

Instructional Design for Other Cultures

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Ethics and Social Responsibility in Distance Education

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### Instructional Design for Other Cultures

Culture encompasses the contributing factors to society including, values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and knowledge (Jahoda, 2012). Multiple definitions of culture exist but most definitions include the makeup of a society's norms. Since multiple societies can exist under the umbrella of a single society multiple cultures for those multiple societies can exist as well.

The approach will be to identify the possible solutions to the current issue of creating culturally diverse instructional design products. Then an analysis of the existing challenges for these solutions will be completed. Lastly the effects on the IDOL industry and more specifically the potential legal and ethical ramifications of not creating globally diverse instructional design materials will be discussed.

### Major Issue

Instructional design is facing a challenge in creating materials that can be used globally either by physical use in different countries or through the access of students from a variety of nationalities online. Creating relevant design materials often falls within an undefined area of cultural responsibility that can be observed by the individual user of the material as unacceptable, unethical or even illegal. One solution to this problem is to create culturally neutral materials; however, this can be a time consuming and costly process and requires specialized knowledge in the different cultural areas the material is to be used. The creation of culturally benign software could assist instructional designers in creating globalized instructional design products; this may be the most efficient process. Offering education on how to prepare

culturally neutral material could also aid in overcoming the complexities of creating unbiased instructional design materials.

### **Arguments**

#### **Globalization**

One argument to make instructional design materials more accessible for multiple cultures is to follow a globalization process in the instructional design. The first step to globalization is internationalization or the process of removing any cultural identifiers such as voice, gender, color, font, graphics, icons, symbols, phrasing, and illustrations (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007). This process would allow for the follow up of localization or the adding of cultural identifies for the cultural the instructional design will be used in. This can create a unique yet standardized product that would be culturally responsible for the client of the instructional designer.

#### **Multiculturalism**

The concept of multiculturalism is that individuals are already exposed to and can relate to multiple cultures (Reiser, 2012). This can be seen in the adoption of different cultures attire or the incorporation of pop cultural elements for example. In order for multiculturalism to be executed correctly in an instructional design it is important that the instructional designer complete a thorough learner analysis to identify the cultural characteristics as well as the learning characteristics of the target audience. In conjunction with the learner analysis the instructional designer will also need to incorporate the use of a cultural subject matter expert or trusted

advisor recommended by the client to gain feedback on the cultural nuances in the instructional design (Reiser, 2012).

### **Cross Cultural Learning Objects**

Kinuthia (2009) discusses the benefits of using cross cultural learning objects as well as the precautions that should be taken. Identifying instructional objects that can bridge the gap between cultures will allow for the incorporation of culturally diverse material into the instructional design. The use of cross cultural objects can be found in new and developing learning theory including; the multiple cultures model, the third dimension model, the cultural adaptation process, the culture based model, and the introducing design to novice teachers model (Kinuthia, 2009). Each one of these models puts culture at the forefront of the design process by including it in the analytical process before design begins.

### **Counter Arguments**

#### **Globalization**

Though globalization in theory makes perfect sense it does have a couple of counter-productive elements. First the process of internationalization and localization is an expensive one because the material would need to be reviewed by cultural experts to ensure that cultural identifiers the instructional designer uses are successfully eliminated without compromising the content of the instruction. Then the cultural experts would need to go through and add appropriate cultural identifiers applicable to the client using the instructional design (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007). This is a high labor and time consuming process that would negatively impact an instructional design budget and efficiency.

According to Dewey and Duff (2009) a number of other barriers exist for instructional designers in the creation of globalized instructional design. Often times the resources available to instructional designers are limited or not available. Whether the resource is literature, educational presentations, or subject matter experts finding information to help identify and remove all cultural identifiers can be challenging for the instructional designer.

The limited resources leads to the second challenge that Dewey and Duff (2009) address and that is the availability of funding for instructional designers to use the available resources for internationalization. The use of subject matter experts can be costly and is often not included in the instructional design budget of institutions of learning. This provides further support of the prohibitive cost outlined by Reiser and Dempsey (2007).

An additional barrier for some instructional designers is the policies of institutions (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Outdated policies that have not been modified for globalization instructional design can limit the instructional designer in the design process as well as limiting resources and funds.

Dewey and Duff (2009) also discussed the limitations in staffing that some institutions have. As indicated by Reiser and Dempsey (2007) the process of internationalization is a time consuming process and would require a sufficient amount of support staff. The support staff would be needed in the editing and reviewing process to ensure cultural identifiers have been removed. The support staff would have to have expertise in cultural identifiers thus increasing the expense of their employment.

## **Multiculturalism**

Cultural integration is seen more frequently as the ease of access to information and practices of other cultures becomes more accessible through electronic communications. Reiser (2012) cautions that even with the integration of some foreign cultural practices into an existing culture the instructional designer needs to prepare completely for incorporating similar cultural nuances into the instructional design. The need for caution is because an instructional designer may misinterpret or may have a misperception of the integration of the foreign cultural nuances. Even with cultural integration or multiculturalism the instructional designer needs to avoid bias, dialects, idioms, and other cultural specifics that may not be understood by the intended audience or worse offend the intended audience. The instructional designer can avoid these situations by completely analyzing the learning and utilizing cultural experts to review the material prior to its release.

In regards to multiculturalism Kinuthia (2012) points out the industry related obstacles to the successful integration of varying cultures into an instructional design. The definition of what multiculturalism is varies across the profession leaving a lack of a solid foundation to build multiculturalism concepts from. A second inconsistency across the profession is the identification of what needs should be addressed first by the incorporation of multiculturalism into the instructional design product. In addition to these inconsistencies the instructional design profession currently lacks a standardized framework to build instructional design on. The lack of the standardized framework contributes to the inconsistencies of the incorporation and use of multiculturalism in instructional design.

### **Cross Cultural Instructional Objects**

The use of cross cultural learning objects has the potential of having a negative impact on learning if it is culturally different to the point of distraction for the learner. The instructional designer using cross cultural learning objects needs to select minimally different objects to keep the level of cultural dissonance to a minimum for the learner. This will allow for the learner to continue focusing on the learning rather than the cultural dissonance (Kinuthia, 2009).

### **Personal Statement**

Necessity is the mother of invention as the cliché goes and in the case of culturally diverse instructional design it will most likely be no different. Instructional designers need to work today to find the solutions to tomorrow's obstacles in the creation of globally diverse instructional design products. Identifying the challenges to creating globally diverse instruction is the first step in creating solutions to address the needs of globally diverse instructional design. Creating culturally neutral material may be a solution that would be easier to implement with preprogrammed software. Further educating instructional designers on cultural differences may require specialized classes in degree programs or professional seminars. Identifying instructional objects that can be used to bridge the gap between cultures can help in the acceptance of more culturally diverse materials. Each of these suggestions possesses the potential to resolve cultural gaps in instructional design however; for the best instructional design product it is imperative the instructional designer is culturally sensitive and aware of his or her limitations in cultural analysis.

### **Potential Impact on IDOL**

#### **Internationalization and Multiculturalism**

**Creating the internationalized or multiculturalism instructional design.** The goal for any instructional designer in the creation of an instructional design is to create an effective product efficiently. According to DeBry (2001) the most efficient way for culturally suitable instructional design material to be created is to create new instructional design material that excludes cultural component and uses place holders to be filled with culturally correct information for a specific client. By illuminating the use of cultural references such as color, background, wording, symbols, and others the instructional designer will save time in the creation of the instructional design because the elements will not need to be removed or replaced.

A second option for efficient instructional design is for instructional designers to create culturally specific instructional design (DeBry, 2001). If the design is meant for use in a culturally specific area and not for use in multiple locations with varying cultural influences then the instructional designer can create an instructional design product that includes correct cultural references for the client. This will save the instructional designer time in creation of the product because place holders will not need to be changed for local culturally accepted components. However, if the instructional designer were to repurpose the instructional design later then the efficiency of the processes would be lost because the instructional designer would need to remove and replace cultural elements.

**Overcoming obstacles for creating internationalized or multiculturalism instructional design.** In theory the creating culturally neutral instructional designs that can be used in multiple locations or culturally specific material designed around the culture of the client are practical options. As Kinuthia (2009) points out there is very little if any instruction on cultural specifics in instructional design programs. The importance of cultural consideration is



included in instructional design curriculum however; classes that instruct on the specifics of various cultures are not readily available.

One way to overcome the obstacle of cultural awareness in instructional design for culturally specific material is for the instructional designer to complete a full analysis before starting the instructional design (DeBry. 2001). This analysis would not only need to look at the learning needs, the client needs, and the expected outcome of the learning but also cultural elements of the culture that will be using the material. A second option for overcoming the obstacle of cultural awareness for culturally specific material is for the instructional designer to utilize a cultural expert. However, this option will add to the cost of the instructional design.

To create internationalized instructional design products the instructional designer can use data bases and libraries of information on culture to identify cultural specifics that should not be included in the instructional design process. This process could be time consuming and deter from the efficiency of the creation of the instructional design. A second option is for the development of software that can be used in the instructional design process that utilizes culturally neutral design elements. The initial creation of culturally neutral software would be time consuming and costly, however; the efficiency that can be obtained by using this kind of software would provide a good return on the investment of its creation.

### **Cross Cultural Learning Objects**

The methods discussed for internationalization and multiculturalism are beneficial for standalone instructional design products or products that would only be used by one culture at a time. The introduction of minimally dissonant cross cultural learning objects as suggested by Kinuthia (2009) can address the ethical ramifications for instructional design that has a culturally

diverse participant population. Participants may have a level of expectation that they will encounter different cultural elements in a culturally diverse classroom such as those found in online learning platforms. Even with this expectation the instructional designer is obligated to minimize the cultural dissonance for the participants by utilizing cross cultural instructional objects. According to Lin (2007) to maintain a culturally diverse classroom the instructional designer needs to avoid bias to age, gender, religion, country of nationality, etc. If the instructional designer fails to create a culturally diverse instructional design could potential alienate some or all of the participants that could result in poor performance and is a direct violation of the Code of Professional Ethics as set by the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). According to AECT (2007) an instructional designer “shall provide access to varying points of view.”

### **Profession Implications**

In the study by Lin (2007) it is discussed that producing instructional design products without the appropriate knowledge can have a negative impact on the profession. The instructional designer who is a subject matter expert but has little training or education in the field of instructional design may unwittingly offend or insult learners because of a lack of understanding of cultural nuances or in some cases the instructional design may violate local customs, policies, and laws. In the AECT (2007) commitment to the profession section of the Code of Professional Ethics it is discussed elements of instructional design need to be completed by individuals who have demonstrated a competency in the task. This can be interpreted a couple of different ways. First the instructional designer needs to consult a subject matter expert in regards to the content of the instructional design. Likewise, an instructional designer rather than

a subject matter expert should create the instructional design product. Utilizing the subject matter expert as the instructional designer can potentially negatively impact the instructional design profession because the subject matter expert may use instructional elements that are not suitable for participants. The end result would be a distrust of the instruction by the learner that would cause them to fail in learning from the instructional design.

### **Effects on Distance Education**

As educational systems grow to utilize virtual classrooms more the role of the instructional designer in creating culturally diverse material will become even more important. In the professional foundations of the Instructional Design Competencies of the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (ibstpi) (2012) instructional designers need to be able to apply research to instructional design, continue to improve on their knowledge and skills in instructional design, apply the results of analysis to the instructional design, and be able to follow ethical and legal guidelines for instructional design. For the instructional designer to perform these competencies they will need to go beyond the much discussed and analyzed ethical criteria of copyright, accessibility, and confidentiality (Lin, 2007). Instructional designers need to be aware of instruction on a global level and to manage the instructional design process to be culturally inclusive for the target audience or audiences.

Under the planning heading of the ibstpi (2012) competencies an instructional designer must conduct a needs assessment, identify the characteristics of the audience, and analyze those characteristics to incorporate the appropriate instructional elements within the instructional design. Now the instructional designer needs to go beyond finding out what needs to be learned, what is expected of the learning, and how the learners learn. The instructional designer in his or

her needs assessment also needs to identify the cultural nuances that contribute to the characteristics of the learning audience. Using a subject matter expert in identifying these cultural characteristics may be necessary to ensure that the instructional design is appropriate for the learners.

Ibstpi (2012) identifies the following competencies in the design and development category of the Instructional Design Competencies; use appropriate processes, organize the design product, create interventions and plan for interventions, use existing materials, create materials, and assess the learning. In the evaluation and implementation category ibstpi lists the competencies of evaluating the instruction, revising the instruction, and implementing the instruction. This is an ongoing process for the instructional designer and should incorporate cultural nuances as well. The instructional designer should look to the feedback provided by the learners either directly or indirectly to identify any cultural components that detracts from the learning or enhances the learning. The instructional designer can then modify the instruction to eliminate distracting cultural characteristics while capitalizing on accepted cultural characteristics. This will ensure that the instructional design is appropriate for the learners and that any oversights are corrected.

Within the management category of ibstpi (2012) it is important for working relationships with the client be established and that instructional design projects are managed. These are equally important to the instructional design industry as a move to more culturally diverse material is made. With a strong working relationship with the client the instructional designer will be able to connect to cultural resources that can aid in the creation of a culturally appropriate instructional design product. A good working relationship also sets the foundation for mutual understanding that is necessary for the instructional designer and the client needs to effectively

communicate misunderstandings within the material and design process so that they can be corrected. A good working relationship with the client will help the client understand that any cultural bias is unintentional and helps them to feel comfortable addressing the concern with the instructional designer directly.

## **Conclusion**

The instructional design industry is going to need to continue evolving and learning to keep up with global cultural changes. Instructional designers need to include cultural characteristics into the analysis of an instructional design project and apply appropriate instructional design elements that are culturally neutral or culturally correct for the client. When the instructional design is for a culturally diverse audience the instructional designer needs to work on creating culturally neutral instruction or use minimally dissonant instructional learning objects. To create culturally responsible work the instructional design will need to continue to develop his or her knowledge of cultural characterizes and enlist the assistance of cultural subject matter experts. By creating culturally sound instructional design projects the instructional designer will be upholding the ethical integrity of themselves, their institution, and the instructional design industry.

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