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Cultivating Diverse Online Classrooms Through Effective Instructional Design

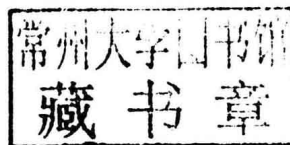


Karen L. Milheim

IGI Global
DISSEMINATOR OF KNOWLEDGE

Cultivating Diverse Online Classrooms Through Effective Instructional Design

Karen L. Milheim
Walden University, USA



A volume in the Advances in
Educational Technologies and
Instructional Design (AETID) Book
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MISSION

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Foreword

The world is inarguably becoming more digital and increasingly advanced technologically. And while we often bemoan the costs associated with this virtual new world, the benefits are and can be profound.

One of the more impactful and meaningful benefits is the ubiquity of educational information and pedagogical content. As president of a large online university, I have seen firsthand the impact that various forms of distance learning can have worldwide. There is a large segment of the global postsecondary student population that is simply unable to attend a traditional campus-based university, and many are too busy working to be able to leave the workforce and go back to school. These adult learners are motivated and talented; they only lack the means of gaining access to earn a degree.

With the evolution of distance education, digital technology has created a tremendous opportunity for online education to deliver culturally sensitive design and culturally adaptive instruction. There are some who may view online education as impersonal and one-size-fits-all; in fact, creative and innovative instructional design strategies allow online classrooms to serve globally diverse student groups in a manner unimaginable only a few years ago.

Consider how much has changed in the past decade, which, in education technology, is a relatively short period of time. Ten years ago, basic instructional design principles were based around bandwidth because some students did not have easy access to the Internet. That meant most online courses were exclusively text to make sure all audiences could consume the course content. Internet access also impacted sources for the material used in the classroom, which were often from people who were geographically located nearby.

Today, we don't have to limit the quality of education we can deliver. Although bandwidth continues to be an issue for students in some parts of the world, we're in a position where we can control the student experience so it automatically detects the connection and changes the experience to meet low-bandwidth needs. And now, course content is more engaging as the Internet hosts a plethora of original, scholarly, and crowd-sourced information with the option to translate virtually into any language.

As technology enables more approaches for customized instruction, it assists in the development to deliver postsecondary education that is designed to be culturally diverse with culturally adaptive instruction. Increasingly, more students are engaging in online education from different parts of the world for a number of reasons, requiring diverse classrooms to constantly adapt and iterate to ensure delivery of effective instructional design. Sound fundamental instructional design principles are at the core of this effort, such as using globally-acceptable language; however, the challenge remains to maintain the essence of academic standards and structure while recognizing cultural differences.

The future of online postsecondary education is personalization. One disruptive approach has been competency-based education (CBE), which focuses on student learning and deemphasizes how much time students spend in the classroom. An estimated 600 institutions in the United States alone are developing CBE programs, and there are varying approaches. At Walden University, we developed Tempo Learning™, a custom-paced format in which students are self-directed and progress at their own speed. Progress is measured by the mastery or demonstration of skills, abilities, and knowledge in a particular area of study.

Postsecondary institutions are also using adaptive learning to personalize the student experience by continuously assessing student performance and activity in real time. With every touch of the screen and keystroke, students provide valuable information—data that can be used to personalize content and target students' strengths and weaknesses, thereby creating a successful learning path for each student. The advancement of data science also has allowed universities to move from curriculum-centric models to student-centric models. For example, at Rio Salado College, students navigate personalized pathways toward their degrees, with performance data driving advancement through the pathway. The data further enable faculty to provide guided evaluation and response that specifically engage the individual student with real-world applications of learning.

Multicultural education environments are only growing, and postsecondary institutions will need to be prepared to address the needs of diverse audiences. This book shares essential research and findings that, applied thoughtfully, could continue to expand educational access worldwide while at the same time improving outcomes in the years to come.

Jonathan A. Kaplan
Walden University, USA

Jonathan Kaplan, JD, is the president of Walden University, responsible for the overall day-to-day management, academic quality, financial performance, accreditation, and governance of Walden. Prior to Walden, Mr. Kaplan had a distinguished career in government, public policy, and law in Washington, D.C. He served in the White House as chief of staff of the National Economic Council and as special assistant to the president for economic policy under President Bill Clinton. Mr. Kaplan serves as an observer on the board of directors for Coursera and is on the board of the Presidents' Forum. He also was appointed in 2013 by a bipartisan group of U.S. senators to be part of a Congressional task force conducting a comprehensive review of federal higher education regulations and laws. Mr. Kaplan graduated cum laude from Harvard College with a BA in government. He received his J.D. from Boston University School of Law.

Preface

I was fascinated about different cultures at an early age. When I was 12 years old, my middle school participated in an international pen-pal program. We were asked to complete a profile of our interests, and to list countries we were interested in having a pen-pal from. I remember listing Switzerland and Singapore, mainly because I was told Switzerland was a neutral country (with lots of picturesque mountains), and the word *Singapore* sounded cool and different to my 12-year-old self. Weeks later, I found myself corresponding with Caroline, a girl my age who lived in Singapore, via mail. Amazingly, our friendship persists to this day, 30 years later. We lost touch at various times over the years, but always wind up reconnecting, especially at important milestones in life. We have come a long way from sending each other photographs, VHS tapes and boxes of candy from our respective countries. No doubt, technology (e.g., social media, Skype, smartphone apps) and the internet has made it much easier (and less expensive) for Caroline and me to continue to communicate across the oceans.

Looking back, I realized my Singaporean friend and I have always had many, many things in common and our lives have paralleled in many ways. She and I both pursued communications-related programs of study as college undergrads (hers in advertising, me in broadcasting), we both have sons who have similar interests, and we share a love for reality television (certain programs, anyway). Yet, like in any friendship, we continually discover how different we are too—differences which go well beyond our personalities and television show preferences. It is clear that Caroline and my respective cultures are a major influence on how we operate in our daily lives and how we view the world. Everything from when and what we eat for dinner to where we travel, and from how our countries handle healthcare and education to race and religion, clearly show that while we have much in common, where we grew up and where we reside give us both a much different perspective on many aspects of life.

As my career as an educator progressed, I partly credit Caroline for fostering my interest in other cultures. Now, as an instructor for a global, online University, I have had the opportunity to connect with students from around the world on a

daily basis. Every classroom I (virtually) step into is comprised of students from various backgrounds and experiences which ultimately impact motivation, learning preferences, communication, and myriad other factors. Over the years, I have become more interested in how these differences, particularly from a cultural perspective, might impact the classroom experience, including how students connect with each other, engage in the classroom, and interpret course content.

I have experienced first-hand how cultural diversity among students, in particular, can impact the classroom and student experiences. More recently, I developed greater interest with regards to how I, as an instructor, might improve my own teaching practice to ultimately benefit our learning community in the course in light of cultural differences among students. To explore this interest further, I conducted a study several years ago designed to investigate how instructors view their roles with respect to facilitation across a culturally diverse classroom (Milheim, 2014). Most participants agreed that, as instructors, they had a responsibility for managing conflict, creating a safe space for communicating, and proactively attending to potential issues related to students' cultural backgrounds. Still feeling that there is much more to fully understanding the student experience with respect to culture, I decided to delve deeper. This curiosity was the initial catalyst in the development of this book, a process which (formally) began over a year ago. The result is a collection of fourteen chapters authored by researchers, educators, and practitioners, which explores the intersection of three distinct areas: cultural diversity, the instructional design process, and online learning.

During the development of this book, questions came to light related to the definition of the term *culture*. I received several inquiries, for example, with chapter ideas which explored the experiences of students with disabilities in the online classroom (the culture of this particular group would clearly have implications for the course design process). Also, a few potential chapter ideas were sent to me exploring cultural differences from the perspective of one's socio-economic upbringing. I realized early in the book development process that the term *culture* could be interpreted or described in many, many ways. Certainly, I do not dismiss the fact that culture can be a rather generalized term. It was important that, for this book, the term *culture* was narrowed a bit and more clearly defined. My original goal was to explore cultural differences within the context of the global, online classroom. Thus, this book encompasses topics related to cultural differences from the perspective that culture includes "variances in written expression, country of origin, and cultural norms," which ultimately affect "levels of participation, motivation, and other factors in the course" (Milheim & Fraenza, 2014, p. 301).

If we think about these differences during the course design and delivery process, it can benefit not only the individual learners, but also the learning community within the classroom, which is comprised of students and faculty as a group. The

chapters in this book provide the reader with research, examples, frameworks, and best practices for course design and development in online settings. In developing this book, I sought chapters from experts who worked with students in online settings, particularly those that included individuals from around the world. I did not want to limit the book to online courses in higher education, since online learning takes place in other ways, including corporate training, professional development, and open courses. Best practices, research, and exploration of online learning in variety of settings with respect to cultural diversity and instructional design can benefit anyone working with diverse groups of students. Along these lines, chapters in this book not only focus on higher education settings, but also Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), as well as corporate training and development.

As education programs continue to expand globally, students enrolled in online education can reside nearly anywhere in the world. It is already known that the cultural backgrounds of students have a significant impact on topics such as learning, communication, and motivation in the classroom. Yet, the research in this area focused specifically on course design and the online classroom in light of cultural differences is still in its infancy compared to similar literature focused on traditional classroom environments. With over 5.5 million students enrolled in some form of post-secondary distance learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), and organizations expanding professional development programs online to global workforces, it is critical that those involved in instructing, developing, and planning online learning understand how to adapt to this growing population of learners.

Instructional design strategies that recognize cultural differences among students is critical to acknowledging factors such as preferences for interaction in a course, how culture manifests itself in the classroom, and viewpoints towards the purpose of education (Milheim, 2014). As Gunawardena (2015) notes, understanding learners from a cultural perspective enables the maximization of diversity, particularly towards building online environments that are conducive to learning. Implications of further research that explore the instructional design process in light of cultural differences in the online classroom is critical. By expanding the body of knowledge in this area, course designers, instructors, and educational professionals will continue to increase their understanding related to how culture can influence the online classroom.

In Section 1, “Culturally Responsive Instructional Design,” this book introduces major concepts and topics related to working with culturally diverse groups of students and other instructional design process considerations. In Chapter 1, “Distance Learning Course Design: Considering International Learners and Diversity,” Jillian Wendt, Deanna Nisbet, and Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw explore research focused on international learners and frameworks for course design. In addition, the chapter highlights what is currently understood about international students enrolled in U.S.-based courses. Through their review, these authors present areas where further research

is warranted related to the topics covered in this book. In “Designing for Immediacy and Culture,” Michele Hampton examines the importance of instructional design strategies which engage students from a communications and engagement standpoint. In her chapter, Dr. Hampton further describes the importance of acknowledging culture in instructional design, as well as its influence in the classroom.

“Learning to Become and Online Learner in a Chinese University: A Tale of Transformative Pedagogy” offers first-hand perspectives on what it is like for students from a different culture to acclimate to the culture of the classroom, particularly when it is not their own. In their chapter, David Stein, Hilda Glazer, Michael Glassman, and Xing Li describe how transformational pedagogy can be used in teaching across cultures. The authors further describe how new instructional design methods can help support transformative pedagogy in consideration of a diverse student group. In the final chapter of Section 1, “Exploring Social Presence in the Culturally Diverse Online Classroom,” Debra Smith expands on the impact of social presence in the classroom through a study which explores perceptions of social presence among culturally diverse learners in online course settings. Through her work, Dr. Smith reveals strategies for the instructional design process based on the implications of her findings. The chapters in Section 1 provide a useful, timely, relevant introduction to major topics related to cultural diversity, online learning, and instructional design, as well as a fundamental look at the intersection of these concepts in practice. These central themes are an excellent starting point prior to reading the other chapters in the book.

The chapters in Section 2, “Supporting Student Culture and Diversity,” continue the exploration of how to support students from diverse cultural backgrounds by investigating specific strategies and methods in the instructional design process and within the classroom. In “Bridging the Social, Academic, and Cultural Divide for International Students: Using Peer-to-Peer Support Strategies Online,” Kimberly Palermo-Kielb and Christy Fraenza examine the role of peer support for international students in online course settings. Drawing from literature and experience, the authors share strategies to support the needs of diverse learners who are engaged in online courses. The authors draw on sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky to further frame their analysis. Kelly McKenna, Jill Zarestky, and Melissa Anzlovar continue forward with these concepts “Culture and Communication Online: The Inclusion of International and Non-Native Language Learners.” In their chapter, these authors focus on communication and linguistics in the online classroom, particularly in light of the uniqueness of students as individuals. The authors also present best practices for instructional design and teaching to support international and non-native language learners in the classroom.

In addition to mentoring, student support, and communications, it is also important to consider social presence in the online classroom. Bethany Simunich and Amy Grincewicz introduce frameworks to increase social presence in instructional design. In this chapter, “Social Presence and Cultural Identity: Exploring Culturally Responsive Instructional Design in the Online Environment”, the authors highlight points related to communication, isolation, and the impact of culture in the classroom to suggest instructional design strategies which support inclusion and flexibility in the online environment. In “A Historically Black College’s Approach to Integrating Culturally Diverse Teaching and Learning Strategies in an Online Classroom Platform,” Kimetta Hairston, Yvonne Crawford, and Jennifer Johnson present case study research focused specifically on integration of strategies to support the online classroom in light of culture. Through their research, the authors explore areas such as student preparation, instructional strategy, design methods, and technology and their impact on students. These authors also explore the need for and implementation of academic support strategies to foster the transition of students to an online environment. In summary, the chapters in Section 2 provide a closer view related to how designers, educators, and those working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds can more effectively support students in their courses.

Regardless of the setting, there are many best practices and intersections of concepts and strategies covered in this book that can transfer to other environments beyond online higher education. While the majority of this book is focused on higher education settings, it is also important to address other types of online learning. As companies and institutions streamline and seek alternate ways to offer professional development opportunities to employees, e-learning and other virtual platforms are often a sought-after solution. Section 3, “Global eLearning,” presents three chapters focused on online learning in settings outside of higher education programs of study, including corporate training and development and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In Chapter 9, “Implementing eLearning in a Global Organization: Pitfalls, Successes, and Considerations,” Larry Asu and Marcia Perrotti draw from their experiences in global training and development as well as relevant literature to present strategies for development of successful eLearning in the workplace. Their chapter cover topics related to translating materials, budgeting, and project management during the instructional design and development process. Chapter 10, “The Influence of Cultural Factors on Corporate Training in East Asia: Perspectives From Systems Theory, Human Resource Development, and Instructional Systems Design,” continues with the section’s focus, with Doris Lee examining how instructional design theory impacts and intersects with culture in corporate training and development in East Asia. As a result, Dr. Lee suggests how online learning design might be impacted

by the theory described in the chapter. Chapter 11, “Impacts of MOOCs on Online Learning and Campus-Based Course Design,” examines teaching practice within MOOC settings, and how best practices may transfer to or inform areas related to course design and instruction in other venues. In this chapter, author Trang Phan discusses specific implications for those working in various settings and presents ways that diversity can be embraced via these strategies.

Section 4, “Instructional Design Models, Frameworks, and Research,” is dedicated to topics relevant to models and frameworks in instructional design. The chapters in this section focus on how models can inform the design process to benefit areas such as critical multiculturalism and value systems with respect to a diverse student body. In Chapter 12, “Modelling for Value Systems in a Diverse Online Program in the Caribbean,” authors Camille Dickson-Deane, LeRoy Hill, and Laura Gray present a conceptual framework designed to support student participation in online learning. Their framework is informed by other theories and models, while acknowledging the importance of designing for a diverse group of students. In “Addressing Critical Multiculturalism in Online Education Using a Poly-Framework Approach” authors Srikanta Banerjee and Jill Firtell apply multiculturalism to online education, presenting a critical perspective. Through their examination, a new model for addressing critical multiculturalism in the online classroom is presented and discussed. The final chapter, “Designing Engaging Online Environments: Universal Design for Learning Principles,” has Aleksandra Hollingshead exploring methods to engage learners through a Universal Learning Design framework, which focuses on individual learning needs of students. In her work, Dr. Hollingshead suggests a systematic approach to instructional design which supports a more engaged and meaningful learning environment.

Why should we seek to better understand how cultural diversity impacts the classroom? Simply put, it will help us shift how we approach and view our respective roles in the educational process. The instructional design process, and those involved in this process, play a significant role in the educational experience for diverse groups of students. The online setting creates an interesting dynamic for students and faculty. Ultimately, the goal of this book is to help foster that shift -- a new way of thinking -- about how we design, teach, and work with students from different cultural backgrounds in online settings.

Karen L. Milheim
Walden University, USA

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