes the case that it is essential for instructional designers to be aware of differences in learners and their contexts if they are going to connect at all with those in other cultures. I will proceed to highlight some of the most commonly identified areas of concern here. Although some generalizing and overlap is unavoidable, the categories of (a) technological infrastructure and familiarity, (b) general culture and social expectations, (c) teaching and learning expectations, and (d) language and symbols will each be discussed in turn.

Technological Infrastructure and Familiarity. It often catches instructional designers off-guard to find out how limited the resources and dependability of educational technology can be, even "technologies" such as books, paper, and pencils being in short supply in some areas of the world. On the other hand, it also surprises many people from the West to find out that some of the developing countries in Asia actually have a more sophisticated and wide-spread technological infrastructure, Korea in particular being much more developed than even the US. Infrastructure access and dependability has been addressed in literature regarding the implementation of distance learning in foreign countries (Chen & Mashhadi, 1998; Inding & Skouge, 2005; Ho & Burniske, 2005). Although the technologically advanced countries have become more and more reliant on high speed ubiquitous technologies, there remains in a large part of

the developing world very undependable or non-existent electricity resources. The gap between the technological haves and have-nots has been referred to as the "technology divide" (Inding & Skouge, 2005). All of this highlights the need for (a) fewer assumptions to be made about the access and dependability (technological infrastructure), as well as (b) the familiarity of the learner to the medium that is used in instruction.

The first issue deals with technological infrastructure. Some of the differences in technology were addressed by Derek in Chapter 4, when he stated the importance of finding out exactly what machines the end user is going to be accessing the material with. It is possible that things can work on the developer's system and not on the system of the learner for whom it is intended. When making design decisions, it is vital to know if systems are different (e.g. available hardware and software, processing capacity, black and white versus color monitors, screen size, resolution, and even type of keyboard) and to acknowledge and adapt for any limitations that could impact the learner's ability to access and interact with the material and teacher. For example, if learners can only access the Internet from an Internet café or on dial-up and paying by the minute, their download times might be extreme and power shortages frequent. Jill aptly said, "The act of being online is so different based upon where you are. It can be slow and painful." Shawn stated all these concerns this way:

> Here are things that are cultural in the sense that wherever you are in the world you are going to have to consider it, but they are not cultural in the sense that dealing with certain machines really isn't cultural. Although some of that technology may be influenced by culture, it is more of a technological barrier. But it is something that we are very often way beyond thinking about. (Shawn)

If instructional designers are sincere about reaching learners, they should obviously not overlook these concerns. As is often the case, many assumptions about technology can prove wrong. Particular concern needs to be taken by instructional designers to not get

carried away by the latest technologies and push their implementation regardless of the context in which they will be used (Mudhi, 2005). Troy provides this interesting insight about not neglecting the range of possibilities:

> With podcasting, and there are more MP3 players in Asia than in America even, the important thing to recognize is that radio is still a hugely important medium. So much that is human is conveyed in the voice, and so much, I think, that is a distraction is conveyed in the video. So I think radio, whether it is traditional radio, Internet radio, or pure file download podcast, I'm in it, I'm doing it. (Troy)

Troy recognized the value in radio, a medium that we sometimes neglect to even consider. The overall suggestion from these designers is that media selection decisions should be informed by the access, cost, and dependability of the medium for the intended learners.

The second issue deals with the learners' familiarity in working with the medium of instruction. Consider the following two descriptions of some of the difficulties encountered with those who might not have a familiarity with or upbringing using certain technologies:

> Even manipulative things, I have actually had problems, more noticeable with [certain] students, some older, that do not have the dexterity to be manipulating a mouse. The thing is that they did not have manipulative type of things when they were kids. Also *many in cultures around the world haven't have a chance to develop those manipulative skills, and it is very hard for them to deal with a mouse, period, let alone with left clicking, right clicking, center clicking, etc.* (Shawn)

> Basically, given that the indigenous cultures here [in Australia] do not have any written tradition for committing large amounts of detail to some kind of abstract data-base; kinesthetic, visual and auditory learning experiences are critical to the community's survival: hence, interfacing with a CRT via a keyboard or cursor must be approached within those learning contexts. *The concept of acquiring abstract knowledge via what is in itself a virtual process must surely represent a higher-order cognitive skill that is not inherently encouraged or coached within a hunting and gathering modus operandi; reflective thought on abstract concepts would be a luxury that few in such a society could indulge in, if at all*. Hence the transmission of knowledge via CBT is difficult, whether systematically instructionally designed or not. (Ian)

These two quotes highlighted how even seemingly basic things like manipulative skills in working a mouse, or the ability and desire to engage in abstract reflection though any technology medium can not be taken for granted. When living in a technologically advanced culture, our assumptions may be too great.

And lest one thinks that US learners are immune to difficulties with unfamiliarity of even the simplest technologies, read Shawn's reaction, coming from the UK, to some of the US learners he was working with:

> We look at young people coming out of high school and we think they have had all these experiences, well, don't bank on it. Don't bank on even your American students coming out of high school with having done much more than type in Word. They may never have turned a computer on or off. I have students who are American born and raised that literally have never turned a computer on before…even the Americans aren't as savvy as you expect them to be. (Shawn)

Again we find these differences to be a matter of degree, and not something that can be overlooked or ignored in the instructional design process, local or foreign.

One additional complication for instructional designers comes when balancing what currently exists with considerations of what will soon be available. This is especially true if funding requests, planning, and development precede implementation by a few years of when learners will actually start the new programs. Joey describes this balance:

> We know in the ideal world people have potential of using new web-based Internet technology on the one hand, and on the other hand recognize that still for many of the students throughout the world [using advanced technology] becomes a barrier and an exclusion instead of an inclusion…We are skeptical but not Luddites. *We accept technology cautiously*. We also try to have alternative means of completing courses. We survey the trends of our target students (developing countries are often not well resourced). If we go to what the Western world takes for granted, are we alienating these other people? Also, to a certain extent, we have to do what people expect – with modern distance education using innovative approaches. Our ultimate goal is to have good quality instruction using the most available media. *We are trying to keep up, but not necessarily be so near the cutting edge.* In a way we are more middle ground, currently having students

> correspond with communication technology, but not needing to rely on it for downloads, etc. (Joey)

A combination of expectations, access, and cost issues seem to influence instructional designers' media selection choices. With those issues in mind, Joey wanted to be progressive in his use of media, but not to the exclusion of learners. Barbara seemed to be at a similar point as Joey, recognizing that putting complete reliance on the Internet for any educational course or program was not feasible at the moment in Sri Lanka, however still encouraging people to give students more and more access to the Internet. They both are working to keep learners up to speed with the rapidly changing technological world in which we are part, without unnecessary exclusion because of media selections.

The sum of this section is that the participants of this research feel the context of existing technological infrastructures as well as the learners' familiarity with that technology needs to be taken more seriously. Essentially, more audience analysis needs to take place, making sure to "ask hard questions about assumptions you are making regarding people's ability to get online, access to learning environment, and communicate electronically easily" (Jill). This will increase the chances that technology itself is not another barrier to the objectives of the instruction.

General Culture and Social Expectations. As Derek stated, there are cultural differences that become apparent in any kind of a cross-cultural interchange or collaboration (general culture and social expectations) and then there are ones that are particular to educational endeavors (teaching and learning expectations; which will be discussed in the next section). Even though the first category might not be the exclusive concern of instructional designers, it is inclusive. If nothing else, instructional designers need to be aware of these general cultural and social expectations in order "to make the

materials very relevant to the learners, to make it possible for them to use their life experience and their work experience and their everyday life environment" (Jill). There are major differences that exist in things as varied as the value systems that affect what people think is even worth learning (e.g. Barbara's recognition of how integral spirituality was in teaching anything to the native people of Canada) to differences in things like humor (both what is funny and when humor should be used). These things do make a difference in how to structure instruction. Although not exhaustive of the list of things that could be mentioned here, this section deals specifically with the cultural and social expectations regarding (a) the role of women, (b) rules and relationships, (c) legality concerns, (d) concepts of time, (e) the effect of the familiarity and enculturation of the learners with the culture of the instructional designer, and (f) the effect of the socio-economic status and political instabilities of the learners' country.

First, one example of a major cultural difference is how women are viewed. The status and roles of women in society should impact the deliberation process over things like how images of women are depicted, when to use women's voices, and for what topics and purposes. Although there might be disagreements regarding these issues, they should at least be discussed. For example, if an instructional designer from the US functioned under the assumption that all people view the role and status of women the same as they do, it would potentially both alienate learners and reveal their own ethnocentrism. Jill describes one situation in which the role of women was an issue:

> I think that there is not any substitute to trying to get to know the learners. And sometimes it is paradoxically easier to do for someone from the outside. For example, I had worked in the past for a program in Pakistan that was for women, in an institution that was run mainly by high-status men. And in some ways it was easier for me as an outsider to get round some of the barriers and work between the people at the university and the women, because as an outsider you are able to

> ask questions and insist on doing things that would have been inappropriate for the people who were working there all the time. And I think that we were able to make an impact... (Jill)

Jill recognized immediately that there was a different expectation and role of women in Pakistan that she needed to be aware of as she proceeded. Regardless of what the aims of instruction are, if it is targeted for women, or discusses women, or even shows images of women, it would be very helpful to check the assumptions behind how the depiction choices will be perceived, in order to see whether it will be helpful in reaching the ultimate goals or not.

A second example of a general cultural difference is in rules and relationships. For example, Gertrude was surprised that even when she developed a relationship with people in the West, they were still less likely to break the rules in her behalf. The international business consulting guru, Fons Trompenaars (2005), gave a lecture to the Pacific Asian Management Institute in which he discussed "Leveraging Cross-Cultural Competence for Business Performance." In his presentation, he described this dilemma between having the ideal of valuing a particularistic relationship on one hand and having the ideal of valuing established rules on the other. He developed a scale that rated countries on where people generally fall on this continuum. Korea was rated furthest on the relationship side, along with many of the South American countries, and the US was rated towards the highest on the rules side. When he presented his findings at different seminars, he found an interesting situation. One American raised his hand to say, "That proves it, we knew Koreans are crooks, they are always breaking the rules." At a different seminar he presented this and a Korean made the comment, "Ha! We knew those Americans are rotten, they won't even help a friend" (paraphrased, August 5, 2006, Honolulu, Hawaii). Expectations regarding the relative value of rules in light of

particularistic relationships is an interesting challenge (see also Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Some of the instructional designers who participated in the present research also noticed this challenge. In Marci's description of working in Mexico, she mentioned that a difference in the concept of honesty was one of the most difficult issues for her to deal with. Shawn also described how certain rules we automatically recognize in the West might not be universally held:

> Even things like citations, we are trained to do that [in the West], but look at students from other cultures, particularly from China, which do *not have that same idea of intellectual property, or individual intellectual property*. For them, that assumption can be completely new and different. So *not only do you have to tell them how to use APA style, you have to introduce them to the concept of citing sources and ascribing to particular people that it is their work that you are using*. (Shawn)

Even when people are talking about the same words, like integrity or trust, and it could mean completely different things to different people.

With issues like these, I think it is important to consider and discuss Barbara's dilemma:

> I find myself trying to sort out in my mind the differences in what we might want to call culture from the influence of what I might put down to just the need for power or simple greed. We encounter all these influences among the people we work with, not just here, but back in the context in Canada as well. And trying to sift out what might be cultural influences from all these other just very human characteristics is neither easy nor straightforward. (Barbara)

In other words, it is a very difficult thing to separate greed and selfishness from other acceptable cultural variables that are based on genuine ideals not associated with selfishness. Although I agree they should not be confused, a full examination of determining the differences between a genuine cultural ideal vs. a selfish motivation is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, differences in expectations regarding

rules and relationships is a topic that deserves consideration in cross-cultural instructional design decisions as well as future research and scholarly discourse.

Third, associated with the concern over the flexibility of rules is what existing governments will allow, perhaps in formal laws or informal policy. Certain laws and policies might restrict certain design decisions regarding educational technology. Earlier I mentioned Rose's concern with what the authorities would allow in Egypt. Mike also describes similar concerns while developing online-assisted distance education for people in Tonga:

> As background, Tonga is the world's oldest surviving monarchy, with its origins going back some 1000 years. Unlike England and other world monarchies today, *Tonga is not a constitutional monarchy; the Tongan king essentially owns all of the land and, in many respects, is able to operate independent of any forum.* Though there is a parliament which usually operates without interference, the king has the power to appoint or release its members, propose, reject, or change legislation, etc., each of which occasionally occurs. In addition, Tonga is proud to never have been colonized by another country, though it was, for a time, a protectorate of Great Britain. Thus, it has been able to keep many of its ancient traditions unchanged from before the time of Western contact.
> Some of the most fundamental of the social protocols in Tonga are those relating to courtesies involved with greetings, especially those dealing with people of high rank. In terms of the classroom, these directly apply to the teacher. In the presence of the teacher, or anyone of high rank, the typical Tongan classroom will stand at attention and bow to show their respect. During class, they are not to interrupt the teacher, speak only when spoken to, etc. *In the presence of the royal family, no Tongan's head is allowed to be above that of the royalty's. If a violation of the social protocol occurs it is customary that anyone, though usually the one offended, is allowed to discipline the offender, up to and including the administration of corporal punishment.* In the broader society, even if non-relatives see an affront in the street, the marketplace, a store, home, or other location, they are able to discipline the offender without criticism as the societal norms are understood by and enforceable by all Tongans.
> Some of the issues these customs might raise were brought to our attention when we demonstrated the distance learning technology to the Tongan Crown Prince Tupouto'a during his visit to the campus. For example, if the Crown Prince was only on a television set, live and interacting with a distance classroom, it was suggested by those familiar with Tongan custom that the monitor be mounted so that his visage would be above the students' in height. Also, as custom dictated that commoners were not to directly speak with royalty, should the students in the

> class (all of whom were commoners) be allowed to address him? For our demonstration purposes, in order to minimize disruption of Tongan cultural protocols as much as possible, we had the Crown Prince simply observe the local facilitator and the distance instructor interact with the class and listen to the Crown Prince's commentary on what he observed. …gaining the support of people with high ranking or influence may stop many problems before they begin, especially in a high context culture. (Mike)

In his case, Mike recognized that respecting the existing government and gaining the support of the people with high rank and influence was important if he wanted the Internet-assisted distance instruction to be supported and implemented in any kind of a meaningful way. This case is representative of the need to understand how the formal laws and informal policies by those in power might impact the implementation of online instruction.

Fourth, beyond these issues is time. Specifically of concern is the consideration of time in terms of the learners themselves, both how much learners have and how our culturally influenced conception of time might bias us (a different aspect of time will be mentioned later in a discussion regarding cross-cultural work with other stakeholders). Jill addresses this first issue:

> *Know how much time learners have available to study…don't make too many assumptions when you don't actually know their lives.* Their time might be consumed cultivating their crops, as overwhelmed house-wives, in extensive church responsibilities, and so on. And also question whether they have control over their own time, if they have any privacy, and so on. (Jill)

Jill felt that it was too easy to make unfounded assumptions about how much time is available to learners and how much control learners have over their time. The importance of this issue obviously varies some depending on how learners are selected (if they are self-selected or captive, etc) and what exactly the goals of the instruction are. But as a basic concern, time availability is an assumption that should be questioned.

In the West, our linear view of time also has a strong impact on everything we do, from planning our day to designing instruction. Although it is very invisible to us initially, partially because of how abstract of a notion it is and because of how surrounded we are by our own assumptions regarding time, the Western conception of time is not shared by a major portion of the world's population. For example, learners from Asia have more of a circular than linear conception of time (Rogers, Hsueh & Allen, 2005). As a practical issue, when people speak about time and schedules, both Marci and Derek recognized that there can be different meanings and expectations depending on their cultural context:

> *How we view and deal with time is heavily influenced by culture*. Most Americans want to plan everything out and get it done according to plan. People from other cultures will sometimes say what they think you want to hear, "I'll get it done by Tomorrow," only they have no intention of having it done by then. Or maybe it just isn't going to get done at all, it isn't going to happen. (Marci)

> I teach a class in Hong Kong, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, it is a Masters level Educational Technology class. My experience is that they understand my needs and requests very well, and they are very effective, very efficient in what they do. Whenever I request something, they will say, "Oh, I have to wait for a while" and what that means they will get it to me by 4:00 in the afternoon. In Hawaii, if people say they "have to wait a while", that means they will get it to you next year or something. (Derek)

In the literature, both Slife (1995) and Himanen (2001) refer to this issue of time in interesting ways. Himanen (2001) points out how even in the West the view of time has changed through the years, with more emphasis being placed on fixed schedules since the industrial revolution. Slife (1995) presents a very interesting discussion regarding the influence of the Western conception of time on our particular view of Psychology, and specifically human cognition. He argues that the linear view of time increases appeal and explanatory power while simultaneously incurring underlying reductionistic problems that he argues can not be solved unless an alternative view of time is taken into account. The larger narratives of time and passage thus provide some important differences among

learners depending on what their cultural background is (Whorf, 1967). Whether it is in terms of deep philosophical issues or in terms of strictly pragmatic issues, there is a strong case that instructional designers need to be more aware of their assumptions about time and the resulting impact those assumptions have on their practice.

Fifth, the degree of familiarity and enculturation the learner has with other cultures makes a difference. Derek pointed out that if learners from foreign cultures have already had a great degree of interaction with the culture of the instructional designer, then it provided an easier entry into more effective collaborations. Consider these two other statements regarding the influence that previous experience with foreign cultures might have on learners and instruction, specifically the impact of colonialization.

> *Many of the countries I've worked in were formed with British Common law and much education and curriculum is what it used to be in Britain. They often have a stamp of the old colonial regime* kind of thing. In Africa it would be nice to have more cross-over between francophone (French speaking) and Anglophone (English speaking) nomadic peoples, but *in general people expect something with a British style.* That is what they are aiming toward, whether it is appropriate or not. In Africa, I often have had to be the person encouraging them not to be so British, but to make it more individualized to them. There is often a nostalgia for those type of things, and an image that money coming from the West is dependent on it. In Viet Nam, they are not so tied up with that. They want the best from US, UK, Canada, Europe, Australia, etc, but be their own country with no colonial feeling. They are not coming from traditional colonial background, but want to jump right to the cutting edge, with fashion, technology, education… (Joey)

> The one technology that has been hugely embraced by Egypt in a very short time frame has been the cell phone. And I wanted to know why, and I found out that they are hugely communicative people and they have wide networks of friends and family, and they love to talk and they love to be in group situations. *They are enormously social, and the fact that the British had introduced this completely opposite educational system that they can't get around is ironic.* (Rose)

These two comments touch upon the influence of colonialization on many cultures. The reality is that cultures themselves are in flux, and that enculturation and globalization are changing the expectations of people around the world to one degree or another. Although

not always negative, Ian discussed in some depth his insights regarding enculturation and assimilation among indigenous Australian tribes:

> *Rite of passage can be very heavy for Oz indigenous males*…sometimes boys will be taken out on ceremony for a couple of months, to ensure that they have been properly "weaned" from the maternal influence. Very pragmatic of course, since the burden of defense and survival in hostile conditions rested on the men's shoulders: women cooked, washed, gathered yams, etc, but were not weapon-handlers…I believe the Oz indigenous clan culture is a very heavy and resilient one, which has been spurred on by well-intentioned do-gooder "culture -vultures" - who have, in the end, usually wrecked the chances of any decent assimilation of values. (I exclude missionary work from this). In line with the world's history of the clash of cultures, traditional Oz indigenous culture per se has been rapidly heading for the scrap-heap since 1788, and there's every reason to expect that it will have virtually disappeared within this generation, as the last remote desert and island people pass on.
> What does this all mean in the context of the question at hand? Lots. *Urbanized indigenous boys have no real tradition to fall back on, and look only to the behavior of some adult male to hand - the louder and closer the better.* If that happens to be some re-located older indigenous male who cannot adjust to work in a city environment (as in the Redfern community in Sydney, which I was permitted to go into in 1993, by virtue of having unknowingly befriended some honorary member), then it will be dysfunctional behavior: alcohol, beating women and sometimes other men for whatever reason. The tradition of the dominant male has to be re-asserted regardless of context. Having worked in New Zealand from 1989-90, I can say that the situation of the urbanized Maori fringe-dwellers I saw around Wellington was actually very little different. They are rebels without a clearly-articulated cause, because they are now being forced to play in a different ball-park without access to the full rule-book; and that is generally - and quite rightly, I believe - bitterly resented. *So "face" in such cultural contexts is critical to self-esteem and identity,* especially in Oz these days where there is a pervasive media-facilitated indigenous "pseudo-culture" heightening perceived differences...*To invite a male from any such culture (perceived and otherwise) to embark on an abstract exercise of question and answer where one's fundamental knowledge is open to inspection for the purposes of cognitive "chaining" without adequate interpretive support and some cultural intermediary, would be simply wasting time.* (Ian)

Ian's statements indicate that there are larger issues of cultural assimilation or alienation that must be taken into account when considering educational technology initiatives. Ian continues by explaining that the importance of the issue of enculturation is more severe

and complex in largely traditional communities, like Maningrida in Arnhem Land, where he worked for a year as an administrator over adult trainers and educators:

> Given that the culture is confident in its own traditions, and that ceremony is allowed to over-ride all other obligations - including paid community development work (CDEP), *the concept that an adult's knowledge could be increased in what are non-traditional job-types, by a process of instruction from another influence external to the culture, is largely considered white man's folly.* However, in the interests of saving face for all concerned, both male and female will demonstrate compliance with training proposals if the WIIFM dimensions are clearly addressed: eg more money/ more food/ more access to vehicles and phones. (Ian)

Ian introduces all kinds of fascinating and complex issues that more naïve instructional designers might not even be aware of. If nothing else, his comments emphasize the impact that culture can have on motivational issues, even regarding what is worth learning and why. His statement also indicates that the degree of experience and familiarity that the culture you are working with has with people from your own culture could have either a positive or negative effect, depending on what issues you examine and how you look at it. For many reasons it is helpful to be aware of and discuss the level of previous interactions between cultures as design decisions are being made.

Sixth, there are many other larger social issues that can have a big impact on the learner, two of which are the prevailing socio-economic status (SES) and the political instabilities affecting the learners. Again, although the issue of SES is not strictly a cultural one, it is one that is encountered more frequently in cross-cultural projects. The location and economic level of a country can greatly influence things like the reliability of transportation and health care resources, especially in the face of destructive natural and political sources. Jill explains her feelings on this matter:

> If you assume that you can have study meetings in a town for all local students, you need to find out if they have transportation, how much it costs, if they have places to stay and things to eat when they get there, etc. – *there are all kinds of*

> *assumptions that we might not even think of when we come from rich countries.* If someone doesn't show up at the beginning of training in this country [the UK], you think they are being impolite. If someone doesn't show up for the beginning of training in an African country, it might be because one of their children had malaria, or the monsoon season started and their bus couldn't get across that part of the road, or someone in their family died; and they have different family expectations of what to do when a family member dies and how you have to stop everything. All sorts of things which unless you have visited someone's country you can't be expected to have any awareness of. *It is very easy to go on assumptions of what is happening in peoples' lives when you don't know much about them. It is crucial that the model of [some instruction] being created in a rich country and distributed in a poor country is discredited and not used as often any more. It has to be owned by the people of the country of use, developed or redesigned for them.* (Jill)

Although no one is immune from threats to health, life, freedom, family, and so on, it does seem as if these threats are more common for people in lower SES situations.

Also unfortunate is the influence of political corruption and instability. Mike touched on one aspect of this problem, indicating from his experience that jealousy and revenge regarding resources (like computers) in certain areas can incur some pretty unethical consequences, including damage and destruction of resources. He emphasized how these instabilities can form an incredible barrier to using educational technology in certain areas.

In my own experience, I was recently helping to create an entrepreneurship course for people in a south pacific island. While I was doing user testing, one person brought up a major concern. She said she was pretty confident that there is going to be a governmental coup' within the next few years, similar to the one that occurred ten years ago. She felt that it would be similar to the last governmental turnover, where most private companies had their profits taken and their business were either extinguished or fled overseas. It occurred to me that the impact of whatever instruction you could create to encourage entrepreneurship in this context will be severely limited. I was also

surprised that this was the first time that the client and other stakeholders became aware of the unstable political situation. If the targeted learner group is in a situation with instabilities in economies and/or politics, it seems wise to discuss how this affects your instructional designs as early in the process as possible.

General social and cultural conditions and expectations like those described above are of undeniable importance in the lives of learners around the world, and in how they might view and interact with educational technology. Although all of the participants in this study recognized issues like these, they still struggled with how to deal with each of them exactly. Some instructional designers did their best to adapt their materials as they could, some put much of the responsibility to localize with local facilitators, some felt a responsibility to be social change agents, and some simply felt overwhelmed and didn't know quite how to respond. In general, Mike tentatively offered some concise and helpful suggestions:

> Determine the overarching priorities/goals for your long distance project and ensure they meet local needs/desires; gaining the support of people with high ranking or influence may stop many problems before they begin, especially in a high context culture; openly discuss issues and concerns with the local staff and administration—do not simply implement best practices; leave untouched as many social norms and traditions as possible; be sensitive to traditional concerns when resolving concerns, be open to traditional solutions; and make the hierarchy a group of facilitators for those under their control.

Mike's suggestions resonate with the comments of many of the others. They indicate that an approach of sensitivity and responsiveness is best with regard to these general cultural and social expectations. This approach is also helpful when considering the unique impact culture has on teaching and learning expectations.

Teaching and Learning Expectations. Carrie gives a good glimpse of how important culture is in terms of teaching and learning expectations:

> First of all, culture can influence your expectations of yourself as a learner, and then your expectations of the teacher, those are the most basic ways that culture influences learning. And your learning style as well. How do you conceive of learning? How do I conceive of learning? What do you expect, and watch? What is your goal as a learner, and what is worth learning? (Carrie)

It is these kinds of issues that instructional designers encounter, especially when working cross-culturally. Perceptions about teaching and learning expectations are influenced deeply by culture. Becoming more aware of and more sensitive to what assumptions they were making on this level was one of the primary concerns these participants. The issue of educational expectations loosely breaks down into the following categories: (a) teacher and student relationship and roles, (b) issue of saving face, (c) need for face-to-face interaction, (d) ideal classroom environment and types of activities engaged in, (e) metacognitive strategies learned, (f) writing style, (g) assessment types, (h) categorization and structuring of knowledge.

First, consider the teacher and student relationship, and the role each is expected to play. In the case studies in Chapter 4, Gertrude and Barbara emphasized that the unique role of the teacher changes depending on the culture; and that in some cultures teachers are even given a type of divine status. Whereas there is often the expectation in the West that learners should be more independent and able to critically examine the information in education, many other parts of the world find this foreign and somewhat alienating. Jill talks about the conflict this can stimulate:

> There is an unwritten expectation in most open learning materials that are written at least in this part of the world that they should be very interactive and expects the learner to be very critical. Now, in East Asia, respect for the teacher is engrained very deeply, and they are very hesitant, it is very difficult for students to be critical to challenge or question them. Their expectation is of the teacher as an authority figure that knows what they are going to learn is what they ought to learn and will guide them along the whole way. Now that is not an approach at the adult level that open learning in Western society is likely to adopt. So it is very hard for a student from say Japan or China to take a class from say the University

> of London, in a relatively short time and without much contact with the system, or what the expectations are. And they will very often ask for more support from their tutor than the system has the resources to provide, but that is what they're expecting from the part of the model of education, for more guidance. *It is hard for them to become independent learners, and that is not because they are not well educated or because they are not bright students. It is a question of expectations and an educational culture that is different from what they have come up against before.* (Jill)

This comment indicates that it is difficult for people who expect the teacher to be the one who holds all the worthwhile knowledge to engage in a lot of the existing distance and online learning (which often assumes learners will take a lot more initiative). Troy and Joey confirm that it is more difficult for people in some parts of the world to even state an opinion regarding the material they are learning:

> It is cliché but true that in most Asian countries and *in a lot of the world to some extent, the learning is "I'm the teacher, I put out the facts and you send them back*." As boring as that sounds, that's the truth, and you are rewarded for parroting back what you are supposed to do. And *the idea of raising my opinion in a class discussion, in most educational divisions – not only is it not rewarded, but also there is no place for it, you know, you wouldn't even think of it.* In a way I guess I can't think of anything more fundamental than that in terms of the learning process…And 90% of the students on the honor role in some American places are Asian – well, that's because US high schools still reward that same kind of take it in, spit it out kind of stuff. (Troy)

> In Viet Nam there is, I think, a cultural background, explicit as well as intrinsic, where *people expect expertise to be delivered to them*. Not only in the course materials, needing to be more authoritative rather than inquisitive or questioning, but also in the kinds of tuition [tutoring]. So that the tutors who are giving face to face tuition are also expected to have that expertise, and that is an issue, because many of the rural areas lack any of the modern teaching practices that we are trying to get people to adopt. (Joey)

The role and style of the teacher (as untouchable expert) in much of the world seems to conflict with the alternative expectation of the teacher underlying much of distance education (as more of a facilitator and guide). Joey and Troy recognize that this issue needs to be addressed, and Troy's comments are interesting because he does not exclude those in American high schools from having similar expectations of simply repeating

what the teacher has said. Also contributing to these expectations is the culturally influenced need to save face, which is stronger in some cultures than others.

The issue of saving face was mentioned frequently and seems to be of critical importance. Barbara explained how she found that for Thai people, humiliation is one of the worst things that could happen. The result is that students are more reluctant to ask questions and make comments in class, at the risk of looking foolish. Now although obviously this is also an issue in the US and other Western countries, Ian explains how the issue of saving face can be greater in societies where there is more clear hierarchy in societal roles:

> Yes, it has been my experience that culture intrudes into learning contexts (non-CBT and CBT alike) a little more subtly than the obvious ones I have already stated: firstly, *there is the question of "face" being preserved in adult learners, when their societal role has been clearly defined via some well-defined rite of passage or other*..... This was particularly the case when I dealt with [two particular groups]; in both cases, the issue of face I saw as a major impediment to free one-on-one learning unless there was a well-established empathy between facilitator and learner. *I have found that in such rigidly culture-bound contexts, this applies as much to CBT as non-CBT in situations where the learner genuinely does not know which way to proceed, and could only do so by seeking help (i.e. admitting ignorance to another regarded either his cultural inferior, or not of his clan, or of a totally different societal persuasion).* In one of the cases, many were local clan aristocracy in their own right …and thus retention of face (especially in front of each other) was a major issue. (Ian)

As an interesting side note, Ian also compares this issue of saving face with those in highly regarded societal positions in the West:

> By the same token, my observations as a training consultant for the behavior of privately-schooled “western” senior adult trainees in courses is that the same penchant for “preserving face” can also be a real impediment to any genuine learning occurring, depending on how organizationally-threatened the trainee feels at the time! (Ian)

Ian is sensitive to the way people might feel towards admitting ignorance on a certain issue, and he notes the particular challenge this presents to instructional situations when

the learners are not in a position where they are willing to risk this. Betty provides this vignette as an example of how deeply the desire to save face may be for people from certain cultures:

> Sometimes people in other cultures are under cultural pressure to succeed. This was brought home to me in a really strong way. I was trying to work with some Chinese students in doing a creative project with media tools. They were doing a three minute media piece that was going to be shared with the class, and they would ask me, "What is it that you want us to do?" And they kept trying to get out of me what I wanted from them. I kept explaining it is a creative project, from your own passion, your own interest, what interests you. They actually started talking about the culture clash between their expectations of Australia and what happened when they actually got to Australia, what they were experiencing. In the end what *they did was a project of how they feel when they don't pass in their studies.* They decided to do a piece using a 3D model of a generic Western modern city, with high rise buildings. One of the students was filmed on top of one of the buildings, which I took as some kind of a metaphor of freedom. But instead, *there was a student in almost a jail-white strait jacket uniform with all these papers of "FAIL" floating around him, and then he falls off the high-rise building in slow motion to his death.* Ok, I was like, wow …and when they finished this presentation, one of them said, "This is a metaphor for how we feel." (Betty)

If the issue of saving face is taken seriously, it does impact decisions regarding choice of medium and other instructional design decisions on a very fundamental level, specifically in the level of interaction and participation that people initially feel comfortable with. As will be discussed later, most of these instructional designers did not think that the need to save face would necessarily preclude people from participating, but they did feel that it meant that they needed to offer a lot more support in creating an atmosphere and the motivation to encourage safety in interaction. From his experience, Troy described the situation this way:

> *This whole bit about participating and interaction – it's much more subtle than we look at it.* It's not just like, "Oh, look, now I'm interacting." There are phases to it. And the mere posting of your thoughts publicly on a discussion board is huge. For your whole career, every time when you've written something for an assignment it has been a private thing between you and your instructor, no one else sees it, which is the biggest waste in all of education, meaning your work is

> wasted along with the other students'. *In my experience with our most recent class, posting publicly for Asian students at first is unbelievably difficult, but they all did it. Because they believed that it would be, or that it is a good way to learn.* And they also worked hard on their posts, they were proud of it, and they overcame that shyness. *So step one is just public self-expression. Step two is that of valuing multiple perspectives.* Again, "why should I read another student's post? The person I'm supposed to learn from is the professor – he is the fount of all wisdom, what do I care about other students?" you know. Well, they broke through that – in just one semester, and they then realized there was value to spending their precious time reading the other student's posts. *But the idea that they would actually write something in response to it – I think that is a third level of interaction that they were not prepared for yet. But we'll get there, we'll get there.* (Troy)

Troy continued by saying,

> I break things down, that's how my mind works – but it's important to not talk about interaction the way many faculty members do, and this isn't just cross-cultural issue. You know, I facetiously talk about online threaded discussions being the gateway drug for online stuff, and it is, it's the easiest thing to do, lots of faculty members try it. And if you interviewed faculty members, I bet 75% of them say, "Oh, I've tried that once and it never works. They didn't interact." Well, *most faculty members don't know how to do a discussion. Faculty members are great at posing questions that are good for an exam,* that's what faculty members have been doing their whole career and they're really, really good at it. *But a question that is designed for discussion is different than a question that is designed for assessment*. And they don't know how to do it… so they didn't ask the question in the right way; they didn't understand their own expectations about what this interaction and participation should be like, it was murky and not clear. So things could have happened, but they didn't recognize it, because they didn't know what they were looking for. So that is why I think it is important to break it down into these stages and see interaction, and particularly in a cross-cultural situation, not as a fact, but as a process or evolution. (Troy)

Troy saw that public self-expression, willingness to read the thoughts of other students, and the willingness to reply to the thoughts of other students are all different levels of participation that need to be monitored and supported. He also pointed out that this needs to be done in the context of questions that are designed for discussion, not assessment. In summary, the issue of saving face should be considered in designing support for discussions, in analyzing participation, as well as in considering the willingness of learners to accept instruction created by a foreigner in the first place.

The third issue is the perceived need for face-to-face interaction, which is of greater concern in many societies. Barbara was so bold as to say that the need for face-to-face interaction is so great in many cultures that she does not think they would have come up with distance education on their own. Taking a different angle, Carrie recognized how this whole idea of vulnerability or saving face might be amplified in an online situation versus when instruction is face-to-face:

> *When we set up a learning situation like an online discussion board, there is great anxiety that the learner might feel they are under scrutiny or might be drawn into a conversation where they have to admit ignorance about a certain fact.* This happens normally and naturally in the classroom, and no one pays any attention to it. It is kind of positive and a trigger for learning in the face to face situation because the teacher can respond immediately to that student's gap in knowledge. In the long-distance situation, it becomes a real important situation, because it might lead to that student losing confidence, feeling isolated, wondering if they are the only student experiencing this lack of understanding. So treating those situations and events with sensitivity is still something that is very important in my mind. (Carrie)

So whereas vulnerability in admitting ignorance is usually responded to immediately in a face-to-face situation, Carrie feels online learners are at a greater risk to loose confidence and feel isolated. Shawn and Rose offer two possible ways to approach the dilemma of the desire for face-to-face interaction: one is by giving the online element a more human feel, and the other is by blending the online learning with face-to-face contact.

> One online instructor I know of has a bunch of little videos; many are little introductions that are often enough for people to feel connection with her, the human contact. Some of that might be cultural, that I must have some kind of human contact with you in order to be able to take any of this in at all. Some of it also may be a people thing - I need some human interaction. (Shawn)

The idea of making the instructor of the course more visible as a human is a good idea. However, it might not be enough. Rose speaks about the value of having students be in face-to-face contact with the other students as well:

> [In Egypt] what we found out is that people needed to be together a lot. We brought them face to face six times a year, and by the end of the year those groups really supported each other. But it took a long time, you have the Christians on one side of the room, the Muslims on the other side of the room, the veiled people on this side of the room, and the nuns on over there. Schools would be separated from each other. Then *you saw that as people were building the networks that were the kind of "underground" networks, that you were not really formalizing,* they started to get stronger within their own schools and then form cross-school bonds. *And they were learning how to support themselves – and it was something that was going on that was in a different level than the formal teaching that occurs here.* And sometimes that is something that you just have to do. (Rose)

Rose's comment helps us recognize to a greater degree that the planned delivery of instructional content is only part of the value that can come from instructional experiences. The connections people were making with people they normally would not have was facilitated by the face-to-face interactions. Although it is possible for some of this to happen online and at a distance, it is arguable that being face-to-face with others makes them more present and real in shaping both our view of them and our view of ourselves (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Perhaps face-to-face instruction is not always possible, but I am convinced that it has implicit benefits which are not yet replicable online, if ever they can be. The level of predisposed willingness for learners to engage in the more isolated and self-directed learning (which is often associated with on-line instruction), is one of the things that these participants felt was a culturally influenced variable that needs to be considered.

Fourth, discovering the expectations learners have regarding the goals of education can also be facilitated by looking at cultural perceptions of the ideal classroom environment and the types of activities typically engaged in. Derek spoke about the layout and structure of a Chinese versus US classroom, and the focus on presentation versus focus on learner. Gertrude and Barbara touched on how having a lack of reading material can also contribute to an increased emphasis on lecture. The classroom design

and the types of activities engaged in also tie into the previous discussions regarding the role of the teacher and the need to save face. When learners expect a lot of lecture and very little active participation, the result is that they are unprepared for much of what is valued in highly interactive Western-style education. As a result, if instructional designers expect Western-style interactive activities to be a part of their online design, then they need to be prepared for dealing with the lack of previous experience.

On a pragmatic level, Joey spoke about structuring activities so that they add value to the whole experience:

> *In the activity design, the process of making things more culturally effective is important*. The kinds of activities that you ask people to do you have to be careful about. You need to be careful not to just think about the kinds of activities you did as a student and just do the same things. If you are face to face with learners you can see if it is working and how it is going down, but in distance education it is much more difficult and you really need to do pilot testing to see them complete it. Perhaps they won't understand it, or if they don't see the value of doing it, then they will just skip though it. "I don't have time, I just want to get the content and move on." Make the activities worthwhile and designed into the material so they will add value and are not just seen as extra things. (Joey)

Joey suggested that one activity that might accomplish this is the type where learners are given several scenarios and asked which one they think is better, followed up with feedback or a dialogue of some sort. With any type of activity, however, from group work to individual work, it is key to find out how learners from other cultures will react to them in order to either change the activity or provide the support that might be necessary. To see just how subtle and important this can be, these participants also directed attention to something easily taken for granted, which is the lack of experience people from various cultures might have in using certain basic metacognitive strategies.

As the fifth point, it was a learning experience for many of these designers to recognize how the levels of metacognitive awareness and strategies that are used in other

cultures can be significantly different. For example, Marci spoke about the need she saw to teach the metacognitive strategies that went along with increased participation and interaction. She mentioned how she would make explicit and teach things like note taking, brainstorming, and even group-work strategies because of how unfamiliar some of her learners were to those kinds of activities. Rose also noticed this need, and described how she would explicitly teach the metacognitive strategies she felt could help people open up and participate on higher levels:

> Without a structure to open up, they had so much trouble. *I needed to teach metacognitive strategies all the time – otherwise they had problems opening up.* They had so much trouble. We had a very specific model for brainstorming, introductory speaking, and reflection. And it was a challenge for every session just to get people into brainstorming, to get people to understand that it was ok to challenge, and ok to question – to get them out of the mindset that everything only has one answer – and that there are many acceptable solutions. Not only do people need to learn how to express themselves, and share, but they also need help recognizing that there can be more than one idea or right answer. (Rose)

This way that Rose and Marci teach metacognitive strategies might be one of the most basic and helpful things instructional designers can do to get all learners on the same page; preparing them to be willing to participate in ways they might not be used to.

Sixth are the expectations regarding the type of writing style that is typically accepted in different cultures. One common activity that most learners around the world must engage in is writing essays or papers. In the extended case studies, both Barbara and Marci were concerned with the fact that the type of logic and writing style that is acceptable in the West is different from other parts of the world. Barbara addressed her concern with having standard template for design. In speaking about something as basic as including objectives at the beginning, she added this remark,

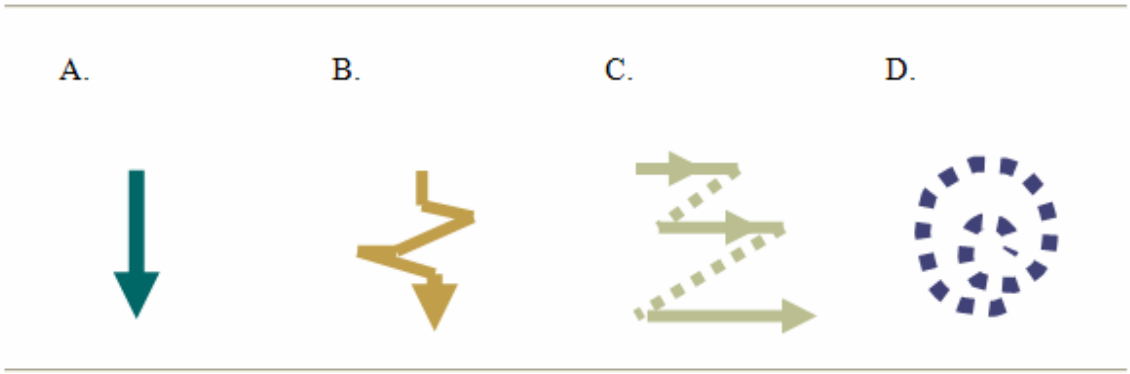
> If you are dealing with a culture where the learners are accustomed to a more, let's say, type of spiral logic, where they are kind of circling around and around until they determine what their objective is, you know they might not start out

> with an objective at the beginning, but it is more a matter of defining it as you go. This sort of standard approach [from a standardized template] is going to be very much a challenge to the way that they have learned how to think. It is going to be problematic. (Barbara)

Barbara felt that it is problematic to assume everyone has the same standard logic and writing style as the one expected in the West.

In her interview, Marci indicated that there are at least four prominent styles of logic in the world that are expressed in writing (as pictured in Figure 1). This is an example of contrastive rhetorical analysis and similar to models that were used several decades. Interestingly none of the instructional designers I spoke with said much about altering instruction and expectations about writing to cater to other logic styles. The most common feeling was that they needed to be aware that learners from other cultures might be coming from a different approach and that these learners need to be made aware that there was a new set of expectations regarding their writing as they participate in instruction designed by Western institutions.

It seems like the idea of different logics and writing styles is a new concept for a lot of people. Marci said that when she made explicit to international students the differences in writing style, emphasizing what she expected and how the differences do matter, she found relief in their reactions because it was the first time they finally understood this. Previously they were trying very hard and still failing without knowing why. Although all learners might not be this way, you will remember that Gertrude was one who ended up liking a new writing style better than the one she was used to her whole life. It seems clear that differences in logic structures and writing styles do have an influence on teaching and learning expectations.



A. Those speaking the English language use a thought pattern that looks something like this. This thought pattern follows a straight line of development of ideas - in a direct, linear pattern, and uses a deductive approach to show a direct relationship of ideas. Ideas are clearly related to each other in orderly sequence. In the USA, the paragraph is a logical unit, beginning with topic sentences. Opinions are direct and are supported with facts.

B. The line of thought is sometimes interrupted by rather complex digressions. Then it goes back to the main ideas. This is typical and acceptable in the Romance languages (e.g. Spanish, French and Italian).

C. This type of thought pattern has parallel lines of development are strong. The broken lines indicate largely irrelevant material & ideas that are introduced into the paragraph. It is typical of the Semitic languages (e.g. Hebrew, Akkadian, Arabic, and Aramic).

D. This type of thought pattern has a circular line of reasoning which is an approach by indirection. The circles around the subject show it from a variety of views. The subject is not looked at directly. It is typical of Oriental languages (e.g. Japanese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hangul (Korean)).

Figure 1. Four types of writing/logic styles

Seventh, the types of assessments given and level of importance placed on assessments also seem to be influenced deeply by culture. Carrie mentioned how many types of self-assessments and peer-assessments are very difficult for people from certain cultures to engage in. Both Jill and Mike refer to the way in which expectations regarding written assessments and exams can differ.

> There are all sorts of opportunities for misunderstanding about how to proceed. I think this is true even, say, between the British system and the North American system. For example, in the British system, with some of the subjects that we would call arts or science subjects there is an expectation that students will be assessed by writing essay type answers to questions. That is a skill that is practiced a lot and expected of students in secondary school and university, so that the system is usually a series of questions and you choose which ones you want to write the answer to. And there is very little assessment by means of things like multiple choice or short answer, which are often found in North America. So *countries assess students in different ways, and it can be very hard for a British student on a program in North America or vice versa to assimilate the expectations that the people there take for granted and don't have to question. These types of misunderstandings can even happen between cultures that on the face of it know a huge amount about each other.* You just think about how British media is just saturated with American information, programs, culture in terms of games and so on, but at the heart of it there are differences in how we see the world, and how we expect to be taught, how we expect to learn, how we expect to be assessed. (Jill)

Jill recognizes that there are clear differences in the way we expect to be assessed. And it is arguable that based upon how learners expect to be assessed, they will be predisposed to learn material in a certain way.

Perhaps simply so that it would be accepted as valid instruction, Mike spoke about the need he felt to harmonize the assessment methods they used in their distance learning with the approaches used in the local Tongan educational system:

> A deeper, more troubling issue was identified in the need to harmonize the evaluation methods employed in distance learning with the approaches used by the local educational system (which has its roots in the British system and close ties to the educational systems used by Australia and New Zealand). Noteworthy is the general distaste for multiple-choice exams, which are generally seen as being "too easy" and unable to evaluate critical thinking skills on all but the most

> rudimentary levels. *Any effort to legitimize the use of internet-based distance learning as a part of the local educational milieu must include a means for reconciling these important perceptual and technological differences.* (Mike)

Because Internet-based distance learning was such a new thing for the people he was trying to reach in Tonga, one of Mike's main goals was to legitimize the use of it as part of the "local educational mileu." For this reason, he sought to bring the assessments administered through the online course more in line with their current expectations.

The level of importance put on failing or succeeding on assessments is also worth mentioning. Consider situations like the one Barbara spoke of in Sri Lanka where a complete emphasis is on learning for the exam, where the examination is everything. The system of formal schooling has been criticized for this reason even in the US, where learning and instruction have more of an "exchange value" (in getting grades, degrees, jobs, etc) than a "use value" (where what you learn is valuable in and of itself) (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It seems as if learning primarily for the test is a common motivation throughout the world, but Barbara and others indicated its elevated importance in certain cultures.

When the "exchange value" of good grades and degrees is decreased through social pressures, other complications can arise. Contrast the Sri Lanka culture Barbara describes, where learners put utmost importance on succeeding on the exam, with another one that exists in many urban US cities:

> *There is a strong anti-success, pro-mediocrity social pressure in a way. People don't want you to be smart and they don't want you to succeed.* I am thinking back to stories...teachers who would work in poorer school, and students who would do work in secret and turn it into the teacher outside of class. They didn't want people inside of class to see that they were doing homework, because it wouldn't be seen as socially acceptable. So those type of things, it didn't matter as much what you did in class, if there was all these other kinds of things that were going to stop the learning. (Shawn)

In Shawn's description, it becomes clear that social and cultural expectations really do play a big part in the weight learners place on succeeding on various formal assessments. The expectations regarding the types of assessments and the emphasis placed on assessments do make a difference. Cultural expectations are a factor that instructional designers should not overlook when making decisions regarding the use of multiple-choice or essay, norm or criterion referenced, peer assessments, self assessments or teacher assessments, and a number of other decisions regarding how learners and instructors are going to evaluate progress.

In summary, there are a lot of ways in which teaching and learning expectations vary based upon cultural influences. In being aware of some of the differences, instructional designers are able customize things such as the structure of the instruction (often integrating as much blended learning as possible), the types of assessments, and the supports people are given as they interact with the teacher and other students. Many recognized the greater need for being explicit about what types of writing styles they expected and some were even more up-front in teaching the metacognitive strategies that were necessary for engaging in the types of activities that they designed into the instruction. In general, their increased awareness influenced them to question more than they otherwise would have whether what they designed would connect with learners from other cultures or not, finding ways to customize their instruction as needed. Other very insightful comments they made applied specifically to the ways in which language and symbols influenced both the learners and their own designs.

Language and Symbols. As an area of cultural concern, these instructional designers noticed several various ways in which symbols are interpreted and used

differently. Even the color spectrum is not the same in every culture. As one of the most complex and meaningful symbolic systems, language took a prominent role in their thinking, and understanding differences in language and symbols was important for the following reasons: (a) language structures can actually influence the way in which people think; (b) when the language of cross-cultural instruction was English, instructional designers tend to forget about the impact of other cultural issues and misunderstand the level of the English learners can handle; and (c) a misuse of other symbols, colors, and metaphors can unintentionally offend or alienate learners.

First of all, there seems to be a link between language and its role in thought processes. Carroll (1956) says that "we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language" (p. 212). Chen and Mashhadi (1998) explain that "the 'danger' of a culture of [online instruction] lies in instructional designers overlooking the fact that meaning is not directly apprehended but it the result of meaning within a particular conceptual framework" (p. 9). Carroll (1956) continues, "we cut up nature, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of language" (p. 213-214). There were several specific ways in which these participants noticed how different "patterns of language" influenced the thought processes of learners. For example, several participants mentioned how the relative lack of written communication affected things. Ian describes one scenario, where the concept of literacy (with written words and numbers) is a foreign concept for indigenous Australian tribes:

> *Given that there is no written tradition in Australian indigenous culture, the concept of language in the context of literacy and numeracy, is at best a slippery*

> *one* in terms of measurement: traditionally, indigenes of this country have been hunters and gatherers. There is little significant anthropological evidence of any kind of indigenous agricultural or pastoral society, where there has been a need to record patterns of recurring activities typically associated with seasonal change (e.g. rainfall distribution, growing times, etc), as you would have with an agrarian or hydraulic society at the mercy of seasonal fluctuations. Nor is there any evidence of store-keeping records listing holdings vis-vis future needs, etc. Iconography found and analyzed to date seems to depict occasional events: meetings, fighting, hunting and killing wildlife; and acknowledgement of the existence of spiritual phenomena (e.g. water-spirits, etc) rather than any attempt to discourse upon, or accumulate detail.
> Hence, the study of Australian indigenous information-processing capacity could be described as barely even on the map.....A Western construct has simply been super-imposed on their communication modus operandi. This is not to gainsay the enormous amount of work that has been done since 1788, in trying to replicate the indigenous oral cultures in a western linguistic format: how else? *Thus, the "written language" of, say, a western desert traditional is an entirely artificial concept, based on some loose phonetic arrangement useful only as a means for anthropologists to record the gist of some conversation to be replicated at some future date.* (Ian)

Ian speculates on how the lack of literacy in the sense that we know it in the West, might influence the way people think to a greater degree than we might expect. It seems that much of what is "known" about the information processing style of Western minds is too often projected on other cultures without sufficient justification.

Along these lines, Barbara provided her opinion that she didn't think you could understand another culture without understanding the language: "You can't possibly get close to a culture without knowing the language, no way. I firmly believe that." In her comments, Gertrude mentioned her perception that although she could express certain things in English she could not express them in her native language, and I'm sure the reverse is true. Smith (1991) points out that the connection between culture and language makes even interpreting and translating from one language to another a difficult task:

> In large scale cultural communication, however, involving long and complex philosophical and religious traditions, more formidable problems arise and the boundaries to be crossed are such that we can no longer safely assume the relative

> simple one-to-one meaning equivalents that are the stock-in-trade of the professional interpreter. (p. 28)

It is clear that language is not "just" another technical matter to be factored into the design of instruction; it is an integral aspect of culture.

Shawn and Jill also provided a couple reasons why language issues need to be taken into consideration. First, Shawn referred to how even the flexibility of word order in certain languages has been known to cause confusion among international students who are studying biology:

> This particular biology professor had been teaching clearly things like "A is inside B", but she looked and noticed she had students who would write on lab notes things like "B is inside A". She wondered how they could get it so backward. She figured out, which was very clever of her, that *the students who were having the most difficulty with that were students whose first language was a language where word order was not important because word endings signified relationships.* Whereas in English word order is important, in other languages word order itself is not necessarily important, you can mix and match or whatever, and it doesn't matter because whatever the ending is on the word makes it accusative or dative or whatever. Many students think in their first language and then translate it, and of course they can't translate it word by word, so then you get this kind of a thing. (Shawn)

As it turns out, there are distinct types of languages: analytic languages (which rely on word order), and synthetic languages (which use prefixes and suffixes signify relationships). Shawn went on to explain how this teacher found a creative solution to this problem, by introducing a way of taking notes and conducting exams with more drawing and labeling of diagrams. To her surprise, not only did the international students do better, but so did the local ones (although they fought against the idea at first). What is important here is the realization that languages are different enough that they do not have a one-to-one correspondence, and that the variations can make a difference. Jill gives another example from her experience of why language makes a difference in instruction:

> I used to assume that it was always appropriate to encourage writers to write in an informal style, to use informal language and addressing their students directly and referring to themselves in the first person. But then I worked with people writing materials in Arabic who explained that *there is one kind of language in Arabic that was informal and another kind that was acceptable for education. And there was an issue regarding how much you should move away from the kind of Arabic that was used in formal education to the kind of informal that was used in everyday speech, because you could upset people* – the expectations of the learners. I think that if you used informal language it meant that the instruction wasn't serious and they would feel patronized perhaps or not treated as serious students. I'm sure there are other examples apart from Arabic, where that is true. I think it is also probably true in countries like Malasia and Indonesia, that there are different language registers, you know, different kinds of language that you use in different contexts and for different uses. (Jill)

It does seem as if the structure of a language, as Shawn spoke of, and the expectations in using various levels of formality of a language, as Jill mentioned, do have implications in how instructional content should be created. But how connected are language and culture?

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis concludes that language and culture are inseparable, if we accept the notion that culture affects language and language is affected by culture. Although the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has experienced reconstruction over the years, the general premise that language and culture may not be separated is still held by many (Lee, 1997). Sapir (1929; as cited in Slowinski, 2002), as early as 1929, explained the relationship between language and culture in these words:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. (p. 207)

Weiten (1998) indicated that although the current status of the linguistic relativity hypothesis may not be a strong as Sapir and Whorf initially proposed (that a given language makes some forms of thinking obligatory or impossible), there is a weaker version that may be tenable and supported by research (Bloom, 1981; Hoffman, Lau, & Johnson, 1986). This version argues simply that a given language makes certain ways of

thinking easier or more difficult. This view is more in line with the comments of many of the instructional designers who participated in this study. In any case, the influence of language on thought process is an important matter for consideration when working cross-culturally.

Second, when English is the language of instruction, some additional concerns arise. We simply need to look at some of the complexities in the English language that are often taken for granted. Several of these instructional designers noted that particularly when the instruction is in English, it is easy to make assumptions that hinder the learners. When the instruction is in English the two salient concerns were to not forget about a majority of the other cultural issues altogether, and to monitor the level of English used (offering additional vocabulary help when needed). Shawn and Jill both touch upon this first issue, recognizing how easy it can be when people understand some English to forget that you still need to be careful with many of the other cultural considerations that have already been touched upon:

> There are those things that we don't think of. One thing that came up quite frequently is in math instruction. A lot of the Chinese students were brilliant in math, but when it came to word problems, they could get lost immediately. Particularly if it was about banking. I don't know what Chinese people do know, but there were many of the students for whom our concept of a bank is completely different – so you have this problem set up, but they can't do the problem because they don't understand. *They can read the word, but it has no meaning for them. And so they can't understand what on earth it is that you are trying to ask them, so they can't therefore demonstrate their mathematical ability.* (Shawn)

Jill stated this problem this way:

> Sometimes it is felt that all you need is the same written language and then you can communicate with people who use that written language wherever they are, but as I'm sure you are aware, this is not the case. (laugh) For example, one online program we are running and helped develop (helping people get professional qualifications in open learning), uses English and people have to take an English test before they are accepted into the program. But the differences between the assumptions of how education is run is very different for students

> who use English, but are working in contexts of East Asia, who have very different expectations of the role of the teacher or tutor than students in Europe. Or again in North America students may have very different expectations, because we have all been brought up in very different education programs, even though we share a common language. And actually the fact that people use English doesn't mean that it is their first language, it may mean that it is simply the language of instruction – and it is grafted onto a basic or primary education that is taught in other languages, the mother tongue. (Jill)

The point that both Shawn and Jill make is very valid. Even though people may share a common language, it is important not to be lured into believing that they will have a common expectation or understanding of what is happening.

This also leads into the more subtle fact that Marci alluded to, that there are various levels of English with specialized vocabulary not measured in your normal TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Beyond that, in English there are certain constructions, or collocations, which convey meaning that the individual words do not. Native English speakers are already in the minority of those who speak English in the world, which increases the concern Marci has for all of these issues. She explains,

> Native English speakers think if others know or can speak English, then they should be able to understand this course or program, because we did it in English. That is not true, because there are so many different levels of English.
> There is social English that everyone pretty much knows, hello and goodby, etc. But in schools or industry there is going to be specialized vocabulary or academic vocabulary. Also, you are going to have words that are pretty much the same but they have collocations. *A collocation is a word or a few words around it that are always used together to mean a certain thing, but if you looked up the words in the dictionary individually, it would mean a completely different thing.* You won't find the meaning, because the collocation is not there, although a few dictionaries now are starting to come out with some of the collocations. But *native English speakers don't understand that even if their words are in English and the user generally understands English, you still have to invite them in to your community of practice and explain what these things are in the situation…*
> So right there we are in trouble, making assumptions just because users might speak English. You have got to give users more scaffolding, more support, more examples, or a good glossary and/or pictures – so they can figure out what it is and have a clue and not be so frustrated. And being aware that there is an academic English they need to be taught, which is much different from what they need to know to pass the TOEFL test. (Marci)

Marci emphasizes that even when learners generally understand English, it does not mean that they will be able to construe the meaning of any particular course, especially when taught out of the context of the community of practice in which the new terminology is used.

Shawn gave one very simple example of why he believes instructional designers need to be more careful of what words they use, even if everyone speaks English. This example came from his educational experience in the US:

> Even though I speak English, I come from Scotland, but I am still caught off guard here [in the US] being from another culture and looking at the assumptions that were just floating around. One of the first courses that I took in my Masters Program was a basic Ed Psych course, and there was a question in there, I can remember this guy so well. There were a couple of us that weren't Americans – there was a guy from Peru, who was also an IT masters student. We were doing a multiple choice test, of course, which Americans seem to love, but I abhor, and the last question was supposed to be one of these throw away questions for nothing, like a joke to lighten the mood so you don't get all tense. But it was about cartoon characters, and the answer was "Bullwinkle the Moose", and *I didn't know who Bullwinkle the Moose was, I didn't know who any of the other characters were. It was completely culturally bound* – and after the guy had graded it he came back and said, "I'm sorry, I thought I was giving you all a point for nothing to be nice, and I realized that some people just have no idea." First of all, it had nothing at all to do with psychology, but even if it had, it was completely culturally bound in American culture. Now since that time, I have really come to appreciate and love Bullwinkle the Moose, he's wonderful, but I had never even heard of Bullwinkle the Moose before that time. There was something that was completely alienating to foreign people. (Shawn)

Although not completely detrimental to the goals of the class he was taking, Shawn's example with Bullwinkle the Moose does highlight the need we have to be aware of the lack of universal knowledge regarding people, places and events. In explaining further why care needs to be taken when using English as the language of instruction, Shawn shared the following insight:

> Behind words that are so common to us is a lot of connotation and meaning that is built over time – but have no meaning to others. Even now I just recognized that I used a construction that is uniquely Scottish. I said that something was "outwith" their experience. I remember now using that in a paper and the professor circled it and said they looked it up in a dictionary and couldn't find it – what does it mean? I thought, what does he mean, what does it mean? "Out with – not within". And I realized that it really is only a Scottish construction, you won't find it in England, but it is quite common construction for us. And I use these things, and I am not always conscious of them, and I always have to catch myself when I am doing it. So I always have to be careful of how I phrase things and how I present things for American students, because I did not grow up American. (Shawn)

Although these examples range on levels of severity in their potential to impede learning, the more instructional designers become aware of issues of these, the less likely they are to frustrate learners and/or loose their interest or ability to focus on what it is that they are trying to communicate and teach.

Third, beyond formal language there is a concern regarding the other types of symbols, colors, and metaphors that are used. Regardless of whether the instruction is in English or not, issues beyond simple translations should be considered. Some of these instructional designers briefly reviewed potential concerns over everything from formatting and fonts to the pictures, icons, and colors chosen. Shawn gives a couple examples of potential formatting questions that should be asked:

> Consider fonts, and leading (space between horizontal lines of text), and kerning (distance between letters), and the type faces people are used to seeing - are some of these more akin to particular languages? If we design something with our type faces, do they automatically translate into ones that are familiar for their other languages? *The more something is foreign the more likely that people are going to feel that it does not apply to them in their context.* (Shawn)

Suggestions made by one author (Singh & Pereira, 2005) suggest that it is valuable to be as detailed as having for Arabic speaking people the scroll bar on the left side of the page (since they read from left to right), and having fonts that are more intricate and italicized (since they have a language that looks more italicized when written). If nothing else,

Shawn's point, that "the more foreign something is, the more likely that people are going to feel that it does not apply to them," is a good enough reason to explore all of these issues in more detail, through research and user testing.

Along with the representation of the content is the specifics of pictures, colors and icons that might convey a different meaning than the instructional designer expects. The following comments illustrate some other concerns with the way these symbols are used. Marci begins by saying that although there generally is a desire and need to simply have more visuals in the first place, we also need to make sure that these visuals represent in the minds of the learners what we might expect them too:

> There are some other ways the end product will look different if it is sensitive to other cultures that are different from ours. Lots of times there will be more visuals in the training or end product, we need some more universal symbols. I find that a lot of the things we use are communicating things that we don't want. The symbols we use in our culture to represent something might either be offensive in other cultures or just totally miss the idea we were trying to communicate. (Marci)

Symbols, colors, and metaphors mean very different things in different places in the world and to different people. Both Shawn and Ian support this in their comments:

> Even colors, if you click on a link and it changes to a different color – you need to be aware of those kinds of things. Certain points are also the strongest points in magazine adds, web-pages, etc. But *stronger points will be based on reading culture*, if you read right to left, or left to right, top to bottom, etc. (Shawn)

> The other element that has to be considered…is that offensive reference to, or inadvertent use of, icons or physical phenomena identified as special or sacred in whatever clan folk-lore you are dealing with, is a sure turn-off. While references to such symbols/ideology can, in the right conditions, be the bridge into the psyche of the clan, they are also a barrier to the uninformed. Serpents, crocodiles, pools of still water, - even rock piles- and, of course, the deceased, are most likely to be imbued with special status. Remember, Oz indigenous folklore and traditions spring from observable phenomena - as do many of those of PNG clans, whom Margaret Mead and others spent considerable time researching and writing about. (Ian)

It is interesting that things like the colors we use to imply certain connotations and even images of piles of rocks that might mean nothing to us can have vastly different interpretations and subtle connotations to others.

In addition to being aware of these things, Marci explains some things she does in order to discover if the visuals and symbols used indeed do convey the intended meaning to the particular learner group:

> *We need more market survey type of things, user research or surveys, to see if they even get an idea of what we intended.* Get some prototypes and run them past some focus groups. Some products will have certain colors or lines certain ways, and we should use things that will be familiar and pleasing, that users will gravitate towards instead of reject. (Marci)

She alludes to the fact that will be expanded on later, the need for increased learner participation in the design process. This feedback from learners should help designers with the representation of symbols and the use of language, the goal being to help learners find relevance in the instructional experience and feel that it applies to them.

At this point I have reviewed the awareness these instructional designers have concerning potential differences among learners from different cultures, breaking these differences down into four areas: (a) technological infrastructure and familiarity, (b) general cultural and social expectations, (c) teaching and learning expectations, and (d) differences in the use of language and symbols. The next question to be covered is how they became aware of these differences.

How do instructional designers become aware of cultural differences?

In Case B, Marci shared this insight into her own personal experience, “I didn’t understand any of these cultural differences or assumptions at first. When I was first introduced or encountered the problem I didn’t have words for it and it wasn’t in any of my training.” So how did she and others become aware of differences? These participants

developed a level of awareness in both informal ways (e.g. as a side effect of exposure to different cultures and as a side effect of having an open and inquisitive disposition) and more formal ways (e.g. simulations, classes, research, participant feedback, multi-cultural design teams, taking courses designed by people from other cultures, and field visits moderated by an expert guide). All these different ways will be discussed.

In Informal Ways

By informal, I mean that developing cultural awareness was not the primary goal, but an unintentional side effect of a lived experience and/or disposition. Various participants stated that they became more aware of cultural differences because of multiple engaging encounters with people of different cultures. Several designers expressed that actually traveling to and immersing themselves in a different country was the most powerful influence on their developing awareness. Two examples of this come from Jill and Carrie's comments:

> When I first started working in developing countries, I thought I knew how you were supposed to do things, and rather naively I thought that my role was just to help people see things the way I did. I had come from a situation that I had been able to learn about a lot of programs in different parts of the world and read a lot of the literature, and I thought I knew what you were supposed to do. But the longer I have worked with people in different environments in different parts of the world *in their own environment* I think one thing it has taught me is how much you need to be aware of how much you don't know. *In other words, you may start off visiting another country thinking you understand it, but the more times you visit it, you realize that there are layers there that you hadn't even realized existed in terms of differences in people's approaches.* (Jill)

> I started becoming aware of some of these issues, I think, *by travel*. I have worked in so many different places. When I graduated, I went and taught English in Spain, France, and Italy. Then I went back and did Master's degree. Then I went to the Middle East, Kuwait, then Borneo, another Islamic country, and then I came to Australia (various parts). I have taught in 4 continents, which I think is probably more than average. (Carrie)

These two comments are representative of the general feeling that actually traveling to and being with the learners in their context helps significantly. It should be pointed out, however, that one does not necessarily need to travel beyond the borders of his or her own country to have an initial awareness of cultural differences. With respect to this matter, Shawn speaks about his experience living in Great Britain.

> I've always been aware of cultural differences, and *part of that is where I come from*. I come from a small country that is part of a bigger country. My identity is Scottish, which is fine. Scotland is part of Great Britain. So there are things that are British, and there are things that are uniquely Scottish. It is very obvious. To people in the south of England, they are completely ignorant of what is north of the border. So there's always been an awareness that we knew different things, part in language…I mean words that my parents would use and that I would use would be completely incomprehensible to an English speaker. The Scots dictionary is fascinating and baffling. … Here is a problem that I perceive – America is such a huge country, people can live their whole lives without leaving it. They can live their whole lives without leaving their state, people can live their whole lives without going 25 miles from where they were born. And have almost no awareness of the rest of the world. People can still live in the same place they were born in Britain, but *there is a much greater awareness, at least of the rest of the world, simply because we are such a small country, and our whole history has been threatened by other people*. Even still recently in living memory... (Shawn)

Shawn clearly has been confronted with cultural differences by virtue of where was born and raised.

Troy gives a good example of the diversity to be found within U.S. borders. This quote also exemplifies how difficult it is to define a "national culture," and again how valuable it is to actually travel to live with another cultural group, even if it is within your own country:

> In my normal life back in Boston, being Troy the suburban family-man and multimedia producer, my friends were people just like me – they were, you know, people that lived in the suburbs of Boston and what not – that's what we do as human beings…but while I was a student I could really take advantage of getting to know others… *I'm a Unitarian, a quite liberal religion formed in New England and I grew up in Boston, kind of the headquarters of Unitarianism – and then I go to Utah, which is of course the headquarters of another one of the world's great religions, and now I'm getting all wrapped up here in California with Buddhism*

> and what not, and it's very interesting. And talk about culture – you're not going to find much more of a cultural transition than going from the liberal suburbs of Boston to Logan, Utah either, you know. And *I'm just one of these guys that I learn from everybody, I respect everybody, my prior assumption is that it is really worth connecting with this person.* I cannot tell you the looks I got from people in Boston when I told them that I was going to go to Utah (and my wife will say that those were four of our greatest years that we've ever had, you know), but I had to learn how to communicate effectively with the people that I was with there because they were coming from a really different culture than me…And now I have gone with a small up-and-coming university outside of LA that is going to be fully accredited in about a year. It is 15 years old, and is owned and operated by a prominent and very large Buddhist organization in Taiwan…again, everything is so new here, I've just been here for 8 months, I'm still scrambling to figure out what's going on here. I'm a stranger in a strange land, surrounded by Buddhists and monks and nuns and students from places like Uzbekistan…(Troy)

In addition to recognizing the diversity of cultures that exist in the US alone, one other interesting thing about Troy in the preceding quote is his descriptions of an attitude or disposition he has that helps him in cross-cultural situations.

Actually living with and having multiple engaging encounters with others in a different culture is very likely to foster some seeds of cultural awareness, but there seems to be an even higher level of awareness and understanding that can come from these experiences as a by-product of the person possessing a certain attitude or way of being. For example, Troy describes his attitude that he can learn from everyone, and that his prior assumption is that it is worth connecting with others. He explains how this disposition allowed him to take advantage of becoming friends with many of the international students attending the same university as him and how much he enjoyed that. Hand in hand with his belief that it is worth really connecting with others, Troy also explains a talent he has developed that allows him to be more sensitive to others:

> Part of what has helped me be more sensitive to learning differences in people's approaches from other cultures is that *I'm only really good at one thing, and that is communicating.* I don't play any musical instruments, I'm not a good athlete, I'm not good at painting or anything like that. A good communicator is different from a good orator. I mean I can get up in front of a crowd of 10,000 and give a

> good oration, but a communicator is different. *A communicator has a way of feeling how it's being received and knowing how to modulate, draw examples and metaphors, and images that are working in the situation in which I am trying to communicate right now.* And I'm good at that…it is kind of second nature to me now, to do everything in my power to sense how you, Clint, are taking in what I'm saying – and how do I need to be as a communicator to make sure that I'm doing it effectively for you, right now? I just care about it being communicated, that's all. (Troy)

Troy felt that something about his ability and desire to communicate effectively, in the sense that he really tries to understand if something is getting across to those he is speaking with, was beneficial in helping him to be more aware of cultural differences. His way of being is such that he is keenly aware of when things are not making sense to others; he actively tries to figure out where others are coming from and how he might connect better with them. For example, multiple times during our conversation I would ask him a question, and before answering it, he would ask a clarifying question to first see where I was coming from and what exactly I meant. Only then would he proceed to articulate his position. I must admit it was a very engaging and effective approach, and I think that having a disposition or belief that it is worth connecting with others, and developing sensitivity to whether others can understand you or not, does have added value when seeking to understand and connect with those coming from other contexts and cultures.

There is quite a mix of informal ways in which instructional designers have developed increased understanding of other cultures, from being a colleague and friend, listening and caring about others, to living in another culture and even being married cross-culturally. These things seem to have occurred outside of any formal learning environment.

In Formal Ways

As a more formal goal, how can this developing awareness be fostered in other instructional designers if they have not previously had the same depth of multi-cultural experiences? Although there are limitations to any approach, many ways exist to help students and practitioners of instructional design approach an awareness of what assumptions they make. Inferences might be drawn from the experiences of these participants, who shared the following types of formal ways they felt their cultural awareness has been developed:

1. Playing simulated games that are "designed to get people to feel how it feels to be outside a culture,"
2. Attending a class that helps make some of these issues more explicit,
3. Reading or participating in scholarly research that investigates cultural issues,
4. Following design models and methods that encourage more perspective of and even participation of learners in co-designing instruction,
5. Working on multi-cultural design teams,
6. Taking courses that have been designed by people from other cultural backgrounds, and
7. Actually moving your physical body to an environment that is out of your normal comfort zone accompanied by debriefing and an open and inquisitive mind (even if it is within your own city or country).

Some related quotes describe how these types of more formal learning experiences helped these participants develop more cultural awareness.

First, whether computer based or facilitated through different types of games (e.g. card games, board games, and so on), simulations can be constructed in a way to help increase cultural sensitivity. Shawn explains some of the ways in which simulations can be useful in intentionally developing more awareness of cultural differences:

> *Simulations are artificial, but at least they are better than nothing* because at least it can give them a glimpse, to some extent, of getting instructional designers to a situation where they are culturally at a disadvantage. *Simulation games can be designed to get people to feel how it feels to be outside a culture*, not to understand what is going on, and having to try and figure out what is going on…What is very interesting, and this is why the debriefing is important, is that people can get very frustrated, because you are not telling them what to do. Part of what they need to realize is that some of the time we don't understand that you don't know what to do. Or even if I tell you what to do, I am not telling you far enough back down the line for it to even make sense to you. "Well, you do this" "But I still don't even understand what this is" And you have to take them way back over here, before I can see the connection between what I actually do know and where you are trying to take me so that I can actually make that transition and have enough to go on. The whole thing is fascinating. (Shawn)

As Shawn pointed out, simulations can provide an environment where people can begin to explore what it feels like to be culturally at a disadvantage, in the hopes that they would then have more empathy for learners from other cultures.

Second, taking courses from those who understand another culture and how it is different from the one you are coming from can help people to more quickly make sense of why things seem different, and set their expectations to be closer to reality. For example, Marci said, "I took a course about adjusting culturally before I went to Mexico, and it did help. But someone had to be very explicit and point [cultural differences] out, and then you could deal with it and realize that it wasn't you." I agree that courses specifically designed to help people adjust culturally are valuable.

Other types of courses are also very valuable in helping people understand their own culture and their own personal assumptions. It is interesting that even if people have

previously traveled to other countries, or have friends from other cultures, they still might not have a very good understanding of some of the deeper fundamental differences that exist, upon which miscommunication can thrive. In some detail, Shawn describes a different kind of class that he attended which really encouraged some of the deeper processing by which his assumptions were made explicit:

> I remember I took a curriculum course once from a wonderful guy from Alabama, and he basically said, you can't do any study of curriculum without first understanding what your core values are. And he said the first thing you need to do is go away and write down what your beliefs are. He wouldn't let us talk about curriculum until we had. It was the sort of thing where we had to turn them in, they weren't graded, but he made us do them. What do you believe about the world, is it created, is it a complete accident? What do you believe about how it functions, what its purpose is? What do you believe about people and humanity? I mean, those are pretty deep things to be made to do in a curriculum class, when we weren't expecting it.
> And it was fascinating. And we had some other very interesting questions that he asked us in class. Another example was capital punishment. He'd draw a line on the board and say, "Here's for and here's against, where would you stand?" *It was all about really making you look inward and ask, what really is it that I believe? And how therefore does it affect curriculum, and my teaching, and everything else that I do in connection with other people.*
> If you do this, you really need to be careful, and that means creating a safe environment. That's a big part of it, it has to be completely safe. You also have to be careful simply because you are asking people to do things that can have tremendously powerful effects. If people are Ok because they have done this kind of thinking before, and are secure in what they believe, they're fine. If you have someone kind of go into a complete tail spin because they realize that they have no idea what they believe, that what they believe is based on nothing, it is quite dangerous actually. Make sure you are very attuned with your students and that you know where they are. And if the slightest thing is appearing to be going wrong, you have to get them some help real fast. But it is worth it in order to make explicit your own assumptions and values and beliefs. These belief systems do have an effect on how people relate to each other, and they effect how people learn, how people react to instruction. So what do you do with your online instruction? …Will it actually be helping others to connect? (Shawn)

This class, although unconventional, was a powerful and memorable experience in helping Shawn to recognize what his own preconceptions were. It also helped him to question where they came from and to consider how they might be different from others.

Making a safe and stimulating environment for this kind of reflective exploration can be very beneficial.

The third point is that participating in research or simply reading existing literature can help increase an understanding of the dimensions along which cultural differences are found and how much people vary on those dimensions. Marci explains her experience with this:

> I have learned so much more in the last 5 years (since 2000) with the just newly published things that people are putting out there. I've picked up on a few things early on, but only in the last five years have I gone to a totally different level and had a lot more awareness, and more specific things about intercultural communication. *I've learned more vocabulary to describe the situations, from what I have read and workshops that I have attended*. …Once you understand the concepts of things like high and low context communication, …[you] understand more about the difficulties [you've] been having. (Marci)

Marci describes how she thinks instructional designers need more vocabulary to describe what is happening. She sees increasing vocabulary of culturally related terms as a way to achieve an increased cultural awareness, and found that both the classes that she has taken and the research she has read have helped her in this regard.

Fourth, more emphasis can be placed on using instructional design models and methods that allow for more interaction with (and empathy for) the learner in every stage of development. Carrie states how the need for this was one of the first things she became aware of when working cross-culturally, and relates her application of a model that seems to give more respect to the learner's point of view:

> When working cross-culturally, the first thing I became strongly aware of is that instructional design takes things very much from the teacher's point of view, and not from the learners' point of view. I became aware that the imposition of things like the ASSURE model and things like these models and even Gagne's events of instruction onto a learning situation is really imposing a pre-existing framework on the situation where you really haven't delved into the intricacies of the person's understanding of learning, or the contextualization factors, or any of the other factors that might have an influence on the learning situation. *A lot of the*

> *theories put the instructional designer in the mindset of the teacher and their structure, instead of the learners.* Yes, very much we are driven by the need to complete this unit of study, this product, as a package to be delivered, rather than as something that is a learning experience or that is going to transform lives, that is one of the first things you realize. Other models (e.g. Kalbian experiential model) take things from the learner point of view, focusing on movement through cycles of concrete experience, observation, contextualization, and reflection on that experience. So you are constantly moving through iterative cycles of experience. It is not only a very good learning model and one that works very well in many situations, but it is also one that seems to be in more respect to the learner's point of view. In fact I used that in one of my studies with indigenous Australian students and designing web materials for them. And *using this model worked very well for two reasons: 1 – it reflected more closely what the learner's were experiencing and 2 – it gave me a way of including in my instructional design process the understanding and the voices of those people*. So, rather than being a solo thing, like where I was working on it myself as an instructional designer, it became a joint, a dual task, a two way process. Because I would say to the student's "How did that work?" I'd say to the web-designers "What did you think of that? Where do we go from here?" what was your observation – let's get the feedback back into the system – the student's observation and reflection… That is one way that working cross-culturally has influence my instructional design. That is what needs to happen is looking more from the learners' point of view, and finding models that are more that way. (Carrie)

Carrie feels strongly about the need for more of the leaner perspective to be integrated into the instructional design process.

Other instructional designers confirm Carrie's point, noticing the extent to which instructional design theories typically have assumed a teacher perspective. One researcher recently presented on his attempts to use learner stories as an approach to steer away from the formula-centered IDT past, and include a greater degree of empathy and imagination into his design process (Parish, 2005). Another IDT educator is trying to put more focus on learners by steering away from traditional IDT theories (Elizabeth Boling, Personal Communication, March and October 2005). This educator takes a unique approach as she teaches an introduction to instructional design class at Indiana University. Whereas she used to begin her class by teaching various models for instructional design (e.g. from Dick and Carey, Gagne, and so on), she now does something completely

different. Before she teaches them anything about instructional design, she has them pick a project. Then she simply asks them if they really know anything about the people's lives for whom they are designing instruction, if they have any solid knowledge about who these people are and where they are coming from in order to even begin messing with their lives in any way. Then she has them find out about the learners of their intended instruction, and she only gives them a few instructions for how they are to do this: initially write down as many of your assumptions as possible about what you expect the lives of these people to be like, go and find out about them in any way that you can think of, and then compare what you originally thought with what you found. It is an interesting approach which she finds valuable in helping IDT students identify and question their assumptions. She finds that learning to be aware of and adapt to learner differences helps instructional designers become better at creating appropriate and effective instructional for any group, local or foreign. Although user testing and audience analysis have always been a part of IDT, something about the current predominant mode of approach seems to miss a lot of the perspective of and empathy for the learner.

A fifth suggestion for increasing cultural sensitivity and awareness in the design process is to have multi-cultural design teams. Several of these participants mentioned how it was helpful to work in design teams that are composed of individuals from a variety of cultures, especially with people who were from the targeted group. Jill confirms this approach in her experience:

> When you are working in this context you are working with a counterpart who is from the culture you are designing instruction for. You hope some of your techniques are not coming across as too culturally specific, and so you rely on having a colleague who has an understanding of the students for who the materials were designed which would be more developed than your own understanding – so it is a collaborative effort. (Jill)

There is a benefit of having multi-cultural design teams, and this collaborative effort that Jill mentions. It increases the chances that both the instructional experience and the instructional designer will become more culturally sensitive.

A sixth option for developing more awareness is to engage in instruction that was created by those from another culture. Marci describes taking piano lessons in Mexico, how they took a completely different approach, and how she ended up preferring it. She summarizes her feelings about experiences like these:

> I want to ask American instructional designers if they have ever taken a course prepared by someone in a different culture or country? I wonder how they felt about it and what differences they noticed? I wonder if they can even see what it might be like for everyone else to take the kind of instruction that the US keeps putting out all the time? (Marci)

Although the British model of education has permeated a lot of the world through colonialization, there are still throughout the world other distinct and unique educational approaches. Acting as a learner in a foreign created instructional experience is a valuable way for instructional designers to spur more awareness of the differences that can exist, and of how learners from other cultures might feel when first encountering something that they design.

The seventh suggestion is that, in combination with many of the above activities, one of the best things instructional designers can do is still to actually move their physical body to an environment that is out of their normal comfort zone (even if it is within their own city or country). Shawn describes how one of their professors required field visits in combination with a class on cultural diversity:

> The debriefing is an important part of the cultural experience. One of our professors teaches a cultural diversity class, and one of the things she has people do is go to a black church service. And it doesn't matter what your religious affiliation is, if you are not African American and from the south, going to one of these services is completely different from anything that you have ever done

> before. Even if you say, yeah, but I go to church – well not like this you don't. The whole set up is different, you really walk through the door, and especially if you're a white boy, immediately you are a foreigner. And then if you're not southern black Baptist, it is so different that you think – who on earth are these people and what on earth are they doing? I thought I knew what a church service was. This teacher actually has her students do a couple of things – go to a synagogue as well… It might be a smart thing to do, actually, to just get people to go to a religious service other than the ones they are used to. Simply because religious belief is a very central core thing, tied so closely to identity, and so if you go somewhere where you are confronted with something very different, a lot of people would be very threatened. You do have to be very careful, incredibly careful with that. And do a lot of preparation before you send them out and a lot of debriefing when they come back…Even getting people out on a day trip to Canada, or even out of Georgia to New York, out of the place they are used to being. *There are always other things that you can do, but nothing can compensate for actually moving people somewhere else and telling them to get on with it.* (Shawn)

Activities like the ones that Shawn describes can be inexpensive, easily accessible, and could be assigned as part of classes anywhere in the US, and perhaps anywhere in the world where political situations allow.

Aside from the classroom, often the structure of jobs also requires travel to and immersion in a different culture. Jill explains how one of her jobs required travel as a part of her work

> It's called learning by doing…I spent a great deal of time traveling, first of all with other colleagues from here. My first long term project was in an African country as an advisor in an institution which also had a program with short term training inputs from specialized experts. So I was in the office helping people on the ground to find ways of running the new program, and every few weeks or a month an expert would come in from the outside and run a concentrated workshop on writing or editing or student record keeping or student support. And so I was able to learn from that at the same time as I was learning from colleagues on the ground and from the needs of the students I was working in behalf of. I found that very rewarding, in some ways it was at the expense of other people, but *there were consequences of needs and experiences that weren't always apparent unless you were on the ground.* The first time overseas was in Somalia in East Africa….Then I tried to adapt what I learned from that to other contexts, when I worked in another eastern African country. (Jill)

Jill and Shawn both expressed that there was added value to new cultural experiences when there was some type of scaffolding and debriefing, allowing them to learn from the insights of others (e.g. more experienced workers, the teacher, other students involved).

In relation to all of these suggestions, Troy brought out an interesting insight regarding what his approach would be to help instructional designers develop more cultural awareness. Instead of taking a deficit view, he prefers to take a more appreciative approach:

> What we're really asking is how do you change the culture of instructional designers, right? If the culture is "I can just make things, and what do I know about anyone else", how do you change that? The normal way that you change things is that you say, Ok here's where people are now and here's where I want people to be – so here's the gap, and so I've got to get them across the gap, right? That is the normal change process, and I think that it is wrong. I would never focus on how I am I going to overcome the limitations of this instructional designer to get him over to a place other than where he is right now. Instead, I would try something else, and there is an academic field actually that flips that whole needs assessment/ gap analysis/ problem based change approach around, it's called appreciative inquiry. And what it does is it tries to…well, for example, if I was to trying to do a change in a big corporation that's going down hill – instead of saying "Ok where do we want to be, how do we get from here to there?" *I would say, "When things were really working right around here, what was it like?" and I would put the focus there.* I would get the story telling about times they remember when things were going their way, I would put all the focus on that. So, my belief is that for someone to become culturally sensitive, they already have to have the seeds of cultural sensitivity within them already. If they don't, there's nothing I can do. If they do, then my role is to find them and help them grow. So I can't take someone from somewhere they are not to somewhere that I feel they might need to be. I can look to find what is already in them that is capable of being culturally sensitive and reinforce that and grow that. I know that is a really abstract answer, but it is the only way that you can be successful. You have to start from that mindset and then whether it's a workshop, whether it's one-on-one, whether it's in an email, it doesn't matter what techniques I use if I approach it from that perspective. (Troy)

The chances are likely that everybody does have a least a small seed of cultural sensitivity within them already. In this case, Troy provides a valuable insight into encouraging evaluation and change in a way that avoids some of the vulnerability that

people often feel in circumstances when major implicit and unexamined assumptions they have are being challenged. Each of the more formal options stated above, if implemented, can help instructional designers to recognize and further nurture greater seeds of awareness in themselves regarding the assumptions they are making.

In summary, these instructional designers have developed an awareness of cultural differences through a variety of informal and formal means. Even if that was not the original or anticipated goal, encounters with and immersion in different cultures, especially when coupled with a prior disposition that assumes it is really worth connecting with others who are different from oneself, can have powerful side effects in awakening cultural awareness. When developing cultural awareness is a more formal goal, it was suggested that instructional designers could participate in: cultural simulations, classes (both to learn more about other cultures and to learn more about yourself), cultural research, learner-centered design models, multi-cultural design teams, acting as a learner in a foreign designed course, and organized travel to unfamiliar environments (with debriefing included). It was through all of these formal and informal ways that these participants developed an increasing awareness and understanding of cultural differences.

What importance do cultural differences assume in the thinking of instructional designers?

In response to this question, the biggest finding of this research is that these participants feel a great tension (between the greater importance they feel cultural differences should play in their work versus the not so ideal realities of what they are supported or encouraged to do), and the examples they gave of what some of the barriers to being more culturally responsive are. Betty explained how she truly enjoys talking

about these things, but when she reflects on the reality of her own situation, she is overwhelmed at the opportunities and complexity of a more culturally diverse learning environment:

> I am so excited about [the questions about culture] you are asking at one point, but I also feel somewhat drained, because *the reality of cross-cultural teaching that I see as ideal is a million miles away from what I am doing, or am supported to do.* I'm given no additional support at all in recognition of the shift from a student population of 90% Australian born students to a student population of 50% overseas born students from all around the globe, some of whom can not speak English, some of whom can not even read or understand what I am saying, some of whom have no chance of succeeding unless they get into a group with other students who have a better command for the language, and come from the same language background as them. The university is getting so much money from these international students that there is big economic imperative to increase overseas student numbers. I don't think my Australian university is unique in the growing number of international students, but they do not allow us any more time or resources to customize our courses differently for the changing student population. (Betty)

Betty's comments are valuable because they highlight one of the most significant points brought out by a majority of participants in this study. Specifically, the attention of instructional designers to cultural differences is more limited than they would like because the actual practice of IDT is in many ways a lot messier than the ideal textbook situation learned in school. Many of the barriers stem from (a) the over-emphasis on mere content development as the center of IDT practice, which has influenced (b) a relative lack of emphasis on learner experience and evaluation in real-world practice, and even led to (c) the creation of less than ideal roles that instructional designers assume in the larger organizational structures involved. Each of these three barriers will be discussed in turn.

Barrier #1: IDT Emphasis on Content Development

There is significant evidence that the impact of cultural concerns is limited because of the context in which instructional designers are educated and the way they

typically conceive of their practice. It was already touched upon previously, but many of the instructional design models and methods assume the role of the teacher. In addition, traditional instructional design models and rhetoric assume a level of objectivity and determinism, seeing the main project as molding content, which influences instructional designers to think design decisions can be made in isolation from the context in which they are applied. The result has been that instructional designers are quite frequently isolated physically and mentally from the learners for whom they are designing instruction. Carrie gives a good example of this:

> Sometimes instructional designers, and models they use put them in the position of teacher, and *even though the model says to do a needs analysis, it often gets pushed aside, because it is not the focal point of the model*… I've met instructional designers who have just gone in, developed something, and then said "It didn't work." And then I'd say, "Well, who are the learners?" I had a very interesting case with a colleague of mine at the university, who was designing for professionals who were working in the health industry and just had 3 or 4 hours in the evening. It didn't work and she didn't understand why. And so I asked her, "Did you actually profile the learners before you started? Did you introduce them to learning online? Have they worked learning online before?" "Ahh, I didn't know that mattered – I assumed they had." Well, they hadn't. "Do they have computers at home? Where did they go for computers?" You know, all the basic questions. *She was quite experienced, and still didn't spend any time on the contextual issues at all. So they spent hours and hours and lots of money on something that fell flat*. (Carrie)

There is a tendency to neglect or minimize contextual issues, unless it is somehow the focus of the design model. The focus in current education and practice of instructional design is not on context and on experience, but on developing a product and structuring content. Troy explains how instructional designers often get confused by putting too much focus on developing, and on why he thinks we need to be more careful about how we think about ourselves and educate those going into the IDT field:

> I think developing is only one step of the design process – taking the content and rendering it into digital media. This is a huge thing, where *our field really needs to be careful of how we think and talk about ourselves.* The ADDIE model says

> Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate, and we go Design-Develop, it's just like soup and sandwich. And in truth most instructional designers, in the brief history of our field, have spent most of their time developing – staying up most of the night looking at professors' crappy notes and trying to turn them into slides or power points, or something. First, that is what developing is. Developing means "to make manifest", to take something that was just a plan, an idea, and to make it into something, and we're still very hung up on that. But we could be at a point, for a number of reasons, that we should seriously be rethinking this. Number one, *in the real learning experience the content is just part of it.* Also it is absolutely nuts that almost every university in America has a small growing staff of instructional designers supporting faculty members doing introduction to Western civilization over and over again, making the same stuff, this is ridiculous. (Troy)

Troy obviously feels that the value in what instructional designers do is not simply in how they develop and structure content, although it is an important part. He further explains how more and more multinational publishing companies are taking over simple content development role by creating e-packs or courselettes, in order to scale-up the content. Already a huge selection of courses can be ordered, and along with the textbook comes a digital shadow of that course, complete with power-points, quizzes, and everything else imaginable already done. All teachers need to do is load it into something like Blackboard or WebCT. And although these publishing companies think that the value is in the content, Troy expresses an alternative opinion:

> MIT, by putting all their courses and content online, is clearly saying that the value in MIT is not the content, but the experience. But the multinational publishing companies will never see that because they have to believe the value is in what they own. And so they are creating complete courses in everything. The way that it is being localized or culturalized? The answer to that is zero.
> Those guys are actually making some pretty good stuff though, that we should take and adapt, and fit into overall engaging experiences, because as I was trying to say in the first place, *in the real learning experience the content is just part of it.* Unfortunately when people say develop, they usually mean "make that content". I would think of myself more of an instructional designer than an instructional developer. Or there is actually now a new occupation, and it is actually a sub-group of the American Institute for Graphic Arts that's called an "Experience Designer".
> One of the huge influential things I got out of Utah State was Andy Gibbons saying that *in the future the true role of an instructional designer is designing*

> *instructional experiences.* And that is so deceptively subtle but it is the whole ball game right there. And you just can never forget that. (Troy)

As Troy points out, designing experiences is a lot different than developing content. It perhaps introduces a level of complexity and ambiguity that is more challenging and time consuming to think about. In struggling to understand what really happens when students engage in educational experiences, Betty and Rose added their views:

> I think about the implications of who is doing the learning and in what ways. A lot of what people are learning is not actually what is being taught. *Perhaps the most important thing they are learning is not the content that is delivered.* It is too limited a notion to assume that we are the only ones coming in with some useful knowledge…(Betty)

> Most of the time in instruction we only see the top 5% of what is happening, and the rest of it is happening very subterranean, but that is where the real and substantial exchanges are happening. How do we find some way to make links to those exchanges and the existing social networks? It is almost like it is the white noise in the system that is most important, that enriches the learning. Perhaps instead of thinking we are building the pyramid of knowledge that is getting bigger and bigger, we should look at something like a model where it is all there already. Perhaps a more accurate model is thinking of ourselves as drilling holes down into a swamp, and the richness is in the swamp. And can we ultimately (as foreigners, or someone not in the structure – working with people who are of different ages, cultural groups, etc) ever really tap into that knowledge structure, and somehow bring it all together in some kind of direction that promotes meaningful learning? (Rose)

Both Betty and Rose also think that the content is not the most valuable part of the educational experience. They expressed how naïve it probably is to think that the real value in what we are bringing others is primarily the content we structure for them.

In reading the most recent work of people like Schwen, Kalman, and Evans (2005), who build upon the work of people like Lave and Wenger (1991), Brown and Duguid (2000), and others (see also Vygotsky, 1934; Jahoda, 1993), there is an increasing emphasis on the fact that one of the most valuable elements of the educational experience is the social nature of learning. The social networks are often highlighted as a

means by which motivation is derived, identity is developed, and tacit knowledge is gained. This is an area that IDT programs have traditionally tended to neglect in the instructional design frameworks and templates they have taught novice instructional designers. And if there is an increasing emphasis on the social nature of these instructional experiences, clearly there is much value in understanding how culture influences the nature of our social habits, interactions and expectations. Unfortunately, making the change to a new instructional design paradigm (or altering the current ones) in order to allow for more cultural sensitivity is going to be rather difficult, especially when considering the ways in which the history of IDT, with its general over focus on content development, has influenced the next two barriers: a lack of emphasis that is placed on evaluation, and also the very limited role instructional designers play in the overall organizational structure of the projects in which they work.

Barrier #2: Lack of Evaluation in Real-World Practice

The heavy value placed on content development, in relative isolation from context, means that less emphasis is placed on any evaluation. Consequently evaluation frequently gets squeezed out under the pressure of budget and time constraints. In general, too many instructional designers still believe that they can separate evaluation from development. Because learner experience is considered only in vague and general terms, time schedules and budget limitations often underestimate and shortchange formative and summative evaluation activities. The following quotes from Joey and Jill illustrate some of these values, pressures and current realities that make culturally sensitive IDT difficult:

> *In the reality of budgets and deadlines, evaluation does very often get squeezed out*. Or on the other hand, there might be a desperate need for HIV training or training for refugees where people don't want to wait until it is perfected. There is

> the pressure there, where you could loose some of the quality assurance, but you have the pressure to finish, and things get cut where they shouldn't be. (Joey)
>
> The ideal situation is that when you are preparing the materials for the first time you create a pilot testing phase that is planned into the development process. Now, *often this kind of pre-test gets squeezed out because you never have enough time to do what you want to do even if you want to do it*. But in theory, and also to some extent in practice, you would have a piloting phase where you would perhaps have a small number of users represented and you would design an observation of them with the materials so you could see what difficulty they have, but it doesn't often happen. That is good practice, but if it doesn't happen, then you try to use the first delivery cycle as a pilot, and try to build in to find the opportunity of time and resources to learn from experience of the first cohort of learners so you can adapt and correct the materials in the future. But *it tends to be the evaluation that goes of the end of the schedule and then gets chucked*. (Jill)

It is obvious in these comments that both Jill and Joey would like to have more time and money to investigate in greater detail if the things that they are designing are really going to meet the intended needs of learners or not, but that they also feel a tension from their reality not matching up with their ideal. Betty describes this by saying how she feels as if she has no time for anything other than "crisis management", and cultural sensitivity does not really fall into that category:

> I'm so overloaded in my mind with the realities of my day to day work, I don't have time to go in with a research question around cultural differences. The situation is…I go in on day one and find I have a range of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. I sometimes have to go against the system…and assess things in different ways. But on a personal level it is crisis management on the run. (Betty)

It seems common to feel overwhelmed by pressures with deadlines and budgets. In the desire to simplify and cut things out of the schedule, often the needs analysis and evaluation activities are the first to go. The question then posed by Shawn is, "how have you any idea that anything you are doing has any effect?" He said,

> [ISD background and training] should facilitate [effectiveness in cross-cultural settings] if you do an adequate assessment of your learners. I think the whole problem, and this is what I see so much, particularly with people working in industry – "Oh, we don't have time." They don't have time to do assessment at

> the beginning and they for sure don't have time to do assessment at the end. And part of the difficulty of that is, *how have you any idea that anything you are doing has any effect?* …And *so much of the time I hear, "Oh, we don't have time" Well, if you don't have time to really learn about who you are designing training for, you are wasting your time.* (Shawn)

Shawn feels that a lack of adequate assessment of learners is equivalent with wasting time. The reality of the current situation is that there is a tendency to let analysis and evaluations evaporate as budget and time concerns grow. The following section will explore how a big part of the lack of contact and time with learners should also be attributed to the way work scenarios are structured.

Barrier #3: Organizational Structures and the Role of Instructional Designers

One other major obstacle to any cultural sensitivity is the type of role that instructional designers are asked to play in the organizational structure of the projects they are assigned to. It is not only the instructional designers who tend to focus on content over learner experience, but often the organizations that employ them naively do so as well. Frequently, the instructional designers have absolutely no role in the initial audience analysis by which the goals and medium of instruction are chosen, nor do they actually take part in the implementation or the evaluation of the instruction, if evaluation even takes place at all. Carrie expresses her view that instructional design as employment is basically a compromise, due to the pre-existing constraints imposed on projects by the clients when the instructional designer receives them:

> You see, *when you are working in a large institution, with a tight budget and limited resources, you very often are not given a choice*. You are told, "Develop a written or print based series of modules for this group of learners." And that's it. So what do you do there? So it might be that for this specific group of learners an online course paradigm is really better, or an interactive television component, or event learning mode, where they actually wanted to be on campus. So, you, all the time, should be aware of the main purpose, and you, all the time, have to come back to the fundamentals: is this medium suitable for the learners, and is my instructional paradigm really working? *Instructional design,* however, *if you are*

> *in an employment situation, basically is a compromise*. There are pressures there. (Carrie)

Carrie expresses how this is often the case, where certain decisions are dictated to the instructional designer, and that designer is merely expected to carry out the orders.

Certain less than helpful expectations and structures can be seen in both business and academic instructional design projects. The following descriptions give more details regarding specific situations where organizational structures precluded instructional designers' contact with the learner, and thus any real cultural sensitivity. Shawn describes one company that he visited:

> With one class I took, I went to visit a bunch of business throughout the city, of course a lot of major corporations are headquartered here. We went to the headquarters of an "international corporation" and their training people talked to us. And the way that it was set up, they had internal clients say, "We want training to do X" So the training people would design the training and put it in the box and give it to the people who asked for it. *The instructional designers were not responsible to do any of the assessment of who the learners were, they were not even responsible for delivering the training.* They were quite happily saying to us, "Oh yeah, we designed the training for a three day course that we know was delivered in a two hour lecture." And you might say "that's nonsense, they had no feedback, not even a smile sheet". I would say, "If someone walks into here today and said, 'show me how you even add one cent's value to this company?'" they had nothing. I'm not even going to tell you who it was, but it was an extremely large international company. Now since that time, they have gotten a lot better, but even so, the fact that they were operating like that is just astonishing. (Shawn)

Probably for a variety of unexamined reasons, many corporations see the people responsible for creating training as capable of doing a meaningful job by focusing solely on manipulating the content, regardless of the context in which it is delivered. Jill explains how this is often true even in international training:

> The context in which we are working is usually in a team that is working under the auspices of an provider in the county concerned, the ministry of education, or a national college, or faculty at a university, and unless it is a project which we have designed and found the funding ourselves, it is not necessarily up to us to decide what happens to the program after we have made our contribution. So we might be asked to help with teacher development, and then after that phase is over

> they say "thanks for that, off you go," and then the institution concerned makes the decisions from there on out. We may hear about it in the future, maybe not. *We don't always get involved in the whole process throughout design, delivery, and evaluation*. Unless it is one of our own projects, but usually it is not. (Jill)

Occasionally corporations have employed a policy of taking material and "globalizing" it, essentially trying to make it acceptable for any generic audience, and then using local facilitators to "localize" it to that specific audience. This concept of using a local instructor to help customize the material is one approach to cross-cultural instruction that has received increasing attention in the literature (Dennis, Bichelmeyer, Henry, Cakir, Korkmaz, Watson, Bunnage, 2005; Ho & Burniske, 2005; Selinger, 2005). This does not, however, completely eliminate the need for audience analysis and evaluation.

Misconceptions of the role of an instructional designer seem to extend beyond the corporate sphere and into the universities. Carrie gives a grim description of many of the work scenarios she has seen for instructional designers in the universities, determining that there need to be higher level reforms if cultural sensitivity is ever going to have the weight that she feels it should have:

> For me, and so many institutions worldwide, you have to take it to a higher level in a sense. Within an institution there has to be recognition that the job is actually quite difficult, and quite challenging. So for example, in Australia, many instructional designers have been demoted to a non-academic position. They call instructional design a kind of technologist. And this immediately gives everyone else in the university *the impression that instructional design is simply a matter of all one-size fits all, quick fix, put it on blackboard, electrify it, and then suddenly you've got a program, you've got a course.* And *many instructional designers have never even seen a student, or talked with them*… There is a lack of connection, which is the first thing, between policy level, resourcing, and status of instructional designers. Many of the instructional designers have never even met students and secondly, they don't receive feedback on the course directly. So they design a course for a teacher, the teacher goes and teaches it, and the teacher gets the feedback on the course, how well or bad that it was, and very often the instructional designer never gets the feedback at all. *There are all these gaps and loops, disconnect all along the line.* It is absolutely extraordinary. And I put it down many times to bad management, lack of resources, poor conceptualization of the actual role of an instructional designer. Pretty serious stuff, really. (Carrie)

This is a pretty serious thing, if instructional designers really have no contact with students at all, and if they never see any feedback with regard to the materials and educational experiences that they help to create. What do they think their role really is, and how are they supposed to improve? Ian refers to how bad it has been for him as he has observed the role of many instructional designers, referring to it as "Mickey-Mouse" instructional design, and his feeling that the current approach takes away from the possibility of "dignifying any course of academic studies currently offered [in IDT]…" Betty expresses similar frustration in this way:

> *The instructional designers are taught so much out of the context of what is happening that they are often out of touch, isolated from much of the realities…It is kind of nonsense, to be honest with you, in a kind of a way.* The instructional design model many of them are using is trying to figure out where they can put puzzles or quizzes into the learning activities. The budget they have for it is so limited that there is no way they can invest as much as they need to in terms of time with the instructor, or in terms of the time the instructor has to give to them. Even finding time for a five minute phone conversation with the instructor is difficult. With the time and resource restrictions there is no way we are going to be able to adequately approach any of the multi-cultural stuff. (Betty)

If the role of instructional designers continues to be so limited and isolated from learners, then distance education will succeed in being distant from the needs and expectations of learners.

The situation is such that some instructional designers are seriously considering the possibility of going by a different title so as to not be associated with the baggage that IDT has come to be know by (Burnham, 2005; Gorski and Clark, 2001; Subramony 2004). Troy mentioned a new profession that is emerging called "Experience Design", which might cater to a view that instruction is more than course content, and that instructional designers have more responsibility to consider the actual experiences and perceptions of the learners.

Although the above depictions do not represent all instructional designers, they do highlight a big problem regarding the way in which instructional designers conceive of their own practice, and the ways in which others perceive them. Even in the better circumstances in which instructional designers might be in more control, there is still a very good likelihood that budget and time limitations pressure them to be so concerned with forming the content, that they do not adequately know how the learner responds to it, before moving on to another project.

So what importance do cultural differences assume in the thinking of these instructional designers? Although they do feel they are important, there is a great disconnect between the ideal and the actual practice. These designers feel a kind of cognitive dissonance or tension between what weight they think cultural issues should play in their thinking contrasted with how they actually work. Organizational systems are structured in such a way that instructional designers are often isolated from the learners and from many of the key decisions regarding the end product and/or experience. Often under the pressures of time and budget restraints, instructional designers leave out any evaluation efforts (before or after instructional implementation), which limits their ability to really understand and be sensitive to any differences in learners (including cultural ones). These barriers to cultural sensitivity are thought to be partly a reflection of the over-emphasis that the education and practice of IDT puts on developing instructional content, with little regard to the context in which it will be taught and learned. In the next section, I will discuss how the participants interviewed are striving to overcome these barriers, providing examples of the ways in which their understanding of cultural issues tends to influence their practice.

How does understanding cultural differences affect instructional design practice?

In all this talk about cultural differences, can anything in IDT be held constant? Does every instructional experience and design process need restructuring for customization in different contexts? How much can we trust about what we learn in instructional design when working cross-culturally, and which things do we need to question and reexamine? These participants offered a unique perspective, that there are some general principles for instruction which seem to apply in any culture, but that a lot more effort needs to be put into "building bridges" between these generally useful principles and the various learner contexts. Derek said it this way,

> I believe that good instructional design principles and techniques are universal, cross-cultural. It doesn't matter where in the world they are coming from, but you need to find where the people are coming from, what their expectations are coming into it so that you can know what bridges to build. (Derek)

In this section, the metaphor of building bridges will be explained, along with a description of some of the associated implications on the instructional design practice and process. In particular, building bridges in cross-cultural instruction stimulates (a) separating deeper principles from particular application, (b) identifying gaps where bridges are needed (specifically through immersion in the culture, integrating learner feedback in front-end learner analysis, and formative evaluation), (c) allowing for more flexibility in the design process, and (d) educating other stakeholders (e.g. the client and subject matter expert) so they are invested in the bridge-building too. The first three points here (i.e. a, b, and c) are partially in response to barriers #1 and #2 (identified in the previous section) and the fourth point (i.e. d) is partially in response to barrier #3.

Separating Deeper Principles from Particular Application

Some might argue that more debate and research is needed to determine whether or not there are universal principles in instructional design. The general consensus of the participants of this study, however, is that although culture might influence initial receptivity to various forms of instruction (e.g. if you are only used to lectures, then participation and application might be more difficult to get used to at first), that does not mean that other forms of instruction are not valuable (e.g. once learners get used to participation and application, they can find it very helpful). Derek explained why he feels that people might disagree with this, and why they too quickly make judgments and statements that certain forms of learning might not work at all in certain cultures:

> To a Western educator, when they come to a Chinese classroom, because it looks apparently so different to what they are used to, sometimes they will also think that what they have learned in the West is not applicable to the Chinese. And I have actually seen this in articles and presentations where people talk about these kinds of things. For example, you have this Western scholar who has been doing collaborative learning or project based learning or whatever, and they went to China for a couple of weeks and they come back to say, this kind of thing is not going to work in China. And I think what they have missed is they want the concept or theory to apply as is, as it is in the Western settings. *They don't understand the principles behind those theories enough to adapt it to a different culture. If they understood it well enough, then they could actually see that there are applications that work if presented right.* (Derek)

Derek indicates that if people do not understand the deeper principles behind the instructional design theories, they might mistakenly think they do not apply in another cultural context. They seem to embed the *application of a principle* in a Western setting with the *principle itself*, and so when the same *application* of the principle seems difficult or impossible, instructional designers might mistakenly consider the *principle itself* as inapplicable. Derek says we need to understand the principles deeply enough that we can separate them from particular applications and be open to alternative forms of application

in different cultural contexts. He said that now when he attempts to teach a "Western concept" in a Chinese setting, he will try to find both Western examples and Chinese examples to use, finding ways in which principles can be translated into different contexts.

In making this point, Derek gave a specific example of how a focus only on differences can obscure our ability to learn from others and recognize what principles we might share in common. He refers this time to the attitude of a prominent scholar from Taiwan toward American educational practice:

> …whenever you go to a different culture, you do need to adapt, and if you can look at what the other culture has to offer, you can be learning. Years ago I attended a conference in Washington DC. It was a conference sponsored by Taiwan about education, and they gave a lot of grants to Chinese to attend. One comment I remember was made by a senior guy from Taiwan. *Someone was making a presentation about American education, and this Taiwanese guy raised his voice and said that there is nothing we can learn from the US, because they are so different.* Of course, in the Chinese group, he was more respected, so people tried to respect his opinion, but at the same time, *everybody knew he did not know what he was talking about. Of course there are things we can learn from US culture, from this educational system, but sometimes people can be so unable to see the principles behind the differences and just get distracted from the apparent differences so they don't see what we can learn from each other.* (Derek)

It seems that regardless of what culture an individual comes from, they always need to be careful not to automatically disregard as unimportant things that are different, or view people that do things differently in a deficit kind of way. The tendency to be distracted by the apparent differences can cloud our vision of what we can learn from each other and from what all people might have in common.

In defense of the view that there are some generally useful instructional design principles, these participants turned to their experiences. I have already referred to a specific class that Troy was recently involved in where not a single student was Caucasian, all of them were international students from various parts of the world (e.g.

Korea, mainland China, Malaysia, Uzbekistan, etc). There was an emphasis or requirement in the class to participate, and he conducted quantitative research on how often each student would post their own comments to the discussion board, read the comments of other class members, and respond to the comments of other class members. Here is a synopsis of his experience, shared again in order to make the point that people can change in order to interact in new ways:

> All of those students posted to the discussion every single week, they all read each other's post every single week, and never once replied to another student's post… *they broke through the hesitation for public self-expression and the feeling that they were only supposed to learn from the teacher, in just one semester, and realized there was value to spending their precious time reading the other student's posts*. But the idea that they would actually write something in response to it, I think that is a third level of interaction that they were not prepared for yet. But we'll get there, we'll get there… As far as students, and this really gets to the heart of your whole inquiry I suppose in many ways, they can change. And Asians are interesting because, of course, there are always stereotypes that the Asians are going to just sit there and be quiet, that they're never going to interact, never speak up in class, that this is just their cultural nature. Well, I think that is all just a lot of B.S., and *from lots of experiences I know that there might be a cultural habit that someone brings with them out of their environment, but everyone can change, if they want to, in the right supportive situation.* (Troy)

Troy's feeling is that although it might be more difficult than Westerners might assume for learners from some countries to interact in new ways, especially when technology makes their participation so public, he disagreed that they never would see the value of it or be willing to engage in it.

This feeling resonates with Jill's experience as well. Jill had this to comment to make,

> *I'd have to say that despite everything that everyone says about cultural appropriateness and being sensitive to other people's culture, when you come down to it there are some common sense rules and techniques that you can propose to people and find ways of making useful to people in different contexts and maybe even different educational levels*. That might be a program designing materials for people without much of an educational background, or it might be a program for a university level student – but there are some guidelines which you

> can extract from your own and other peoples' experience and practice and propose to people and say think about this and see if it's an idea that resonates in your own context. You know there are styles of writing for people who are learning from off the page instead of face-to-face. And ways of making materials more than just reading, making them active. (Jill)

Jill proposes that there are some universal ways to design instruction. In her interview, she mentioned things as simple as structuring information so that it is clear, providing prompts to help people find their way around, keeping it from being tedious or long, including active components so it is more than just memorization, anticipating difficult parts and giving more supports there, and providing ways for students to get help with difficulties in order to keep learning. After having said this, however, she did want to make clear that we should always check to make sure our assumptions of what is universal really are, "[These suggestions] apply to some extent universally. On the other hand it is terribly important to make sure they do actually coincide with what's proper and appropriate in other people's contexts." In other words, the way in which instructional designers apply each of her suggestions might vary depending on context.

Part of the way in which instructional designers function in this environment is by remembering that learners and clients play a significant part in the application of principles. When speaking about instructional design it is too easy to use terminology that takes a deficit view of seeing learners as objects that can be manipulated in such a way that certain inputs automatically lead to certain outputs. Although still skeptical of knowing exactly which principles were universal and which ones were not, Joey described his approach to working cross-culturally which respects learner choice and agency. He mentioned how although he thinks his outside perspective adds value to his role as an instructional designer, it is also up to learners and clients to help decide what to do with it:

> I do feel like it is part of my job to say, well, I know you haven't done it this way before, but look at the potential benefits are. If we can get people to see a different perspective based on where we are coming from, then they can decide how far and fast they want to change. *I feel it is my job to introduce new innovations, even if challenging, and then we can have a debate, and I can recognize the final decision is not with me, but with the people in the country with themselves.* It becomes easier as you become more familiar with the country and culture itself. (Joey)

Joey has a healthy balance of recognizing that although he might add value by introducing new innovations in instruction to a different culture, the ultimate decision for how much and how quickly they want to accept it lies with the people themselves. As instructional designers are hired, they need to bring something to the table that offers value. At the same time, they need to be humble and responsible enough to accept that there might be better approaches for application, and necessary initial steps before people can even consider some of those options.

The participants interviewed as a part of this study make a strong case that there are deeper instructional design principles (e.g. including things like participation and application) which need to be separated from particular application. At the same time, they automatically couple this with the need to find out where people are coming from so you can know where and how to build bridges from their current ability and expectations to the instructional experience they are about to engage in. Finding these gaps where bridges are needed is the topic of the next section.

Identifying Gaps where Bridges are Needed

Building bridges is a matter of finding where the current expectations and abilities of learners from different cultures stand, and then giving them the additional support needed to participate successfully in the instructional experience at hand. Although it is

easy to just focus on all of the differences between cultures and feel frustration over even where to start, Shawn discusses how building bridges is feasible and smart:

> You might start to think, oh my gosh, can I teach anything? How far back do I actually have to go? Well, it's not quite that bad. *But you need to be much more aware, as you are moving through the instruction, who these people are, and where the danger points are. And when I say danger points, it is places where people can go off the rails unintentionally*…You need to be careful to not situate them in a foreign concept, and then they don't get it, and you just move on to the next thing…If that happens online and that thing is a prerequisite for the next thing, then you are in trouble… *You need to look at where are we starting from, because we are not all starting from the same place.* (Shawn)

As Shawn points out, the most important bridges to build are at those points where people might unintentionally misunderstand. And it is not because they are stupid, or because they are not putting in full effort, it is because something is situated in a foreign concept that they are not used to. Instructional designers need to be careful of those things, whether it is in the content itself (e.g. examples given, terminology used, etc), or in the instructional design strategies (e.g. expecting participation, using application activities, etc), so that they can be more explicit about what is expected and provide the additional support that might be necessary to get learners to that point.

In finding where to build bridges with the content, Jill emphasized the importance of knowing where the materials do not resonate enough with the learners' experiences and consequently will not feel the instruction is applicable to their life situation and not feel ownership of the concepts learned. Jill said,

> When materials are written by people from a different country than the learners, it can be very hard to find case studies and examples and illustrations of what you are teaching that will actually resonate with the learners and their experiences. And *one thing we emphasize is to make the materials very relevant to the learners, to make it possible for them to use their life experience and their work experience and their everyday life environment* to contribute to what they are learning from the program. So *very often students who are trying to learn from materials written somewhere else can be very put off by the fact that the illustrations, the examples,*

> *the case studies do not seem to be relevant to what their needs to understand or learn to be helpful in their own context.* (Jill)

Jill's statement indicates that the illustrations, examples and case studies might be some key areas where bridges can be built. Joey correctly said that it is not always a bad to introduce foreign examples, just that they often need more support and explanation than we typically would expect.

Shawn recapitulates what questions he asks in determining where the gaps are that need bridges built:

> So what are the starting points we need to look at? What is it you are trying to get them to do? *What is your objective, and is it anywhere within their frame of reference?* What is their frame of reference? This is something that we tend to skip so much of – because we assume that if they are already this far along, of course we assume they will know how to do this, or know how to do that. But thinking about prerequisite knowledge, how are we situating what it is that we are teaching them. *Are we situating it in a context that also assumes a whole range or breadth of knowledge and experiences that parts of our target population might not have? How are we expecting them to even behave in the course, and is that within their frame of reference? There are all those kinds of things that we assume, but which we need to find out where they are coming from.* (Shawn)

Shawn again emphasized the importance of discovering what the learners' frame of reference is, in order to see if we are assuming they have a prerequisite knowledge or experience that they do not, in which case building bridges would become paramount. With so many of these instructional designers, they did not fear to cautiously introduce unfamiliar content or instructional design strategies, but they did recognize that in cross-cultural instruction, they might have to put a lot more effort than they otherwise would have into finding the gaps, and into building bridges to the frameworks of the learners expectations and experiences. Although the second question addressed in this dissertation (i.e. how instructional designers become aware of cultural differences) answers to some extent how these instructional designers figure out what the learners frame of reference is

(i.e. how to find the gaps), I will briefly summarize three of the most commonly mentioned ones: (a) immersing oneself in the culture, (b) integrating learner feedback in up front analysis, and (c) integrating learner feedback through formative evaluation.

Immersion in the Culture. Ian aptly points to the fact that there is still no easy formulas for finding all the gaps or differences among the learners that are necessary in making design decisions: "There is no royal road to learning, sire – merely the plod…go live among them for a while, and watch and listen. Talk to others who have been there; failing that, read up well before you go." Although it is not simple or easy, immersing oneself in a different culture does increase the likelihood of identifying where there are differences in frames of reference and where bridges need to be built (Chambers, 1983). With regard to building bridges to instructional design strategies, Rose gave a very specific example of how important this concept was to her and how she went about finding the gaps and commonalities during her process of developing instruction for a variety of learners in Egypt. Some of her experience has already been quoted, but it is of particular importance to the topic at hand. She said,

> I was very fearful in the beginning that my assumptions about what was 'right' would cause the kinds of learning strategies I was introducing to fail. So *I remember grabbing on to things I was learning about the culture to find commonalities*. So when I knew that it was a polar opposite strategy that I was trying to present and see if it would work, for example, would constructivism with technology work in a traditional zero technology environments. *For this project in Egypt, you know I was bringing a Western methodology and set of assumptions to a Middle-eastern environment, and so what I found myself doing was surrounding myself with the Egyptians and visiting many local environments and trying to find where the two polar opposites met. What were bridges that would help me to just introduce some of these ideas*, so it wouldn't be a complete rejection or too much of a learning curve, too steep that nobody would meet? So I found myself looking for bridges, and *interesting enough, one of the initial bridges was mobile technology*. Because the one technology that has been hugely embraced by Egypt in a very short time frame has been the cell phone. And I wanted to know why, and I found out that they are hugely communicative people and they have wide

> networks of friends and family, and they love to talk and they love to be in group situations. *They are enormously social, and it is interesting to note the fact that the British had introduced this completely opposite educational system that they can't get around. I was very happy to discover this because by encouraging them to work collaboratively, I was building on one of their strengths, and it was something that they could easily relate to. And that's kind of what I did, I found that there was a way in, an entry point, and it was easy or innate to them.* So by having a model they saw the reasonability of it, but the application of it is much more difficult, because it is much harder to get around the requirements of the system. For me [working cross-culturally] changed the process of instructional design, looking for bridges, doing user assessments in a new way, …and I think the big hindrance for people is unfamiliarity. (Rose)

Rose pointed to her desire to get to know the Egyptian culture so she could know where there might be gaps and natural bridges to get people to participate more in formal learning environments. Through immersing herself in this culture by surrounding herself with Egyptians and local environments, she recognized that the current educational system (introduced by the British) seemed to be so different from the inherently social nature of most Egyptians (as exemplified in their wholesale acceptance and quick diffusion of mobile technologies). So she used their social nature as a bridge to integrate them into a learning environment that was more social.

Rose continued to describe her experience, this time with regards to using creativity as an instructional strategy:

> When I introduced the idea of creating a lesson plan, the teachers said, "what is it exactly that you want me to do?" I would say, "It's up to you"…So the whole dialogue around creativity is very difficult for people who have never been [expected to do it in formal learning environments]– they may have heard about it, but never actually been able to be creative, or solve problems, or do research or have any kind of independence in their learning. So for a lot of people coming from a lot of these traditional environments (Chinese or Egyptians), *just the concept of creativity, or being outside of a traditional memorization environment, is really, really difficult*. They don't have any *problem solving skills*, they don't have any *dynamic communication skills*, they've never *worked in a te*am – *that is where the bridges are so critically important.* Because you know what, they do have families where they solve problems all the time, but they would never think of the things they do personally in terms of relating to what they do professionally [or in education]. (Rose)

In her comments, Rose explained how immersion helped her discover that if she was expecting learners to engage in creative problem-solving behavior, or use dynamic communication skills while working with a team, or anything that is out of their normal educational experience, creating bridges to support them to incrementally engage in this new type of instruction is critically important. Both Rose and Marci mentioned how teaching metacognitive skills is one way to build these kinds of bridges, making sure everyone was on the same page when it came to things like even how to brainstorm effectively. Derek also spoke about when creativity is taught and expected, how important it is to show a wide variety of application ideas, so that people do not confuse the principle itself with the application of that principle. In all of these examples, immersion played a big part in identifying both the gaps and potential bridges.

Learner Feedback in Front-end Analysis. Another essential way to identify gaps and bridges was through a greater emphasis on learner feedback in front-end analysis. In other words, both this and the next section are a call for better evaluation throughout the process of design. Although learner analysis is talked about in the formal education of instructional designers and is already a part of most instructional design models, there is a special need for emphasis on it when designing cross-cultural instruction. Marci admitted that there is a tendency to skip straight to developing a product, and explained why this should be avoided:

> Instructional designers and clients too often have an idea and just want to skip straight to what we know as the middle of the process. They just want to start designing the product, the lessons, the media, etc, when they haven't done enough of analysis; they haven't tried out some things to see their reaction; they haven't asked enough questions; or haven't gone to observe them in the workplace or at home or at school or wherever they are actually going to be using your project; and they haven't done enough of the audience analysis. They could find out a lot right there. Sometimes they can do a quicker design process and then a quick little

> pilot, and that helps, if they have time and money for it. It helps so they can find out that they don't need to have what they were planning, or that it is not going to work very well, so they can go back and fix it back to the drawing board. I think all that you can do in the beginning phases really pays off in the end. (Marci)

It takes determined intentional effort to make front-end analysis into a reality, but so many of these instructional designers, like Marci, emphasized how much it pays off in the end. Earlier I shared Carrie's story about an instructional media piece that completely failed because the developers did nothing up front to find out about their target audience. She continued to explain her viewpoint on this matter:

> Learning about the learners is of prime importance, and once you know as much as you can about them, I think you can then choose your framework, choose your instructional design approach, from the many models…and what the learning outcomes might be, and that drives it. (Carrie)

Carrie's statement resonates with the statement of another who said "In the ADDIE model Analysis should take more like one half of the time than one fifth of the time." The following statement by Ian encapsulates this feeling, especially when working cross-culturally:

> In terms of training design, your entire strategy of eliciting learning styles will have to be carefully planned, before you can even get to first base of designing. In other words, the preceding Analyze stage is going to be quite pre-eminent and certainly time-consuming: after all, *you're looking to establish rapport with an alternate world-view*, let alone cognitive iconography. (Ian)

The ability to build bridges and establish rapport with people from a culture that is different from that of the instructional designer is a difficult task in the first place, made even more so if no front-end analysis is conducted.

There are so many design decisions that need to be made where input from learners in front-end audience analysis would be valuable. A simple, but frequently repeated example of a design decision is whether the instruction should even be online at all, and to what degree. Then if it is online, what additional bridges are needed to

accommodate the learners. Others concerns were related to whether instruction should integrate cohorts, blended learning environments, multiple forms of assessments, and so on. Carrie explains how important it is to "have some clear idea of what they expect will be the outcomes, you kind of get a little blue-print in your mind of what the experience will be like, what it will look like for them, from the student's point of view" and only after that "you can choose medium, you can choose the structure…" When it comes to finding gaps to inform decisions over what structure things should take, what design model should be used, and even what medium should be utilized, front-end learner analysis is essential.

Learner Feedback through Formative Evaluation. As these instructional designers explained, in addition to spending time and effort up front in getting to know the learner, learner feedback should be a greater part of the whole design process. This is key in finding gaps and building bridges. Earlier there was some discussion of perhaps using alternative models that gave more voice to the learner perspective, making them a more active partner in the creation of the instruction. Other suggestions included rapid prototyping and pilot testing. Implied in many of the comments from these instructional designers is the idea that cross-cultural instructional design begs for formative evaluation as soon and as often as possible. One participant wisely quipped that this involves "more perspiration than inspiration."

Troy describes in some depth how he uses formative evaluation (i.e. observation, questionnaires, and informal interviews) as part of his process of determining his own effectiveness in reaching learners:

> I have tried to evaluate this…I've developed questionnaires, and I've got as many people as possible to fill them out. I call up people at the temples [where the

> learners are] and I ask them questions and have informal discussions to try and figure things out. You know, every way that I can, not in ways that I could publish in a paper, but in ways that I feel inform us. *It's kind of like just-in-time learning, but this is just-in-time evaluation.* I learned this when I was making CD ROMS for a publishing company in Boston. People would fill out their product registration cards, and I was the director of the whole new media division, so maybe I shouldn't have wasted my time on it, but I would actually get some of these cards and call up people and ask them what they were doing with our CD ROMS, and it would blow your mind. People ended up doing things with them that you had no idea they were going to end up doing with them. So *I'm not academic about my evaluation, but I try to get to people and talk to them.* And I try to get to the right people, and try to get reactions from them and inform myself that way. If you'll just…spend 45 minutes having three conversations with people, it's unbelievable how much you can learn. And some academicians would scoff at it, or a social scientist or what not, but it is amazing how much you can learn. And you can tell by the type of communicator that I am here in this phone call, you can get very deep with people very fast if you stay focused, but informal. I'm not reading things off a questionnaire, I'm a person who cares about what you think and I'm having a talk with you now where I can learn a lot, fast, you know. Now, you've got to do questionnaires too, and you got to be smart about how you do your questionnaires, there is an informality to how I do my questionnaires. I'm sure that this last one that I designed and sent out to a bunch of temple people, I could get killed on my research design, but I'm going to learn something. And if I didn't send them anything, I wouldn't learn anything, you know. And how am I preparing for this? I hope that in the next three to five years we end up having lots more online students than on-campus – I'm a big believer in blended learning, and if I can get as many of them as possible to at least come here and cycle them through for two years, two months, however long I can do it, maybe workshops, if I can do it, great, if I can't, I can't. But *we are going to have hundreds and hundreds of online students, and I will continue to just talk to some of them*. And *I'll go there to Hong Kong and Kaula Lumpur, and I'll teach some classes too, but I will also, with some degree of sophistication use questionnaires and surveys*. (Troy)

I find this statement by Troy interesting for many reasons. First of all, it is obvious that he really cares about building bridges to reach the learners. He is not interested in just putting something out there because he is getting paid to do it, and then who cares if it is really connecting with people or not. He wants to connect with people, and he is anxious to really meet their needs in meaningful ways, and that makes him more interested in talking to them in person and on the phone. He wants to see more blended learning (a combination of face-to-face and online components), because he thinks it is a better

experience for them and because it gives him more immediate feedback. Troy's statement is also interesting because he mentions several times that his approach in formative evaluation is a lot more informal than the traditional academic approach. Mike suggests one potential reason why the traditional formal Western feedback systems might not work as Troy's informal approach: "implementation of course evaluations presents a significant cultural problem in hierarchical or authoritarian cultures where it is considered inappropriate for subordinates (students) to 'judge' superiors (teachers)." There are strengths and weaknesses to the informality of Troy's evaluation methods, but his continued focus on formative evaluation is commendable. As instructional designers find ways to increase the feedback from learners, they can find the gaps where bridges are needed and feel more informed and confident making decisions about model, medium, structure and all of the things that influence whether they are succeeding or not in reaching the learners that they intend to.

As Derek mentioned in his case study, focusing on learners as opposed to focusing on content can tend to increase the "fuzziness" that he sees in instructional design. He expressed how, especially coming from an Asian background, IDT seems to be a "soft, human understanding field…[with] a lot that is ambiguous in having focus on the learner that is not present when you mainly focus on presentation." Things seem to become even more ambiguous in cross-cultural situations, where understanding the learner becomes a more challenging task. However, increasing the emphasis on front-end analysis and continuous formative evaluation can be helpful in meeting the challenge and bridging the gaps. In tandem with all of this, there is also the need to maintain some degree of flexibility in the design process and to establishing up front a common

understanding of the purposes and methods of instruction with other stakeholders involved in the design process.

Maintaining Flexibility in the Design Process

Traditional instructional design models are proving inadequate in the experience of these designers. When working cross-culturally, these instructional designers indicated that their design process needs to be much more flexible and eclectic than what they learned in school, both in the models/methods they use and in the time schedule that they adhere to. Flexibility is needed to make sure that they can question what is assumed in the existing models/methods in order to have the space and time needed to build the necessary bridges to the learners.

Flexibility in Models/Methods. Barbara expressed her strong dislike for templates. Perhaps this is because they pre-assume many decisions that should be made only after learner analysis; in this way they cripple efforts to identify where bridges are needed. Carrie also explains that she has had to question basic instructional models and frameworks as she has worked cross-culturally:

> Working cross-culturally as an instructional designer is, I think, it is an area that you really have to bring to bear all that you know about human learning and instruction, and cultural differences – and you have to proceed tentatively. And *very often, you end up questioning the frameworks that you have long since cherished and held as very close to your heart*. Because things seem to become more fluid and you realize that in fact those frameworks are just templates that apply in abstract situations, but not when you actually go to the real world. Yes, the edges might be a bit more fuzzy and you have to make adaptations for that. So, yes, they are good guidelines, or baseline, they kind of give you a very basic clue to the road map, but you find it isn't the full thing. It is kind of like a road map – it is more like sign posts that try to take you in a certain direction. If you think of something like Gagne's events of instruction, yes it is a basic thing, but it is so minimal, so skeletal, that it doesn't stretch you very far along in the fine details of how people learn and understand. (Carrie)

Carrie felt the old frameworks were too abstract and do not go far enough in helping instructional designers understand learners. When working in a cross-cultural context, instructional designers do seem to have an added element of skepticism towards even the basic tenets and values embedded in instructional design models. Carrie touches on this in a little more detail as she describes what she would do if assigned to develop instruction for a culture she is unfamiliar with:

> If I was just assigned to develop instruction for somewhere I've never been, I suppose I would first want to physically go there if I possibly could. If I couldn't I would go to find any research I could about that area, demographics, published research about learning in that area, talk to colleagues who have been there or worked there. There is a good network of instructional designers worldwide. IFETS (International Federation of Educational Technology) or go to website of Educational Technology and Society, an online Journal. Finding out about the culture, what has been done before, talking to colleagues, and taking it from there. I would use an instructional design model I am familiar with, and take it from there. *Once you become really familiar with learning theories, you realize that you have to take a very eclectic approach. In this culture I might use this model, because the values might match better, but in this other situation, a different model might be better*. You develop an intuition about what the barriers might be. So I'm thinking to myself, "Ok, in this culture, what might be the barriers?" (Carrie)

In her comments, Carrie and others express their view that learning and instructional theories have a set of values associated with them, and that these values might not match those of a given other culture. Earlier in this paper was a discussion of how instructional design models contain assumptions and values related to the role of the learner and teacher relationship, and that they often take things very much from the teacher's point of view. Quotes were offered in support of the opinion that this is less than helpful, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Rose mentioned how she is steering away from models that value the notion of knowledge as a thing to be transferred from teacher to learner (in an effort to build a "pyramid of knowledge") in favor of a model that views knowledge as already there (seeing instructional research and practice is more like

drilling holes into a swamp where "the real and substantial exchanges" are "happening in a very subterranean way"). Also mentioned previously is the likelihood that many IDT models might implicitly put value and precedence on content alone. The main point here is that instructional designers who are working cross-culturally are trying to be more critical of the assumptions and values they find associated with the traditional instructional design, desiring a greater degree of flexibility in their thinking and in the models and methods that they are using.

Flexibility in Schedule. Marci and Derek both spoke about how more flexibility is needed in the timing and schedule of the instructional design process. They noticed it especially in their work with high-context societies, where more emphasis is placed on developing good relationships than on following a fixed plan or time schedule (Hall, 1976). Although previously she might have put more value and focus on the time schedule and the progress of the project at hand, Marci explained how she now has come to realize that when working cross-culturally she needs to put more value and focus on the relationship of trust that she develops up-front with the others involved in the project:

> *Using GANT charts and things like that in instructional design might limit some of our responsiveness to cultural issues…If you don't spend that time getting to know people up front, people won't work with you very well, they're going to dig their heels in, they're going to slow down the whole design process* ...Instead of following your schedule, they're going to do it when they feel like it. It is easy to rush into something and get rejected, somehow you didn't fit the bill, you didn't mesh enough. So they're not going to accept you, they're not going to accept what you want to get done – they aren't going to cooperate. And they make that decision because of the way people start. You can say, "We just want to get going, that's our style," but it is very likely that this approach is not going to work in many other cultures. (Marci)

Marci's experiences have taught her that she needs to be more flexible with her schedule and in the amount of time she anticipates for certain design activities (in context of the critical role that developing up-front relationships of trust can play for certain cultures).

Derek also speaks about flexibility with relation to assumptions of time, but in a slightly different way:

> *I think it is important, if people want to be effective in cross-cultural circumstances, then they need to be able to adapt and change their mindset.* Some people can struggle with that. I find that in mainland China they like to do things last minute, and that they like to make changes to established plan. The plans are not very concrete way in advance, so you need to be very flexible – and that can be a problem area for people from the West. On the other hand, the power of their approach is that they can be really flexible to do things in a better way and get things done at the last minute. (Derek)

Derek's statement insinuates that for some cultures flexibility is valued more than pre-planned and fixed schedules. He said that when working with mainland China this has been something Western instructional designers have needed to adjust to. In summary, these instructional designers have noticed a need for increased flexibility in schedules and models/methods while creating cross-cultural instructional experiences.

Educating Other Stakeholders

The previous section touched upon a need for increased sensitivity to the relationships between the instructional designer and the others involved in the design process. Working cross-culturally seems to increase both the need and the challenge of seeking to understand and be understood and trusted by the client and/or subject matter experts (SME). The goal is to make sure that everyone shares interest in utilizing the most effective instructional strategies (even if they are unfamiliar to the learner) and is invested in taking the time and approaches required to build the necessary bridges to the learners. As was mentioned earlier, often the instructional designer will want to be culturally responsive, but does not have funding or time to do so. This means that in making agreements and plans, up-front they need to set things straight with the other stakeholders involved, so they can obtain the desired resources and flexibility.

Marci, Shawn and others also explained how other stakeholders often need to be educated and challenged to see if they have reasonable expectations regarding who the learners are, what it is they really need, and what the best ways are to get them to that point. To be able to educate them, however, requires a level of awareness in the instructional designer themselves. Instructional designers have to be knowledgeable about both instructional design and cultural differences so they are confident enough to say, "If you do this, consider this might happen," or, "I know from experience this is going to bomb, it's not going to work…" (Marci). Before they could get the capital and time they needed to find gaps and build bridges, they often needed to devote a significant effort to educate the other stakeholders as to its importance.

Some of the challenges these instructional designers face in working with other stakeholders are not necessarily related to culture, for example, in having an SME assigned to help write content in an area in which they are in reality unfamiliar, and also in dealing with SMEs who do not even want to make more accessible the content that they felt they did have expertise in. These challenges are combined with some difficulties that are more unique to the cross-cultural nature of the collaborations, for example, in getting buy-in for higher level thinking and/or for convincing clients that certain things just are not going to work as well in another cultural setting. For example, after expressing his opinion that "the hardest part in doing this is working with the SME and also some of the local people," Derek explained the difficulty of getting buy-in from other stakeholders to incorporate higher level thinking, especially if they are part of a culture that has not integrated as much practice and application into their traditional formal education. He explains,

> For them [the SME], they have been teaching this subject material for years. And often times they have not involved the process of practice and application. So getting the idea across for that matter to them is often most difficult, and getting them to see the need to improve the instruction. Because often times people think that when you are using technology, you are just converting what you have been doing to technology. But *for good instructional design, I think you are not just converting, but you are converting and enhancing and adapting* – so that in my instruction or instructional product in general, it should not be less than the classroom instruction. If the classroom instruction is very good, we should capture the good parts of it and also see if we can do something that is different and might make it even better than the classroom instruction. …So you need to continue to explain and continue to ask questions. (Derek)

In working with subject matter experts and clients, particularly in cross-cultural situations, Derek recognized that he needed to ask a lot more questions regarding what they wanted the end result of the instruction to be, and also to spend time explaining why more practice and application would be valuable for many of their goals. Often instructional designers need to help both the client and the SME put greater thought into analyzing the assumptions they were making about the learners and the role and nature of the instruction, and buy-in to the bridge-building process.

In summary, how does all of this reflect on the practice of instructional design? These instructional designers believe they can create instructional experiences that are understood and enjoyed by people from a wide variety of cultures, specifically through building bridges between the instructional experience and the learners' expectations and abilities. They seek to do this by separating deeper principles from particular applications, researching where the gaps are where bridges are needed, increasing the flexibility they have in models/methods and schedules, and especially by seeking up-front to educate and get buy-in from the other stakeholders involved. The likelihood is that the skills and sensitivity developed from customization for another culture will also benefit instructional designers for the natural variation among learners from their own culture.

The feeling is that as instructional designers more culturally competent, they will recognize the deeper ways in which humanity is similar and different, and be better able to meet the instructional challenges associated with cross-cultural online instruction.

Conclusion

Pockets of instructional designers are realizing that cultural concerns play a larger part than expected when designing online instruction cross-culturally. Aware of the influence culture has on learning, and thus on the learners' interaction with online instruction, an increasing number of researchers in online instructional design have argued for the need for instructional designers to be more aware of and responsive to cultural differences (Chen et al., 1998, 1999; Henderson, 1996; Kawachi, 2000; Looi, 2003; Mayor & Swann, 2002; McLoughlin, 1999, 2000; Monajemi, 2003; Robinson, 1999; Spronk, 2004; Tinney, 2005). The goal of this research was to uncover the issues and practices regarding cultural responsiveness that has developed in the lived experience of multiple practitioners from around the world who have been in the trenches of designing online instruction cross-culturally.

In this research, I have reviewed questions regarding the level of awareness these practitioners have concerning potential differences among learners from different cultures. The major differences identified could be categorized into the following four areas: technological infrastructure and familiarity, general cultural and social expectations, teaching and learning expectations, and differences in the use of language and symbols. I have touched upon how these participants became aware of cultural issues through both informal and formal means. Unfortunately, these participants encounter certain barriers to their ability to be as responsive to cultural differences as they would like to be (i.e. an

over focus on content development, a relative lack of emphasis on evaluation in real practice, and the less than ideal roles of instructional designers assume in the larger organizational structures involved).

From this research, I have presented a bridge-building metaphor as a description of how an increased sensitivity to cultural differences influences changes in the practice of these instructional designers. The general feeling is that although some additional efforts are needed to educate and get buy-in from other stakeholders to engage in more learner analysis and evaluation, the effort is worth it as instructional designers are better able to understand the deeper principles, and find ways to accept and encourage their application in a wider variety of contexts than the ones they initially assume.

As a result of this research, several areas of further inquiry emerged. I suggest that the following questions should be explored in future research:

1. How can each of the proposed categories of learner differences be expanded, and how can we better measure where learners stand in relation to each of the key cultural variables?
2. What changes in models and methods are needed to facilitate more sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural differences, overcoming the three traditional barriers identified in this research? What else can be done to move towards overcoming these barriers?
3. What is the influence of Western culture on limitations in the field of IDT as a whole? How should the education of instructional designers be changed? What is the best way to approach the restructuring of organizations and re-

envisioning of the role of instructional designers in order to be more culturally responsive and helpful?

4. Are there indeed universal principles for instructional design (which can be separated from their particular application)?
5. If so, what exactly are all these principles, and how can they best be tested and utilized?
6. What is the process by which learners change and adapt to instructional techniques and approaches that are foreign to them – and how can we help to bridge the gaps more effectively?
7. How can evaluation be integrated more appropriately throughout the instructional design process?
8. What meta-cognition skills are either more practiced or more absent in different societies, and how can we best teach and expand metacognitive capacity in an online setting?
9. What are the best approaches to providing affordable technological access to rural and developing areas?
10. What are all the ethical considerations of introducing technological innovations, and how can we better mitigate the potential negative side effects (e.g. access to pornography, disenchantment and detachment from local communities, overwhelming infusion of media messages and advertisements, dissatisfaction with one's current lifestyle – inability to see the illusion in Hollywood portrayal of things, loss of local cultural knowledge and stories, negative aspects of globalization, and so on)?

11. How can we find more ways to prove that being culturally responsive and helpful is worth it in the long run (for both financial and ethical reasons)?

Perhaps through this line of inquiry, and a more culturally responsive IDT practice, we can further understand the similarities and differences throughout humanity, and better meet the instructional challenges in cross-cultural online instruction.

Chapter 6: Summary Article

This chapter is a synopsis of the entire dissertation, customized for future publication.

Abstract

The resources being poured by Western universities, companies, and governments into creating educational content to be exported (via the Internet) to other cultures are considerable. Those people who are assigned to accomplish this task are left with the great challenge of meeting the needs of learners who come from other cultures, and who often have very different abilities and expectations than originally assumed. This study explores the cultural competence in the lived experience of 12 professionals who have been involved with such efforts. Often they have had to question their assumptions, recognizing flaws in their own thinking and in the organizations that support them, and tried to alter their practice accordingly. The nature of their awareness of cultural differences and the importance and impact of these differences in their practice will be discussed.

Introduction

The interest regarding technology in cross-cultural markets is obvious. The United States and Europe combined are responsible for shipping 63.8% of personal computers worldwide (Aykin, 2005). One researcher (Rose, 2005) noted that in Germany alone, more than 60% of total machinery was oriented to export (in 2001), nearly 40% of it for non-European markets. With so much technology exchange around the world, cultural concerns over usability (on multiple levels) have increased in visibility and importance. Nielson (2005) gives a simple example of the magnitude of this issue by

describing one of the many related problems: “we tested 20 American e-commerce sites with both American and European users. The users’ ability to successfully shop on the sites was 61% on the average for the American users and only 47% for the European users” (p. xv). That means the effectiveness of these sites could be increased by one third if they improved the usability for international customers. Nielson says that averaged across several studies, they found that “measured usability was 46% higher for domestic users than for international users” (p. xv). Culture does have a strong impact on human – computer interaction.

Similarly, the interest regarding educational technology in cross-cultural markets is growing. Online (or e-) learning has been seen as a way to keep students both well educated in their chosen field as well as digitally literate (Massy, 2006). The diffusion of technology has often been seen as the golden token of providing access to previously “uneducated” populations. Projects such as MIT’s OpenCourseWare project,UNESCO and World Bank’s Education For All (EFA) and tertiary educational efforts only scratch the surface of the volume of educational materials being created (typically in the West), intended for international use. For example, Cisco’s development of academic curriculum alone has already been delivered to approximately 400,000 students in 10,000 academies in 150 countries (Dennis, et al., 2005), and Global University, based in Springfield Missouri, offers courses to more than 600,000 student in 178 countries, in more than 145 languages (Rogers & Howell, 2005).

Accordingly, the issue of culture in the field of Instructional Design and Technology (IDT) is gaining ground and an increasing audience of interest. The instructional designers assigned to design the educational content and experiences are not

immune from the influence of their own cultural blinders. Perhaps this has at least partially been the reason for unrealized expectations regarding international e-learning efforts and, in some cases, the resulting disillusionment (Massy, 2005). Concerned with this issue, Burnham (2005) even questioned whether the expression of instructional design as we now know it may well be so grounded in Western culture as to be of less value for a different culture (see also Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999). He recognized that at the very least, "even though people of all cultures find themselves learning and teaching in formal instructional settings; who they are and what they bring to these settings can make large differences in how design is approached" (p. 4). The interest in recent years on the interaction between culture and educational technology is growing.

In the Handbook of Distance Education (Moore & Anderson, 2003) an entire chapter is dedicated to "culture and online education." Most of the material, however, was borrowed from the work done in the field of cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communications, and intercultural computer-mediated communications (CMC) with inferences drawn to the field of online education. Towards the conclusion of the chapter, the authors recognized that their review of the literature "has indicated little published research on the cultural aspects of online learning and teaching" (Gunawardena, Wilson & Nolla, 2003, p. 770; see also Branch, 1997; Chen, 2000; Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez & Mason, 2001; Wild, 1999; Rogers, 2006). Regardless of these pockets of interest, Subramony (2004) points to a severe lack of attention among instructional designers as a whole towards important issues of cultural diversity, resulting in the alienation of many learner groups.

The present research study is an exploratory study (Gibbons & Bunderson, 2005). As far as the author of this article can determine, there are no existing publications focused on fundamental exploration of the range of challenges in the lived experience of multiple instructional designers (from around the world) as they are engaged in designing online instruction cross-culturally. This type of research is of particular value considering the power of the Internet and related technologies to extend the reach of instructional designers like never before. Thomas Schwen says of instructional design, "We (as a profession) have only recently become proficient enough to do harm" (as quoted in Subramony, 2004, p. 21); this applies directly to the topic at hand. A few isolated case studies exist (Ho & Burniske, 2005; Inding & Skouge, 2005; Mbambo & Cronje, 2005; Venter, 2003), and some discussion of cultural issues have been addressed (Chen & Mashhadi, 1998; Spronk, 2004; Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005). However, many of the frameworks for discussions of culture in IDT have been borrowed from other fields (e.g. Hofstede, 1984) and do not directly apply because they do not take into consideration the unique contexts and accompanying challenges of online instructional designers. Additionally there has been little focus on the designers themselves, the particular role they play within the constraints they have, and the way they have developed through the decisions they make in these cross-cultural contexts; rather the focus is usually on the instruction itself, the different learners, or the related abstracted cultural issues.

This study takes a step forward in providing the much needed *exploration research* that can be used to inform both future *explanation* and *design research* (Gibbons & Bunderson, 2005) in this vital area of interest and importance. This exploration research has the potential for helping those whose impact and responsibility

is expanding as they are reaching larger and more diverse populations than ever before through online instructional designs.

Research Questions

Concerning those who are involved with creating online instruction for people of other cultures, the research questions explored in the present study are as follows:

1. Are they aware of possible differences between themselves and the cultural group for whom they are designing instruction?
2. If so,
    a. How did they become aware of these differences?
    b. What importance do these differences assume in their thinking?
    c. How does understanding cultural differences affect instructional design practice?

Theoretical Background

Definitions of "culture" are complex and contested among theorists. Of the little that has been published regarding the cultural aspects of online instruction and instructional design, too often the researchers have automatically imposed existing theoretical dimensions of cultural variability (e.g. most often individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity; Hofstede, 1991). Although work like Hofstede's has made a valuable contribution in being one of the few empirically supported frameworks to conceptualize where some of the differences may lay between cultural groups, unfortunately, it is based on national differences. Maitland and Bauer (2001) argue that when based on national differences, theoretical dimensions of cultural variability are too easily used to make unfounded and unhelpful stereotypical

assumptions about individual learners. While examining the diffusion of the Internet, Maitland and Bauer call this problem the "ecological fallacy"; that is, "the impulse to apply group or societal level characteristics onto individuals within that group" (p. 90). This is a mistake because the more generalized the descriptions of a group are (in order to get statistically significant quantitative data) the less likely these descriptions will apply to any one individual. I agree with Maitland and Bauer's conclusion, "national level characteristics must not be interpreted at the individual level" (p. 90). Although some attempts have been made at creating and using measures to reveal individual placement on some of these scales (Clem, 2005; Neuliep, 2003), automatically imposing generalized frameworks, especially those derived from other fields, should be approached with caution. For online instructional design to meet the needs of real people in the process of making practical decisions, a more dynamic approach is needed to account for both the complexities of the learners' cultural predispositions as well as their individual uniqueness and ability to change.

So how do we come to understand what a more dynamic approach might look like? Where is the theoretical basis? Schwen, Evans, and Kalman (2005) made the argument that much of the sophisticated practice in educational technology is not grounded in theory because the practitioners are using techniques and tools long before academics can begin to theorize about them, and that "scholars should look to those practices to enrich research and related theory" (p. 13). So one problem with imposing any pre-existing theoretical framework (borrowed from another field) on new questions related to online cross-cultural instructional design is that the issue is so complex. While this borrowed framework would illuminate some things, it also necessarily conceals others. The current

pioneer practitioners in the world of online cross-cultural instructional design are often working beyond the current realm of theoretical understanding. As Schwen, Evans, and Kalman (2005) elaborated, “The fault, if there is any, is not with the practitioners who are of necessity practicing at the edge of the professions’ knowledge. Rather the scholars in the community should be attempting to make sense of especially sophisticated practice” (p. 13). For this reason, there is a gap, and more exploration is needed by researchers into the complex reality of practitioners.

The approach chosen for this exploration research is based in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory works well in a context where there is little in the form of existing theory and data. As Goulding (2002) put it, “Essentially, [grounded theory] is most commonly used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge” (p. 41-42). Grounded theory was chosen to inform the methodology of this study because it is ideal for this type of exploration research, allowing the complex multi-faceted issues to emerge without pre-imposing rigid definitions, and for future theory and research to be more grounded in real world, lived experiences of actual practitioners.

Although some pre-existing theoretical work was useful in framing my understanding of why different cultures, societies and people might have developed different conceptions of “knowledge” and “reality” in the first place (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hewitt, 1984), I began with no formal, well-developed theory of how cultural considerations influence the practice of instructional designers. I felt that culture does matter in instructional design, but I was not sure of all the ways in which it did or did not influence the practice of instructional designers. Thus, the research procedures for

this study were set in such a way that I could, as much as possible, explore and discover the range of ways in which culture influences cross-cultural online instructional design, and how practitioners responded to these issues, allowing unpremeditated themes to emerge. I recognize there is always researcher bias, no such thing as ridding myself of subjectivity, so I have tried to be as explicit as possible about some of the key influencing assumptions that color my particular view of the world, and which have no doubt influenced the synthesis of the data (see Chapter 3).

Methodology

In the context of this exploration study, I needed semi-flexible methods that would allow the collecting of rich in-depth data, as well as a way to compare and contrast different perspectives. The method chosen to meet these needs was the case study approach. This type of research design is described by Miles and Huberman (1994):

> By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings. (p. 29)

Collecting a pool of potential participants for cases was done through a snowball sampling method (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Nearly 40 people who were involved with educational technologies (i.e. the Internet) and designing instruction cross-culturally were identified and contacted. Half responded positively with an interest in participating in the study and 12 were chosen (six male and six female) on the basis of availability, interest in participating, breadth and depth of experience (see some relevant demographic information for these 12 participants in Table 2). In-depth interviews were then conducted with each of the participants. Interviews were semi-structured and carried out

Table 2.

Demographic Information of Participants

Pseudo-Name	**Born In**	**Living In***	**Foreign Countries or Distinct Cultures Worked With**
Barbara	Canada	Sri Lanka	Guatemala, Barbados, Guyana, Chile, Ecuador, Great Britain, Ghana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Sudan, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Philippines
Marci	US**	US	Native Americans, African Americans, New Zealanders, Hawaiians and the Polynesian groups there, Greeks, Turkey, North Africans, Central and South Americans (all Spanish-speaking countries & from Spain), Brazilians, Russians, poverty-level Americans, Mongolians, Canadians
Derek	China	Hawaii	Mongolia, China, Hawaii, USA, Malaysia, Asia-Pacific Islands
Rose	US	Egypt	Egypt
Betty	England	Australia	Australia, China, India, USA, South America, Norwegians, Koreans
Ian	Australia	Australia	China, Japan, Malaysia, Papua-New Guinea, New Zealand, UK, Aboriginal Clan cultures in QLD, NT, WA, NSW, Torres Strait Islanders, Kanakas (19th century imported south sea islanders, the only stateless group in Australia), Jewish (both in Australia and overseas)
Mike	US	Hawaii	Tonga, Hong Kong, China, Philippines, Mongolia, Asia-Pacific Islands
Joey	England	UK	Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Viet Nam, Solomon Islands, Rwanda, Sudan, Gambia, Ethiopia, Somalia, and particularly – Viet Nam, Nigeria, Sudan
Jill	England	UK	Uganda, Afganistán, Swaziland, Somalia, Ghana, UK
Carrie	Ireland	Australia	Australia, Spain, France, Italy, Middle East, Borneo, China
Troy	US	US	Korea, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Uzbekistan, Japan, Taiwan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Singapore
Shawn	Scotland	US	UK, USA, Canada, Kenya, Egyptians, and taught Chinese, Russian, Bahamian, Venezuelan, Turkish, Greek and Slovakian students in the US

* At the time of the interviews
**"US" means mainland U.S.A.

in person or via the telephone. Interviews explored the stated research questions of this study.

Tools such as triangulation, member checking, thick rich description and peer debriefing were used to make the themes and interpretations in this research as trustworthy and credible as possible. A more detailed account of the methodology used can be found in Chapter 3.

Results

This paper addresses each of the research questions in turn and provides a synthesis of the issues that emerged across all the cases, citing relevant quotations from the participants interviewed. Because of space limitations, full details of each case are not included in this manuscript. However, interested readers can find a more in-depth treatment in Chapters 4 and 5.

Awareness of Cultural Differences

The first question addressed in the research is whether the participants interviewed were aware of the differences between themselves and the cultural groups for whom they are designing instruction?

The short answer is, yes – but they have a limited awareness. All those who participated in this study are aware of differences between themselves and the cultural groups for whom they are designing instruction, while at the same time realizing there was a lot they still wanted to know. The data collected from these cases indicated that becoming aware that *there are* significant differences between cultures does not mean that you are aware of what all the important differences are or of all the ways in which

they influence learning. Consider the following two quotes, which are representative of the general feeling of all the participants (italics added for emphasis):

> *Instructional designers think they are assumption free, but many of the assumptions are implicit*… I'm sure that every week or month of experience that you have in this kind of international context opens your eyes to something else, but I don't think it necessarily makes you know more about the different contexts. *I think it rather makes you aware of how much you don't know*. (Jill)

> *I am very aware that there are cultural differences. Do I understand what they all are? No.* I am more attuned to picking them up when I see them. Especially for cultures I am not familiar with, I am aware that there are differences although I do not know what they are…*I don't think you will ever get to the stage where you will be able to make your instruction completely culturally bias free...*You can do your best, but *I think we are a long way from doing our best, simply because we don't think about it.* (Shawn)

Both Jill and Shawn recognize their growing awareness of cultural differences, and the influence those differences have on their practice, while still being very open to and anxious to learn more.

Some of the other insights that came in response to this question included perspectives from these participants regarding the most relevant differences in learner characteristics and expectations from various cultures which had an impact on their work. Four categories of differences in learner characteristics and expectations repeatedly surfaced in the interviews: (a) general cultural and social expectations, (b) teaching and learning expectations, (c) differences in the use of language and symbols, and (d) technological infrastructure and familiarity.

> *General Culture and Social Expectations.*
>
> Some of the most fundamental of the social protocols in Tonga are those relating to courtesies involved with greetings, especially those dealing with people of high rank…In the presence of the royal family, no Tongan's head is allowed to be above that of the royalty's… Some of the issues these customs might raise were brought to our attention when we demonstrated the distance learning technology to the [Crown Prince]. (Mike)

As this quote illustrates, cultural and social expectations regarding roles and relationships do influence the type of reception that online education will receive. An understanding of general cultural differences should influence the design process. In addition to differences in conceptions of roles and relationships, cultural and social expectations regarding the perceived role of women, the balance between keeping rules and valuing particular relationships, legality concerns, different concepts of time, and even humor should all be taken into account in trying to understand the learner. Also important is an understanding of the effect of enculturation, and the influence of the socio-economic status and political instabilities of the learners' country. If nothing else, instructional designers need to be aware of general cultural and social expectations in order "to make the materials very relevant to the learners, to make it possible for them to use their life experience and their work experience and their everyday life environment" (Jill). In doing this, Mike tentatively offered some concise and helpful suggestions:

> Determine the overarching priorities/goals for your long distance project and ensure they meet local needs/desires; gain the support of people with high ranking or influence to try to stop many problems before they begin, especially in a high context culture; openly discuss issues and concerns with the local staff and administration—do not simply implement best practices; leave untouched as many social norms and traditions as possible; be sensitive to traditional concerns when resolving concerns, be open to traditional solutions; and make the hierarchy a group of facilitators for those under their control. (Mike)

Mike's suggestions resonate with the comments of many of the others and indicate an approach of sensitivity and responsiveness with regard to these general cultural and social expectations.

> *Teaching and Learning Expectations.*
>
> First of all, culture can influence your expectations of yourself as a learner, and then your expectations of the teacher; those are the most basic ways that culture influences learning. And your learning style as well. How do you conceive of

> learning? How do I conceive of learning? What do you expect, and watch? What is your goal as a learner, and what is worth learning? (Carrie)
>
> Working very closely with Canada's first nation peoples or aboriginal peoples…was a real eye opener…because they do also have a different approach to education. There is much more respect for the elders, and …also a high level of spirituality involved in native education, to the extent that every formal meeting that we would have with a band or tribal council would begin with a prayer, said by one of the elders at the meeting. Everything was framed very much in the context of spirituality, and this is something that Western academics just simply aren't attuned to, we're not accustomed to it. (Barbara)

Instructional designers encounter a wide variety of teaching and learning expectations, especially when working cross-culturally. One of the primary concerns the participants in this study had was becoming more aware and sensitive to what assumptions they could and could not make on this level. A deeper understanding of cultural expectations concerning the teacher-student relationship and roles, issue of saving face, varying need for face-to-face interaction, ideal classroom environment and types of activities engaged in, metacognitive strategies learned, writing style, assessment types, and categorization and structuring of knowledge would help instructional designers make wiser decisions as they create online courses cross-culturally.

Language and Symbols.

> Given that there is no written tradition in Australian indigenous culture, the concept of language in the context of literacy and numeracy, is at best a slippery one…Thus, the "written language" of, say, a western desert traditional is an entirely artificial concept, based on some loose phonetic arrangement useful only as a means for anthropologists to record the gist of some conversation to be replicated at some future date. (Ian)
>
> A particular biology professor had been teaching clearly things like "A is inside B", but she looked and noticed she had students that would write on lab notes things like "B is inside A". She wondered how they could get it so backward. She figured out, which was very clever of her, that the students who were having the most difficulty with that were students whose first language was a language where word order was not important [i.e. a synthetic language as opposed to a analytic language] because word endings signified relationships. (Shawn)

Ian and Shawn's comments show an area of concern noticed by these participants; symbols are used and interpreted differently in different cultures. Even the color spectrum is not the same in every culture. As one of the most complex and meaningful symbolic systems, language took a prominent role in their thinking, and understanding differences in language and symbols was important for the following reasons: (a) language structures can actually influence the way in which people think; (b) when the language of cross-cultural instruction was English, instructional designers tend to forget about the impact of other cultural issues and misunderstand the level of the English learners can handle; and (c) a misuse of other symbols, colors, and metaphors can unintentionally offend or alienate learners.

These three reasons indicate the importance of cultural competence. If nothing else, "the more foreign something is, the more likely that people are going to feel that it does not apply to them in their context" (Shawn). This provides ample reason to explore all of these issues in more detail, through research and user testing.

Technological Infrastructure and Familiarity.

> The act of being online is so different based upon where you are. It can be slow and painful. (Jill)
>
> We know in the ideal world people have potential of using new web-based Internet technology on the one hand, and on the other hand recognize that still for many of the students throughout the world [using advanced technology] becomes a barrier and an exclusion instead of an inclusion… (Joey)

As Jill and Joey suggest, the cost, dependability, and speed of access to the Internet, and even access to electricity is less than desirable in many countries. The gap between the technological haves and have-nots has been referred to as the "technology divide" (Inding & Skouge, 2005). Particular concern needs to be taken by instructional designers not to get carried away by the latest technologies and push their implementation regardless of

the context in which they will be used (Mudhi, 2005). Although it might not traditionally be thought of as a "cultural" concern, it often catches instructional designers off-guard to find out how limited the resources and dependability of educational technology can be – even "technologies" such as books, paper, and pencils being in short supply in some areas of the world. On the other hand, many people from the West are surprised to find out that many people from their own countries do not even know how to turn a computer on and off, and that some of the developing countries in Asia actually have a more sophisticated and wide-spread technological infrastructure (Korea in particular being much more developed than even the US).

All of this highlights the need for fewer unwarranted assumptions to be made about access and dependability (technological infrastructure), as well as the familiarity of the learner with the medium used for instruction. Instructional designers must do a better job at discovering how affordable and available the technology really is, and how familiar and willing to use it the learners really are.

Increasing Awareness of Cultural Differences

The next question to be covered is how these participants became aware of these differences in the first place. Marci shared an insight into her own personal experience: "I didn't understand any of these cultural differences or assumptions at first. When I was first introduced or encountered the problem I didn't have words for it and it wasn't in any of my training." So how did she and others become aware of differences? These participants developed a level of awareness in informal ways (e.g. as a side effect of exposure to different cultures and as a side effect of having an open and inquisitive disposition). Shawn and Troy illustrate this:

> I've always been aware of cultural differences, and part of that is where I come from. I come from a small country that is part of a bigger country…there is a much greater awareness, at least of the rest of the world, simply because we are such a small country, and our whole history has been threatened by other people. Even still recently in living memory... (Shawn)

> I'm just one of these guys that I learn from everybody, I respect everybody, my prior assumption is that it is really worth connecting with this person. (Troy)

These participants also developed a level of awareness through more formal and intentional means (e.g. engaging in simulations, taking classes about cultural differences, conducting or reading relevant research, receiving more participant feedback, participating in multi-cultural design teams, taking courses designed by people from other cultures, and going on field visits moderated by an expert guide). Shawn explained one of these:

> One of our professors teaches a cultural diversity class, and one of the things she has people do is go to a black church service [here in Georgia]. And it doesn't matter what your religious affiliation is, if you are not African American and from the south, going to one of these services is completely different from anything that you have ever done before…*There are always other things that you can do, but nothing can compensate for actually moving people somewhere else and telling them to get on with it.* (Shawn)

The process of becoming aware of cultural differences for each of the participants was unique, but the general feeling is that much more can be done to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity in the general body of practicing instructional designers.

Importance Placed on Cultural Differences

My next concern was to determine how important the understanding of cultural differences was to these participants. I discovered that instructional designers often feel a tension between the greater importance they believe cultural differences should play in their work versus the not-so-ideal realities of what they are supported or encouraged to do. Betty insightfully explained how she truly enjoys talking about these things, but when she

reflects on the reality of her own situation, she is overwhelmed at the opportunities and complexity of a more culturally diverse learning environment:

> I am so excited about [the questions about culture] you are asking at one point, but I also feel somewhat drained, because the reality of cross-cultural teaching that I see as ideal is a million miles away from what I am doing, or am supported to do. I'm given no additional support at all… (Betty)

Betty's comments are valuable because they highlight one of the most significant points brought out by a majority of participants in this study, a larger dilemma in education research between theory and practice. Specifically, the attention of these participants to cultural differences is more limited than they would like because the actual practice of IDT is, in many ways, a lot messier than the ideal textbook situation learned in school.

Three barriers to being more culturally responsive emerged from the analysis of data: (a) an over emphasis on content development as the center of practice and under emphasis on context and learner experience, (b) a relative lack of evaluation in real-world practice, and (c) the creation of less than ideal roles that instructional designers assume in the larger organizational structures involved. Each of these barriers will be discussed briefly in turn.

Barrier #1: IDT Focus on Content Development.

> Sometimes instructional designers, and models they use, put them in the position of teacher [instead of learner], and *even though the model says to do a needs analysis, it often gets pushed aside, because it is not the focal point of the model*… (Carrie)

> I think developing (taking the content and rendering it into digital media) is only one step of the design process. This is a huge thing, where *our field really needs to be careful of how we think and talk about ourselves.* (Troy)

There is significant evidence that the impact of cultural concerns is limited because of the context in which instructional designers are educated and the way they typically conceive of their practice. As touched upon in Carrie's quote, many of the instructional design

models and methods assume the role of the teacher. In addition, traditional instructional design models and rhetoric assume a level of objectivity and determinism, seeing the main project as molding content, which influences instructional designers to think instructional design decisions can be made in isolation from the context in which they are applied. The result has been that too many instructional designers are frequently isolated physically and mentally from the learners for whom they are designing instruction.

To help solve this problem, perhaps new paradigms are needed. Unfortunately, making the change to a new instructional design paradigm or adjusting older paradigms (in order to allow for more cultural sensitivity) is going to be rather difficult. This is partly because of the ways in which the history of IDT, with its general over emphasis on content development, has increased the negative impact of the next two barriers: the lack of emphasis on evaluation and the limiting role instructional designers play in the overall organizational structure of the projects in which they work.

Barrier #2: Lack of Evaluation in Real-World Practice. The heavy value placed on content, in relative isolation from context, means that less emphasis is placed on any evaluation. Conscious evaluation efforts consequently get squeezed out under the pressure of budget and time constraints. Consider this statement,

> [ISD background and training] should facilitate [effectiveness in cross-cultural settings] if you do an adequate assessment of your learners. I think the whole problem, and this is what I see so much, particularly with people working in industry – "Oh, we don't have time." They don't have time to do assessment at the beginning and they for sure don't have time to do assessment at the end…*Well, if you don't have time to really learn about who you are designing training for, you are wasting your time.* (Shawn)

Too many instructional designers still seem to believe that they can separate evaluation from development and still create high quality instruction. The following quotes from Joey and Jill illustrate this issue, which makes culturally sensitive IDT difficult:

> *In the reality of budgets and deadlines, evaluation does very often get squeezed out*. Or on the other hand, there might be a desperate need for HIV training or training for refugees where people don't want to wait until it is perfected. There is where you could lose some of the quality assurance, but you have the pressure to finish, and things get cut where they shouldn't be. (Joey)

> The ideal situation is that you create a pilot testing phase that is planned into the development process when you are preparing the materials for the first time. Now, *often this kind of pre-test gets squeezed out because you never have enough time to do what you want to do even if you want to do it*…That is good practice, but if it doesn't happen, …*it tends to be the evaluation that goes to the end of the schedule and then gets chucked*. (Jill)

It is obvious in comments like these that both Joey and Jill would like to have more time and money to investigate if the things that they design are really meeting the intended learner needs or not, but that they also feel the tension from their reality not matching up with their ideal. Betty describes this by saying how she feels as if she has no time for anything other than "crisis management," and how cultural sensitivity does not fall into that category. The following section will explore how part of the lack of contact and time with learners should also be attributed to the third barrier.

Barrier #3: Organizational Structures and the Role of Instructional Designers. One other major obstacle to cultural sensitivity is the type of role that instructional designers are asked to play in the organizational structure of the projects they are assigned to. It is not only the instructional designers who tend to focus on content over learner experience, but often the organizations that employ them naively do so as well. Frequently, the instructional designers have absolutely no role in the initial audience analysis by which the goals and medium of instruction are chosen, nor do they actually take part in the implementation or the evaluation of the instruction, if evaluation even takes place at all.

Carrie expresses her view that instructional design as employment is basically a compromise, due to the pre-existing constraints imposed on projects by the clients when you receive them. Shawn offers a similar point of view:

> [I] went to the headquarters of an international corporation and their training people talked to us. And the way that it was set up, they had internal clients say, "We want training to do X" So the training people would design the training and put it in the box and give it to the people who asked for it. *The instructional designers were not responsible to do any of the assessment of who the learners were, they were not even responsible for monitoring the delivery of the training.* (Shawn)

Misconceptions of the role of an instructional designer seem to have extended beyond the corporate sphere and into the universities. Carrie determined that there needs to be higher level reforms if cultural sensitivity is ever going to have the weight that she feels it should have. She gives a grim description of what she has seen with many of the instructional design work scenarios in universities:

> For example, in Australia, many instructional designers have been demoted to a non-academic position. They call instructional design a kind of technologist. And this immediately gives everyone else in the university *the impression that instructional design is simply a matter of one-size fits all, quick fix, put it on Blackboard, electrify it, and then suddenly you've got a program, you've got a course.* And *many instructional designers have never even seen a student, or talked with them…* There is a lack of connection, which is the first thing, between policy level, resourcing, and status of instructional designers. Many of the instructional designers…design a course for a teacher, the teacher goes and teaches it, and the teacher gets the feedback on the course, how well or bad that it was, and very often the instructional designers never even meet students or get any feedback at all. *There are all these gaps and loops, disconnect all along the line.* It is absolutely extraordinary. And I put it down bad management, lack of resources, poor conceptualization of the actual role of an instructional designer. Pretty serious stuff, really. (Carrie)

It does seem that it is a serious thing, if instructional designers really have no contact with students at all, and if they never see any feedback with regard to the materials and educational experiences they help to create. What do they think their role really is, and how are they suppose to improve? Betty expresses similar frustration in this way:

> The instructional designers are taught so much out of the context of what is happening that they are often out of touch, isolated from much of the realities…It is kind of nonsense, to be honest with you, in a kind of a way. The instructional design model many of them are using is trying to figure out where they can put puzzles or quizzes into the learning activities. The budget they have for it is so limited that there is no way they can invest as much as they need to in terms of time with the instructor, or in terms of the time the instructor has to give to them. Even finding time for a five minute phone conversation with the instructor is difficult. With the time and resource restrictions there is no way we are going to be able to adequately approach any of the multi-cultural stuff. (Betty)

If the role of instructional designers continues to be so limited and isolated from learners, then distance education will succeed in being distant from the needs and expectations of learners.

This scenario has disturbed some instructional designers to the point that they are seriously considering the possibility of going by a different title so as to not be associated with the baggage that ID has come to be know by (Burnham, 2005; Gorski and Clark, 2001; Subramony 2004). Troy mentioned a new profession that is emerging called "Experience Design," which might cater to a view that instruction is more than course content, and that instructional designers have more responsibility to consider the actual experiences and perceptions of the learners. In the next section, I will discuss how these participants are striving to overcome such barriers, providing examples of how their understanding of cultural issues tends to influence their practice.

Impact of Cultural Awareness on Instructional Design Practice

How does the understanding of cultural difference affect instructional design practice? In all this talk about cultural differences, can anything in IDT be held constant? Does every instructional experience and design process need restructuring for customization in different contexts? How much can we trust about what we learn in instructional design when working cross-culturally, and which things do we need to

question and reexamine? The participants interviewed offered a unique perspective; namely that there are some general principles for instruction which seem to apply in any culture, but that a lot more effort needs to be put into "building bridges" between these generally useful principles and the various learner contexts. Derek said it this way:

> I believe that good instructional design principles and techniques are universal, cross-cultural. It doesn't matter where in the world they are coming from, but you need to find where the people are coming from, what their expectations are coming into it so that you can know what bridges to build. (Derek)

In this section, the metaphor of building bridges will be explained, along with a description of some of the associated implications on the instructional design practice and process. In particular, building bridges in cross-cultural instruction stimulates (a) separating deeper principles from particular application, (b) identifying gaps where bridges are needed (specifically through immersion in the culture, integrating learner feedback in front-end learner analysis, and in formative evaluation), (c) allowing for more flexibility in the design process, and (d) educating other stakeholders (e.g. the client and subject matter expert) so they are invested in the bridge-building too. The first three points here (a, b, and c) are partially in response to barriers #1 and #2 (identified in the previous section) and the fourth point (d) is partially in response to barrier #3.

Separating Deeper Principles from Particular Application. Some might argue that more debate and research is needed to determine whether or not there are universal principles in instructional design. The general consensus of the participants of this study, however, is that although culture might influence initial receptivity to various forms of instruction (e.g. if you are only used to lectures, then participation and application might be more difficult to get used to at first), that does not mean that other forms of instruction are not valuable (e.g. once learners get used to participation and application, they can find

it very helpful). Derek explained why he feels that people might disagree with this, and why they too quickly make judgments and statements that certain forms of learning might not work at all in certain cultures:

> To a Western educator, when they come to a Chinese classroom, because it looks apparently so different to what they are used to, sometimes they will also think that what they have learned in the West is not applicable to the Chinese. And I have actually seen this in articles and presentations where people talk about these kinds of things. For example, you have this Western scholar who has been doing collaborative learning or project based learning or whatever, and they went to China for a couple of weeks and they come back to say, this kind of thing is not going to work in China. And I think what they have missed is they want the concept or theory to apply as is, as it is in the Western settings. They don't understand the principles behind those theories enough to adapt it to a different culture. If they understood it well enough, then they could actually see that there are applications that work if presented right. (Derek)

Derek indicates that if people do not understand the deeper principles behind the instructional design theories, they mistakenly might think they do not apply in another cultural context (see Figure 2).

Professionals often seem to embed the *application of a principle* in their own cultural setting with the *principle itself*, and so when their *application* of the principle seems difficult or impossible in a new context, instructional designers might mistakenly consider the *principle itself* as inapplicable. Derek stresses that we need to understand the principles deeply enough so we can separate them from particular applications and be open to alternative forms of application in different cultural contexts. He said that now when he attempts to teach a "Western concept" in a Chinese setting (e.g. problem based learning), he will try to find both Western examples and Chinese examples to use, finding ways in which principles can be translated into different contexts.

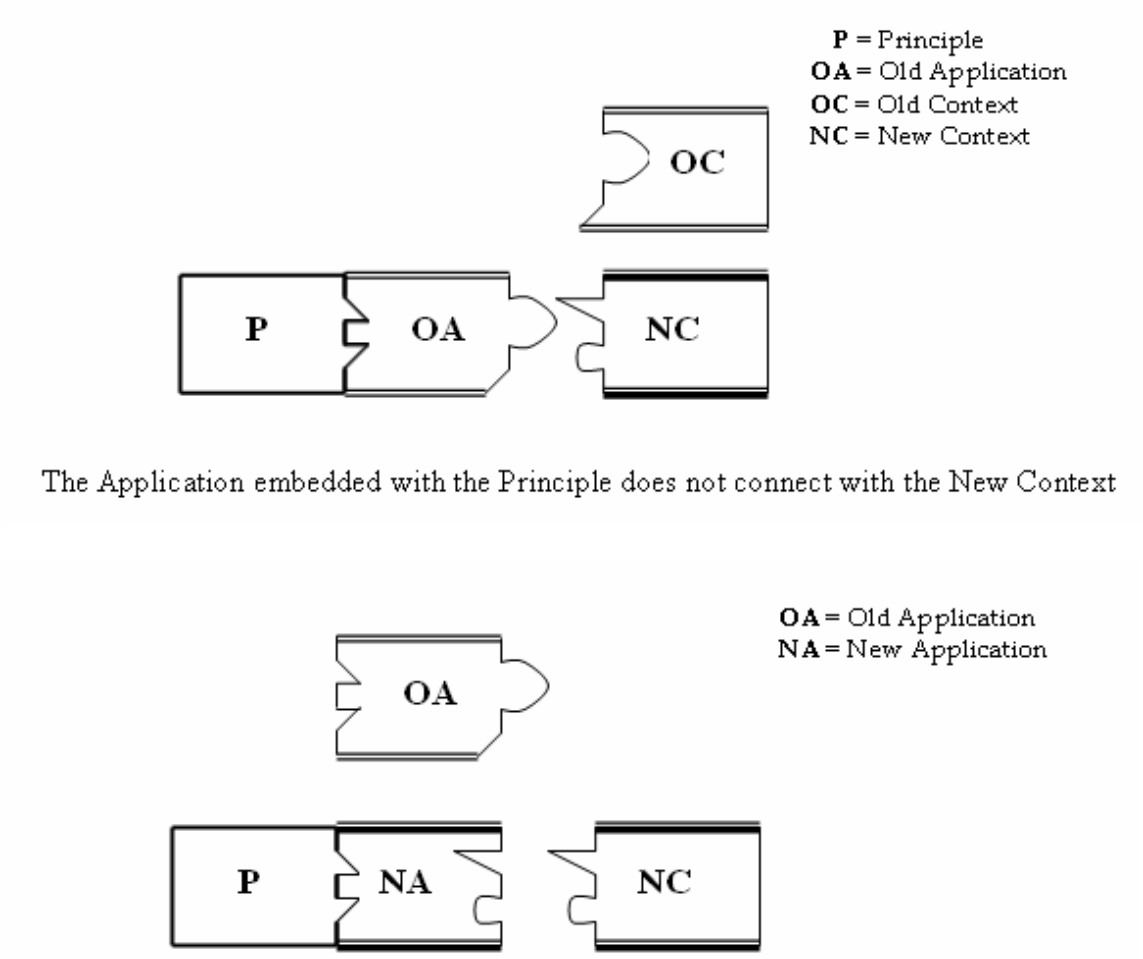


Figure 2. Illustration of the need to separate deeper principles from particular applications.

Identifying Gaps and Building Bridges. The concept of building bridges seems to be associated with being more aware of and open to the possibility that your own conception of things (e.g. time and schedules, rules and relationships, social and educational expectations, and so on) is not the only view that exists and is valid. The trick is in finding where the key differences in the current expectations and abilities of learners from different cultures stand, and then bridging those gaps through things like giving additional support needed to participate successfully in the instructional experience at hand. Although it is easy to just focus on all of the differences between cultures and feel frustration over where to start, Shawn discusses how building bridges is feasible and smart:

> You might start to think, oh my gosh, can I teach anything? How far back do I actually have to go? Well, it's not quite that bad. *But you need to be much more aware, as you are moving through the instruction, who these people are, and where the danger points are. And when I say danger points, it is places where people can go off the rails unintentionally*…You need to be careful to not situate them in a foreign concept, and then they don't get it, and you just move on to the next thing…If that happens online and that thing is a prerequisite for the next thing, then you are in trouble… *You need to look at where are we starting from, because we are not all starting from the same place.* (Shawn)

As Shawn points out, the most important bridges to build are at those points where people might unintentionally misunderstand. It is not because of unintelligence or a lack of effort, it is because something is situated in a foreign concept that they are not used to. Instructional designers need to be careful of those things, whether it is in the content itself (e.g. examples given, terminology used, etc), or in the instructional design strategies (e.g. expecting participation, using application activities, etc), so that they can be more explicit about what is expected and provide the additional support that might be necessary to get learners to that point. In their interviews, several participants pointed out that it is not always bad to introduce foreign examples, just that they often need to be accompanied

with more support and explanation than typically is assumed. Three of the most commonly mentioned ways to find gaps were (a) immersing oneself in the culture, (b) integrating learner feedback in front-end analysis, and (c) integrating learner feedback through formative evaluation.

Shawn recapitulates what questions he asks in determining where the gaps are that need bridges built in this way:

> So what are the starting points we need to look at? What is it you are trying to get them to do? *What is your objective, and is it anywhere within their frame of reference?* What is their frame of reference? This is something that we tend to skip so much of – because we assume that if they are already this far along, of course we assume they will know how to do this, or know how to do that. But thinking about prerequisite knowledge, how are we situating what it is that we are teaching them. *Are we situating it in a context that also assumes a whole range or breadth of knowledge and experience that some of our target population might not have? How are we expecting them to even behave in the course, and is that within their frame of reference? There are all those kinds of things that we assume, but which we need to find out where they are coming from.* (Shawn)

Shawn again emphasized the importance of discovering what the learners' frame of reference is, in order to see if we are assuming they have a prerequisite knowledge or experience that they do not, in which case building bridges would become paramount.

As Figure 3 illustrates, there are often gaps between the way the instructional experience was designed and the expectations and capabilities of the learners it was designed for. As is frequently the case, the instructional designer unconsciously assumes the learner is a lot more like himself or herself than they in reality are; they seriously underestimates how important the differences in context are. Perhaps this is why it has been said that if you are using the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) in cross-cultural situations, Analysis should take more like one half of the time than one fifth of the time.

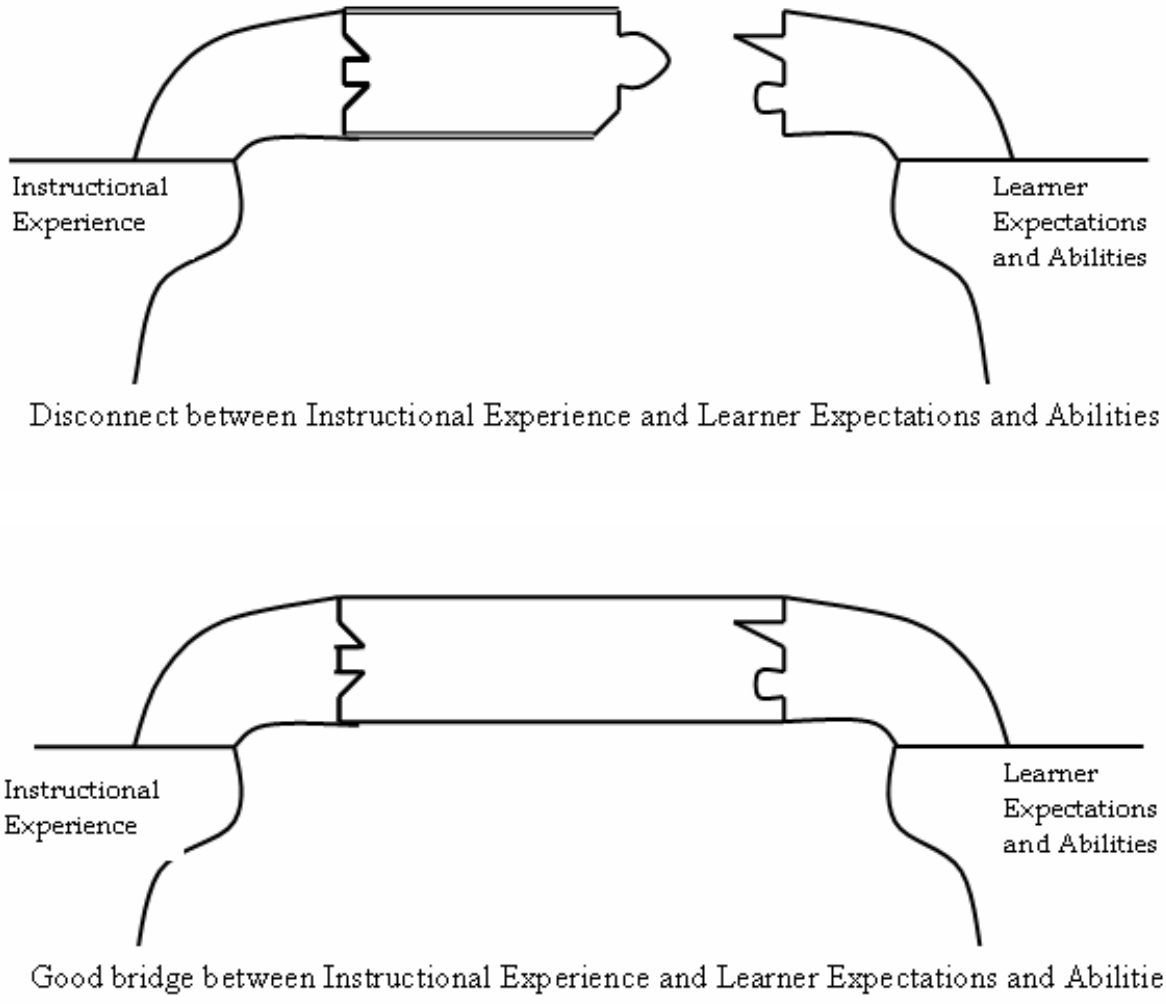


Figure 3. Illustration of need for bridging gaps between instructional experience and learner expectations and abilities.

This research yielded several examples of this process, one of which was Rose's experience developing instruction in Egypt. She described how she was afraid in the beginning that her assumptions about what was "right" would cause the kinds of learning strategies that she was introducing to fail:

> So I remember grabbing on to things I was learning about the culture to find commonalities… For this project in Egypt, you know I was bringing a Western methodology and set of assumptions to a Middle-eastern environment, and so what I found myself doing was surrounding myself with the Egyptians and visiting many local environments and trying to find…what the were bridges that would help me to just introduce some of these ideas… (Rose)

Through surrounding herself with Egyptians and immersing herself in local environments, Rose recognized that the current educational system (introduced by the British) seemed to be so different from the inherently social nature of most Egyptians (as exemplified in their "wholesale acceptance" and quick diffusion of mobile technologies). So she tried to utilize their social nature as a bridge to integrate Egyptian learners into an instructional environment that was focused more they originally expected (based on their previous experiences with formal education) on interaction, problem solving in teams, and creativity in project conceptualization and design.

Coupled with these activities, Rose found a strong need to take a step back even further and teach metacognitive strategies like brainstorming (where there can be more than one right answer, and answers can come from anyone), note-taking, and various approaches to creative problem-solving; not necessarily because learners have never done these things before, but because they had never been asked or taught how to do these kinds of things in formal education environments before. Although met with some resistance in the beginning, she ultimately found a success and very positive feedback from her efforts to really understand and start from the learners' context and abilities.

The participants interviewed as a part of this study make a strong case that there are deeper instructional design principles that need to be separated from particular application. At the same time, they automatically couple this with the need to find out where people are coming from so you can know where and how to build bridges from their current expectations and abilities to the instruction they are about to engage in. In addition to explicitly teaching certain metacognitive skills, other examples of attempts at building bridges included supplementing the instruction with a wider variety of appropriate examples, increased learner flexibility, language support, and use of local instructors in a type of blended learning environment. In tandem with finding gaps and creating bridges, expressed was the need to maintaining some degree of flexibility in the design process and to establish up-front a common understanding of the purposes and methods of instruction with other stakeholders involved in the design process.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

Some are beginning to realize that "culture itself cannot be objectified as just another factor to be programmed into designing a distance learning course" (Chen & Mashhadi, 1998, p.10). Aware of the pivotal and complex influence culture has on learning, and thus on the learners' interaction with online instruction, an increasing number of researchers have argued that instructional designers need to be more sensitive of and responsive to cultural differences (Chen, et al., 1998, 1999; Henderson, 1996; Kawachi, 2000; Looi, 2003; Mayor & Swann, 2002; McLoughlin, 1999, 2000; Monajemi, 2003; Robinson, 1999; Spronk, 2004; Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005). The goal of this research was to uncover some of the issues and practices regarding the cultural

responsiveness that has developed in the lived experience of multiple practitioners from around the world.

This research presents questions regarding the level of awareness these practitioners have concerning potential cultural differences that exist among international learners. The major differences identified could be categorized into the following four areas: (a) general cultural and social expectations, (b) teaching and learning expectations, (c) differences in the use of language and symbols, and (d) technological infrastructure and familiarity. I have touched upon how these participants became aware of cultural issues through both informal and formal means. Unfortunately, these participants encounter certain barriers to their ability to be as responsive to cultural differences as they would like to be (i.e. an over-focus on content development, a relative lack of evaluation in real-world practice, and the less than ideal roles instructional designers assume in the larger organizational structures involved).

From this research, I present a bridge-building metaphor as a description of how an increased sensitivity to cultural differences influences can change the practice of instructional designers. Additional efforts are needed to educate and get buy-in from other stakeholders to engage in more learner analysis and evaluation. The effort, however, is worth it as instructional designers are better able to understand the deeper principles, and find ways to accept and encourage their application in a wider variety of contexts than the ones they initially assume.

Clearly, more research needs to be done concerning the cultural aspects of online instructional design. Such research might begin by addressing the following questions.

How can each of the proposed categories of learner differences be expanded, and how can we better measure where learners stand in relation to each of the key cultural variables? What changes in models and methods are needed to facilitate more sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural differences, overcoming the three traditional barriers identified in this research? Are there inherent Western assumptions covertly embedded in IDT as a whole, and, if so, which, if any, of them should be challenged and expunged?

How should the education of instructional designers be changed so as to promote more cultural sensitivity? What is the best way to approach the restructuring of organizations and re-envisioning of the role of instructional designers in order to be more culturally responsive and helpful? Are there indeed universal principles for instructional design – a short of Chomskyan "deep pedagogical structure"? If so, what are these principles, and how can they best be operationalized in online design?

What are some of the specific steps in the process by which students can learn to adapt to instructional techniques and approaches that are foreign to them – and how can we help to bridge the gaps more effectively Can we find ways to demonstrate that being culturally responsive is worth it in the long run (for both financial and ethical reasons) and what are these ways?

The sheer amount of content being developed in the West and exported via the Internet to other cultures highlights the crucial need to explore these questions more thoroughly in order to respond to the global challenge of forging a common future that is fair and productive for everyone.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

The types of seed questions asked in interviews and developed in each case study were as follows:

Describe what it has been like for you to develop instruction for learners in a different culture.
Have you noticed any distinguishable cultural differences between you and the people you are designing instruction for?
If so, what differences have you noticed (and for which cultural groups do they apply)?
To what degree do you feel you are aware of the differences between your own culture and those for which you are designing online instruction?
What do you use to measure/judge this degree of your understanding?

What were the experiences that first helped you to notice cultural differences?
Can you describe the first time you noticed there were cultural differences and what your process has been in trying to understand these differences better?
Can you describe any other specific times you noticed cultural differences?

In your opinion, how important are these differences in altering the way that you design instruction?
Do you think these differences are significant enough that they make that much of a difference in the way that the learners use the online materials you create?
Do you feel it necessary to further develop awareness of cultural differences for any practical reasons? Why or why not?
If so, how do you think it is best to do further develop awareness of cultural differences?
How important is personally knowing the language of the learner?
Would you feel it would make much difference if an instructional designer was not aware of cultural differences? Why or why not?

As you came to understand this culture better, did it change anything about the way you design? In what ways?
How does your awareness of cultural differences alter your approach to designing instruction, specifically for online-learning?
What parts of your practice does it affect?
What additional questions do you ask yourself and at what points in your instructional design process?
Do these questions vary based upon which cultural group you are designing instruction for? If so, how?
How were your instructional products different? Did you see any ways in which these changes helped the learner?
Can I see some of these products and will you talk your way through them with me?
Where in the instructional product did responsiveness to cultural differences show up?