

## Implications for ID Practice of Instructional Designers' Cultural Identities

Are there social and political purposes for design that are culturally based? A growing body of research is concerned with the design of culturally-appropriate learning resources and environments, but the emphasis of this panel is on the instructional designer as the agent of the design. Colloquially put, if we design for ourselves, we should understand the sociocultural influences on us, and how they inform our practices. We should also develop respect for, and learn from, how various global cultures address similar design problems differently. This panel includes instructional design scholars and practitioners from a range of geopolitical regions, who will share culturally-based narratives and metaphors of ID, and invite participants to do the same.

The idea of design culture is well-established. Most notably, investigations of professional culture have attracted significant attention (Hill, J.; Bichelmeyer, B.; Boling, E.; Gibbons, A.; Grabowski, B.; Osguthorpe, R.; Schwier, R. & Wager, W. (2005)). These investigations have concentrated on how different professions, such as architecture, drama, engineering and fine art approach design differently, with the goal of informing the practice of design in instructional design (ID).

In related research, our research team investigated the idea of agency in instructional design, specifically the roles of instructional designers as agents of interpersonal, professional, institutional and societal change (e.g., Campbell, Schwier, & Kenny, 2009; Schwier, Campbell, & Kenny, 2007). As an artifact of our research into agency, we realized that design is a complex and multivariate notion that is manifest differently in different design professions, and perhaps in different parts of the world. In short, we began to understand that there might be different cultures of design at work, and these cultures carry the possibility of informing theory and practice in instructional design. More importantly, we wondered if this research might contribute to a more culturally sensitive, globally responsible, and morally coherent approach to instructional design. This initial exploratory project was intended to 1) support the development of a research network to explore cultures of design, or cultural influences on instructional design practice, and 2) gather baseline information about how design is conducted in a handful of distinct geopolitical regions. The initial purpose of the pilot project was to ask what designers from different geo/sociopolitical cultures could share with each other to inform the idea of instructional design for “the public good.” The world is increasingly a global learning community that must share knowledge and work collaboratively for the good of humankind, and this implies a need for open, free and unfettered communication among professions and across cultures. The call for open, cross-disciplinary communication opposes the tradition of narrow silos of information, jealously protected from intrusion and theft that seems to dominate disciplines in higher education today.

Because learning/education is shown to be a key indicator of social and economic health and well being, we hope that continuing this study will help instructional designers interpret their roles more broadly, and think of themselves as agents of social change locally and globally.

But we find that this is not how instructional design has been traditionally approached or taught in higher education in North America, at least. Conventional literature in instructional design concentrates very intensively on process—how instructional design is carried out, what strategies and approaches work in various contexts, and how designers should systematically practice their craft (e.g., Dick & Carey, 2005; Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, 2004; Smith & Ragan, 2005). Models no doubt serve a useful purpose, one part of which is to help ground our identities as practitioners. For example, younger or less experienced designers seem to tend to talk about tasks and technologies rather than larger implications of their work (Schwier, 2004). But the actual use to which ADDIE and similar systematic models of instructional design are put, and the worth of such models, has been called into question by North American writers many times and for several reasons over the years (c.f. Gordon & Zemke, 2000; Molenda, 2003; Siemens, 2008; Tripp & Bichelmeyer, 1991; Visscher-Voerman & Gustafson, 2004). Systematic models of ID have been accused of not reflecting actual practice, of being cumbersome, ineffective, inefficient and costly to implement.

Recent research examining the actual practice of instructional designers suggests that practice varies significantly according to context (*cf.* Cox & Osguthorpe, 2003; Kenny, Zhang, Schwier & Campbell, 2004; Visscher-Voerman & Gustafson, 2004). Other critics argue that the field lacks focus (Bichelmeyer, Smith, & Hessig, 2004), and still others argue that key aspects of instructional design have been overlooked in conventional literature. For example, our own research suggests that clients (i.e. faculty members in higher education) working with instructional designers in development projects are actually engaging, as learners, in a process of professional and personal transformation that has the potential to transform the institution and society. Rogoff (1990) argues that participation in learning hinges on communication between people in a group, in terms of shared understanding or shared thinking. Others (Glaser, 1991; Gunawardena, Carabajal & Lowe, 2001; Siemens, 2008; Tergan, 1997; & Thomas, 2002) believe that learning is most effective if it is embedded in social experience and connections among learners, leaders content, and context, and if it is situated in authentic problem-solving contexts entailing cognitive demands relevant for coping with real life situations, and occurs through social intercourse. In other words, instructional design may be a socially constructed practice. The instructional design process, in which faculty, designers, and others develop new ideas and understandings through conversation, may be a form of cultural learning or collaborative learning.

Our experience interviewing instructional designers in other countries suggests to us that there may be geo-political cultures of instructional design at work, but we have found no research that deals specifically with the influence of that aspect of culture on the theory and practice of instructional design. Increasingly, whether face-to-face or online, instructional designers must learn to work with team members representing many different cultures of teaching, learning and design. We suspect that, for instance:

- They must acknowledge and respect cultural differences,
- They must understand and respect multiple values/perspectives, and
- They must work with colleagues with different design expectations and practices

Just as there are different learning cultures, we think that there may be different cultural models of instructional design. In October 2008 a two-day symposium of instructional design professionals and scholars was held in Singapore, with

representatives from Canada, Australia, Asia, North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. The primary purpose of the meeting was to identify a core group to participate in the study and conduct a preliminary exploration of the notion of instructional design cultures from different cultural perspectives. A second purpose was to collaborate on developing a research protocol to be used in a larger international program of research exploring cultural models or frameworks of instructional design. Preliminary outcomes suggest differences in epistemology, agency, authority, and scope.

This proposed panel includes members from the original Singapore Symposium who will reflect on substantive and research-design issues and respond to a set of questions designed to probe and contrast cultural design models, and encourage audience participants to share their stories from different cultural perspectives.

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