Exploring the Realm of Culture Within Instructional Design

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Education

Presented in partial fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Educational Technology) at Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2013

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: Exploring the Realm of Culture Within Instructional Design

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Educational Technology)

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Abstract

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This research project takes a comprehensive look at the intricate issue of multicultural instruction within the field of instructional design, and challenges faced by instructional designers on meeting the needs of learners who come from cultures different from their own. The study explores issues of cultural differences that are most likely to impact instructional situations and indirectly influence future instructional designer's work. The implication that, instructional designers who are unaware of cultural differences and the impact it might have on learners and their beliefs regarding cultural issues, highlights the importance of examining the experiences of professionals who have been involved with such efforts. In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which issues of culture persist in our education system, a qualitative applied approach emphasizing critical pedagogy is used to evaluate how inequitable power relations are perpetuated and how instructional designers respond to ethnic student populations. This design examines the experiences of 12 instructional designers and suggests that cultural issues and the delivery of instruction cross-culturally are far more complex than has been recognized in the literature on instructional teaching and learning. The findings from this study have implications for both students and faculty members encompassing issues such as epistemological beliefs, lack of awareness, and social relationships that suggests cultural parameters that hinder the expansion of multicultural contexts in teaching and learning. The study also provides valuable insight into exploring the cultural competence

of these participants while providing several recommendations for instructional designers and future research. This analysis offers great insight into the impact instructional providers have on the outcomes of education and notes the differences that exist in making a contribution to the education of diverse learners.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Vivek Venkatash for your guidance and support in making this project possible. Thank you for being part of my vision of exploring the realm of culture within Instructional Design. Your expertise in the field of Educational Technology has help to guide me to the finish line. I could not have completed this without you. I would like to thank my co-supervisors Dr. Joyce Barakett for your helpful suggestions and Dr. Claude Martel, your assistance was sincerely appreciated. This journey has inspired me to push the limits of education in my own life and in the life of future learners. Thank you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The advancement in computer-mediated communication and Internet technology has shaped the way in which education and training are delivered. Accordingly, distance education has become global due to its diverse student population and increasing flexibility of online learning (Jarvis, 1999; Mason, 1998). 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, 2005). With such progress and dispersal of such technologies, online learning has been seen as *the* golden ticket of providing access to "uneducated" populations. In fact, countries such as Asia, China and India have popularized online degrees in regards to their advancement in economic development and demands for higher education access (Liu *et al.,* 2010). Similarly, the increase of globalization and the demographic changes in these online learning settings fuel a growing number of learners across cultures (cross culturally), and more importantly challenge the usefulness of the multicultural context these students are placed in. With more internationally diverse student populations entering higher institutions with technology integration as instruction comes the question of how can we accommodate learners from different cultural backgrounds? What type of instruction has been given or needs to be given to address cultural aspects in the delivery of online education?

With such progress of online learning via the Internet often involve students of diverse cultural and linguistic background. Cultural differences between individuals can affect students' learning processes and/or levels of engagement such as communication, activities, types of assessment and so forth. Research has shown that cultural difference

can also have a negative effect on students' participation in online courses, resulting in a "sense of marginalization, or, alienation" (Shattuck 2005). Other studies have revealed that cultural differences may be lessened in online education through "external identities" (Walker-Fernandez, 1999) or "cultural negotiation" (Goodfellow & Lamy, 2009).

In general cultural concerns in regard to online learning has not been accompanied by a growing number of studies in the field. Although research has been done surrounding cultural issues in online education, very few studies have been conclusive (Liu *et al.,* 2010). The implication here also lends itself to the field of Instructional Design and Technology (IDT), in that instructional designers are to design the educational content and experiences that will enhance the learners' learning and competencies. As such, socio-cultural implications need to be considered as well as the socio-cultural differences of learners in order to design and deliver cross-cultural online courses. Considering that instructional design may be so grounded in Western culture fails to consider diversity in a larger context, resulting in different learning performances of students and less value for a different culture. According to Burnham (2005, cited in Rogers, 2007, p.198), "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 difference in how design is approached."

Due to the competitive edge in today's e-learning world and the growing Web-based learning markets, it is important then to incorporate socio-cultural elements into instructional design and technology, as it can have a strong impact on human-computer interaction. It is also important for online education providers (instructional designers) to understand the different educational values and cultural expectations of their participants,

as well as the influence of cultural blinders in their own work. Therefore, instructional designers are faced with two afflicted questions: The first question is: How do we actually do this? That is, how do we incorporate learners' cultural diversity into instructional design- what methodological and or procedures should be used to assist with the design, instructional designer and needs of the learner? The second question deals more with the effectiveness as how to take into account cultural differences in instruction- that is making a case for cultural adaptations to meet the constantly growing need for cross-cultural training (Thomas, 2003). Therefore, the need for instructional designers to be culturally aware of the relationship between cultural context and instructional design points in the direction of developing a comprehensive framework or model that instructional designers can use when developing instructional content. The purpose of the study is to ferret out how their collaborative behaviors are different across cultures and its implications for designing and facilitating online collaboration among culturally diverse learners.

Statement of the Problem

Increasingly, the need for cross-cultural training is growing in instructional settings. Accordingly, instructional providers that include instructors and instructional designers should develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction (Gunawardena & Lapointe, 2007). Similarly, the issue of culture in the field of Instructional Design and Technology (IDT) has also gained ground and interest in regards to educational technology. This is especially important in light of the fact that cross-cultural design has become more challenging with the development of the Internet

and international E-learning. To simply translate materials to meet learners' needs in other cultures is not necessarily a positive outcome or even the outcome to helping students learn and move forward in these computer-mediated environments. Therefore, the association of culture and educational technology holds strong tendencies as it has a substantial influence in teaching and learning. While the word *culture* is acknowledged in education literature and found throughout many disciplines, its evolution does not suggest how practitioners developed and or develop cross-cultural training in instruction specifically those developing online instruction (Parrish, & Linder-VanBerschot, 2010). Ideally, instructional designers need to be more conscientious of their own conceptual frameworks and value systems in response to the materials they design, as it will benefit to the quality and impact of online instruction and future learners (Chen et al., 1999 p.220). Thus, the purpose of this study is to add to the current assessment of research regarding culture and instructional design. By looking into instructional designers and its practice, and seeing which factors are related to culture will help shape the research concerning the thinking, practice and lived experiences of instructional designers. This research will help designers rethink the lineation of what it means to integrate culture in the design of instructional materials, and more important, rediscover how to do it. Hopefully this study will initiate serious discussion to the pertinent question of what is culture in Instructional Design.

To summarize the goal of this research is an attempt to better understand how instructional designers are: (a) aware of cultural difference, (b) which differences make an impact in how their work is delivered and (c) what cross-cultural challenges are there

that make it difficult to practicing multicultural instruction in application with instructional design.

Research Questions

The research questions being explored in this study are the following:

a) Are instructional designers aware of how culture plays a role in their design?

b) How do instructional designers take the cultural aspect into consideration when designing?

c) Are instructional designers aware of the differences between themselves and the cultural group for whom they are designing instruction?

This research will use qualitative methods within the context of a case study approach. Case study research was selected in order to bring a deeper understanding of the development of cultural competence amongst instructional designers. This type of study focuses on investigating a contemporary phenomenon in relation to online instructional systems and effective design.

Importance of this Research

Due to the growing multicultural nature of education and advances in Internet technologies, cultural issues which encompass diversity, sensitivity, multiculturalism etc., has inevitably grown and spread through learning in schools of education (McLoughlin & Gower, 2000). However, rarely have we seen cultural issues being treated in the same regard with other disciplines compared to that of educational technology (Rogers *et al.,*

2007). This increase in cultural diversity of student populations has created the need for programs to be multi-faceted, as well as for instructional providers to integrate culture in ID. By doing so this will assist instructors in developing culturally sensitive learning products transmitting culturally specific knowledge to their learners, and providing a framework for developing cross-cultural instruction and adaptation of E-learning materials. Thus, instructional designers need a better understanding of exactly how they accomplish such a task, that is, how well are they aware of the cultural differences that impact the work placed on others, as well as their own cultural blinders that contribute to the lives of future learners. More exploration surrounding this topic will assist the field of Educational Technology in understanding the cultural differences that impact the teaching and learning enterprise, but even more so in developing cross-cultural learning products that will better serve pre-existing e-learning content and technologies.

Definition of terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions are used:

Culture. According to Scheel's and Branch (1993), culture is defined as:

...the patterns of behavior and thinking by which members of groups recognize and interact with one another. These patterns are shaped by a group's values, norms, traditions, beliefs, and artifacts. Culture is the manifestation of a group's adaptation to its environment, which includes other cultural groups and as such, is continually changing. Culture is interpreted very broadly here so as to encompass the patterns shaped by ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, geography, profession, ideology, gender, and lifestyle. Individuals are members of more than one culture, and they embody a subset

rather than the totality of cultures identifiable characteristics. (p. 7)

Cultural awareness/sensitivity. Cultural awareness refers to being sensitive to the existence and legitimacy of other cultures; to understanding and accepting other cultures; and to viewing cultural phenomena from the perspective of both the culture in which they occur and another culture, usually that of the viewer. Having a cross-cultural perspective/awareness/sensitivity means having the ability to view the world from a standpoint of a culture other than one's own (Powell, 1997b, p.6).

Cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is reflected in the great melting pot of the United States where different ethnic and racial heritages with various beliefs and customs are maintained and valued. Cultural identities should not be discarded and ignored. Used in education, it refers to each learner having a subjective culture, including unique value systems, norms of behavior, modes of interaction, socialization practices, linguistics patterns, and so forth (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1992, cited in Powell, 1993).

Instructional Design & Technology. The field of instructional design and technology encompasses the analysis of learning and performance problems, and the design, development, implementation, evaluation, and management of instructional and non-instructional processes and resources intended to improve learning and performance in a variety of settings, particularly educational institutions and the workplace. Professionals in the field of instructional design and technology often use systematic instructional design procedures and employ a variety of instructional media to accomplish their goals

(Reiser, 2007).

Online Learning: Online learning or E-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. The information and communication systems, whether networked learning or not, serve as specific media to implement the learning process (Tavangarian D., Leypold M., Nölting K., Röser M., (2004). E-learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio.

Globalization. There are varied definitions of globalization and the new information and communication technologies. "Globalization is a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity activity, interaction, and the exercise of power (Held *et al*. 1999, 16)". Evans (1995, 358) substantiates this view by pointing out that globalization "is not simply that the 'world has got smaller'… [r]ather, some time-space relations are radically altered to an extent which fundamentally affects the way people now view, understand and engage the world in which they live. It is far more than technology which facilitates globalization, it transcends the economic, social, political and cultural boundaries and is inclusive of processes, structures and products".

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

What is Culture?

It would seem that the answer to the question of *"What is culture?"* could be a very difficult question to answer due to the multitudinous definitions of culture found in the literature. In fact, work done by Krober and Kluckhohn (1952) identified 164 different definitions of culture across various disciplines. What becomes problematic is having to choose one definition without excluding other components or factors related to that of culture in which others might deem important and or relevant. This is perhaps where one can see a drawback to the word, because it can create a controversial yet difficult means to understanding what culture is depending on the individual, context, situation or circumstance. This not only shows the complexity of how culture can be defined, but also the difficulty in solely choosing one definition, because different scholars define culture based on their own research interests and experiences (Wang & Reeves, 2006). Nonetheless, regardless of which definition holds more power than the other, Danesi and Perron (1999) describe two key points based upon Krober and Kluckhohn many definitions of culture. They state that: "(1) culture is a way of life based on some system of shared meanings; and (2) culture is passed on from generation to generation through this very system" (p.22) Although there is no consensus, many researchers agree that *culture* is learned behavior consisting of thoughts, feelings, and actions (Hoft, 1996, p. 41).

Theoretical Framework

Previous studies have shown that learners with different cultural styles bring in different cultural patterns and prior experiences to the classroom environment (Murphy 1996). Due to a lack of empirical evidence on the influence of cultural attributes and learners' engagement in online activities, understanding the theoretical framework is quite complex. This is to say that the practice of educational technology when it comes to instructional design and cultural difference in online learning is not grounded in theory, rather justification for this research is based on generalized frameworks that were imposed to instructional design and cultural differences. Many of the frameworks for discussions in culture in Instructional Design Technology have been borrowed from other fields such as cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communications, and intercultural computer-mediated communications (CMC) with inferences drawn on to the field of online education (Rogers *et al.,* 2007). Research stems from the fact that pre-existing theoretical frameworks are superimposed with the idea of cross-cultural and online learning. By doing so, allows the research to be interpreted very differently and can be understood as not applying to all learners or as they say 'on all fours.' While things might appear as such other components could be hidden within the research.

Too often researchers have automatically imposed existing theoretical dimensions of culture to inform the practice of their work. For almost 20 years researchers and designers in Human-computer interaction (HCI) and instructional design have had great interest in examining cultural differences that support the design process (Aykin, 2005; Hall & Hudson, 1997; Taylor, 1992), but far too often are unsure about how to go about integrating aspects of culture, and or know what steps to take in diversifying their design. The lack of research in this area can partly be due to the difficulty in connecting

methodologies (inferences being made to the field of online education) (Moore & Anderson, 2003), but also to the limited research in the cross-cultural design of online education. In fact an examination of graduate courses relative to instructional design and technology concurs that; socio-cultural issues are not addressed in several courses, however often addressed by other disciplines in the arts and sciences (Rogers *et al.,* 2007). Voithifer and Foley (2002) authors also state that: " [...] commonly used IT instructional design textbooks[...] tentatively dedicate small sections to issues of race, class, and gender in relation to instructional design; however, in our view they do not offer instructional designers adequate strategies for taking these difficult-to define factors into consideration in their design process." (p.6)

From this the authors have concluded that instructional design has failed to integrate social class issues such as race, gender, ethnicity, nationality etc., into the learning and these learning mediated environments (Kinuthia, 2009). But contrary to the learning and instructional materials, what also becomes apparent is the position the instructional provider takes and the influence of their own cultural blinders. The question of how do you place yourself in the context of the culture your designing in and, how does your cultural identity/beliefs affect or are affected by the design of the product are questions that are of great concern and relevant to considering diversifying instruction in online learning? Thus we need to determine if instructional design/designers address the issue of culture, what is being done or not to done to incorporate this and how can it be applied on a global scale. Henderson (1996) reminds us that instructional design is a product of culture, and thus it needs to take culture into consideration: As she described:

Approaches to instructional design not only reflect differing world views,

but they consist of values, ideologies, and images that involve inclusions

and exclusions that act in the interests of particular cultural, class, and

gendered groups. Instructional design and the designer are inextricably

tied to their societal context and thus infused with the cultural, class, and

gendered influences resulting from the subtle and intricate interplay of

these factors. (p. 87)

Therefore, it is not enough to be solely concerned with the effectiveness of what we

design but more to the fact about the expression of instructional design and the discourse

of cultural issues in Instructional Design and Technology (IDT). As noted by Pincas

(2001), a growing appreciation of cultural diversity should be acknowledged in

consolidation with teaching and learning:

[...] students entering into professional education in a multicultural context

not aligned with their own culture can experience significant conflict. This

conflict arises not only in regards to incompatible teaching and learning

styles, but also because the growing 'professional self' struggles to

maintain both a connection to the local culture in which the student

eventually intends to work and a connection to the learning environment.

(p. 2)

Cultural Challenges

Though the move toward e-learning has gained rapid expansion and popularity

with the continual progression of the Internet and communication technologies, the

benefits of this new media integration raises certain implications to that of learning and curriculum development. Recently, E-learning has benefited and continues to benefit several organizations and corporate settings in the adoption of learning technologies and internalization of services. Despite the major advantage of cost savings, e-learning (also referred as global e-learning) allows for better accessibility of information, in that participants do not have to be in a specific location to participate in learning which impedes traditional classroom training. It is no wonder why online universities (e.g., AIU Online, Capella University, Devry University, Kaplan University, University of Phoenix, Walden University and Westwood College Online) have gained common ground in today's learning of higher institutions, attracting corporate travelers and expatriates. The commoditization of e-learning has provided a global learning opportunity and connectivity to a variety of audience learners, using Web-based learning as a cognitive tool in order to engage diverse students and educational experiences. In spite of the notion that global e-learning and corporate e-learning solutions continue to prove satisfactory, it does not do so without a price. Accordingly, (Anderson & Elloumni, 2004; Barbera, 2004) discuss global e-learning and its offerings stating that global e-learning is: " … the rapid expansion of interoperability and standardization of electronic resources and learning objects are combined with calls to ensure quality in content and process… along with the need to facilitate mobility among students and to ensure international perspectives, collaborative learning efforts, and teamwork" (p.224).

The scope and complexity for delivering uniform and customized training via global e-learning has brought several concerns and challenges referring to the lack of culturally-contextualized and relevant learning experiences reflected in the instruction of

cross-cultural online learning. In order to see the effectiveness of e-learning achieve its full potential would be to ignore the cultural underpinnings valued at making a contribution to the curriculum development and instructional design, effecting the learning processes of learners and that of future learners. Because e-learning has opened up doors for the delivery of online education, the adoption of culture cannot be discounted towards research and development as instructional designers have in their control how consumers of e-learning (e.g., purchasers, instructors, students, and end-users) learn and the learning process as a whole. Specifically, consumers are expected to work with curriculum designed in and for another culture, creating the problem for learners who are culturally different from the culture that developed the learning content.

Geneva Gay (1990), proposed that "if we are to achieve equally, we must broaden our conception to include the entire culture of the school-not just subject matter content" (p.61). Correct as she is, the curriculum has been designed to now include curriculum expanding to cultures on a global scale. Research studies have indicated that the major issues in planning, designing, and delivering online learning now include the given fact of globalized learning and the resultant cultural diversity of students (Chute & Shatzer, 1995; McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). However, curricula and instruction should be designed to provide a cross-cultural learning environment conducive to learners from a variety of backgrounds, while in effect embodying cultural differences and diverse value systems. Creating this so-called multi-cultural learning environment will promote cross-cultural understanding in the online learning community, maximizing the benefits of education to a global community and instruction of online learning." In fact Kim and Bonk (2002) also stress the importance of culture and its role in conjunction with the

cognitive development of learners through social interaction and discourse (para. 7). Ramsey, Williams, and Vold (2003) pointed out that, "effective multicultural education must be grounded in an understanding of its relation to other social and political movements and in an ability to make curriculum developmentally-appropriate or accessible" (p. 14). Therefore, it would seem that culture pervades learning and cannot be subtracted from the equation of instructional design and designing instructional environments. Culture addresses issues surrounding the social and cultural dimensions of learning and ways in how learning is approached that by instructional design should and must be considered.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of e-learning and the influence of culture some of the challenges that arise for course developers are the following:

• **Global vs. local perspectives:** Is learning material developed internationally appropriate for local contexts, pedagogies, and value systems?

• **Adaptation vs. generalized approaches:** Is it possible to produce internationally useable learning resources that can be used in any context, as opposed to generic materials that are later adapted and customized for local delivery? Which is the best approach?

• **Pedagogical uniformity vs. accommodating cultural diversity:** How do designers avoid the imposition of dominant worldviews or mainstream value systems and culturally- dissonant paradigms of learning, and instead enable learners to access learning resources that are congruent with their values, belief systems, and styles of learning?

(McLoughlin, 2000, 2001)

Exploring significant challenges such as those just mentioned will in essence shed light on the influence of cultural factors and communication technologies software such as e-learning. Effective use of activities and instructional materials will improve the effectiveness of online education and cross-cultural understanding and will benefit both instructors and students in increasing cultural awareness and experiences (Ramsey & Williams, 2003). To best put it, 'we often get to know our own culture through the eyes of people from different cultural backgrounds since we are so accustomed to the way we live and the system we believe in; this will be a valuable, if also perhaps a "painful self-reflection" (Hiemstra, 1991, p.8) experience'. Thus, it is intuitive that instructional designers accommodate diverse learners needs by ensuring cultural pluralism in instructional design, pedagogy and other aspects of the educational experience. If left by the wayside, learning could be tampered and be seen as unfitting and lacking certain provisions.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural differences are often ignored when attempting to communicate across geographical as well as social boundaries. As a result instructional designers' inability to understand these cultural differences hinder their capability to communicate effectively with their learners. Part of cross-cultural online education is to provide students with a global context where they are able to develop cultural awareness and gain social competency. However, instructional strategies are rarely culturally inclusive, flexible, or modifiable resulting in them not being as successful in the e-learning environment. This

lack of understanding creates an environment where their learners are hesitant to contribute in conferences, no longer willing to work collaboratively and have difficulty understanding the language (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000; Wang, 2007). Often within these online learning environments there is little emphasis placed on the traditional language. Many aspects of language and communication include humor and idioms that are also culturally relevant or specific. Therefore, the content design should consider content layout, menus, images, color, and symbols since they influence the intended messages (cited in Edmundson 2007, p.66).

In addition, Hites (1996) revealed certain problems in cross-cultural instructional design that instructional designers are often faced with. It appears that both cultural conditions and language conditions continue to pose formidable challenges for instructional designers in developing socio-cultural solutions to Web-based learning: e-learning. Although e-learning has gained rapid expansion and popularity, cross-culturally it has failed on many accounts due to several reasons. Dropout rates are as high as 80% ("sources estimate anywhere from a 60 to 80 percent dropout rate for online courses"—Braley-Smith, 2004) resulting not only from terrible content (Dunn, 2003), inefficient instruction (Clay, 1999; Cook, 2001), technological barriers (Mayes, 2001), but also lack of students' motivation (Harasim, 1990; Mehrotra, Hollister, & McGahey, 2001), language barriers (Meierkord, 2000; Young, 2002), cognitive discrepancies (Coomey, Stephenson, 2001) and psychological difficulties (Suler, 2002). Part of the reason is due to the poor understanding of how e-learning actually works as it does not always encourage and or facilitate collaborative work (cited in Edmundson 2007, p.292). This inextricably translates into cultural insensitivity for diverse learners online. Having found

that engagement, interactivity, and learning support are important aspects of pedagogy and approaches to learning provides basis for developing cultural dimensions of instructional design and quality e-learning. As part of her study, Hites describes several attributes that contribute to cultural challenges faced by instructional designers as well as conditions that influence the effectiveness of instruction and instructional strategies. Because both cultural conditions and language conditions are seen as cultural factors that inextricably address the learning outcomes of targeted students, provides reason to explore which attributes contribute to how individuals use or view communication technologies and the messages within them. Accordingly, several subdivisions of cultural conditions exist that can impede the learning content and global e-learning environment. They are as followed:

Cross-cultural communication is the second condition that affects both instructors and students (Hites 1996) due to people perceiving that their own context and way of thinking is logical and self-evident (Schipper, 1993). This condition of cross-cultural communication or barrier results in conceptual differences that can interrupt communication across cultures (Wiredu, 1995). Ethnocentrism and stereotyping are examples of failing to effectively communicate cross-culturally, as a result individuals are often wrongly categorized. In thinking about cross-cultural situations, we may misinterpret by placing situations, things, events or people in inaccurate categories (Adler, 1986), thus alluding to a lack of understanding of participants among other things. Therefore, if we do not adjust categories as we learn about persons from different cultures we may fail to recognize when communication is ineffective. More importantly,

we may be adding to the cause of incomprehension in comparison with another culture or cultures.

*Cultural values i*s the final cultural condition affecting all levels of organizational behavior, including training. Students and instructors may have different expectations about learning, including instructor leadership styles and the motivations of both students and instructors (Weaver, 1995; Hofstede, 1984) and these expectations are transferred to e-learning settings and related to education, power and authority. This sort of endeavour can also be seen by organizations in other countries in terms of job structures. International students may differ from domestic students in terms of the prerequisite skills or objectives to successfully do their jobs (Gooler, 1979, Spielman, 1983; Hites, 1996). Other cultural values that may influence technical training are uncertainty avoidance, perceptions of masculine and feminine roles (Hofstede, 1984), the role of context in communication (Hall, 1976), time perception, orientation to the individual or collective, relationship of the individual to the world, and orientation to doing or being (Althen, 1992; Park & Kim, 1992; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1971; Adler, 1986). The propensity of these factors will affect learning and training effectiveness (Hites, 1996).

Central to cultural conditions is the issue of language. Language can affect learning depending on the following two conditions: (1) the extent to which the subject involves language, (2) and the extent of the students' weakness in the language of instruction (Macnamara, 1976, p.123). Language has therefore been noted to be an obvious obstacle for foreign technical training (Rome, 1980) due to international students and or foreign trainees inability to process second language competencies efficiently, as well as the time it takes to understand the instructions (Lambert, Havelka & Gardner,

1959). Students tend to comprehend concrete words more easily than abstract words especially when they refer to objects and actions. Because abstract words can lead to difficulty in grasping ideas and in translating terminology, leading to information overload for non-native speakers and the feeling that technology has nothing to offer them since they cannot understand the language. In relation to the difficulty in language, it is common for non-native speakers to read at a slower rate than native speakers. For instance, Chinese-English bilinguals read English at 255 words per minute, compared to Chinese at 380 words per minute (Chambers, 1994; Wang, Inhoff, & Chen, 1999, cited in Edmundson 2007, p.24). Kawachi (1999, cited in Edmundson 2007, p.24) speculates that the English reading rate for Japanese is slower than the figure for Chinese, given the Japanese English proficiency and learning style. This so-called language barrier causes a hindrance to the adoption of e-learning in such continents as Europe, but also resulting in an increased call for "native-language" content development for local companies who are unwilling to adopt English (Barron, 2000, cited in Edmundson, 2007, p.24). Hall (1987) noted that we decode different types of messages at different speeds, and that cultural conventions influence the content, organization, style and format of written documents. Therefore, it is important to note the differences in conventions between writer and reader as this can lead to miscommunication (Boiarsky 1995). Another important aspect regarding language conditions is non-verbal communication. Olaniran and Williams (1995) claimed "different cultures attribute different meanings to similar behavior, which result in communication distortion" (p.225). Hall (1987) and Matsumoto (1991) noted three non-verbal ways of communication that may affect training are proxemics, use of gestures and eye contact patterns all of which have different meanings and use across

culture. The literature suggests that both language as well as cultural conditions have an affect on the instructional methods.

Cultural Differences

A discussion of culture is incomplete without acknowledging the difficulties that arise when attempting to integrate "culturally- specific content and nuances" into online learning environments. Generally speaking, culture affects the individual's method of learning and understanding, communicating, as well as interacting. However, because of distance learning these cultural norms are often lost in translation when creating online pedagogy. In cross-cultural e-learning environments, students from different cultural backgrounds are expected to interpret and understand information that has not been created for multicultural perspectives. This generalized form of teaching ignores the uniqueness of each student's ability to receive and retain information—an ability that is culturally biased. The development of curriculum for online learning faces challenges in terms of instructional delivery methods when attempting to cater to a multi-cultural online environment. Liu (2001) pointed out that "the development of curricula for cross-cultural learning environments must consider the cultural differences and diverse value systems as well as the different education systems to be served" (43). Cross-cultural curricula should be designed to support student learning through the integration of collaborative learning in online learning communities, which will promote cross-cultural understanding, increase students' awareness of global mentality, enable each student to think out of his or her own cultural sphere, and will bring the best out of each culture to maximize the benefit of education to the global community (44).

An example of the importance of taking into consideration the differences of cultures is apparent when comparing Easterners and Westerners:

Table 1. *Four distinct dimensions to compare Easterners and Westerners:*

Easterners	Westerners
Insistence on freedom of individual action	A preference for collective action
Desire for individual distinctiveness	A preference for blending harmoniously with the group
A preference for egalitarianism and achieved status	Acceptance of hierarchy and ascribed status
A belief that the rules governing proper behavior should be universal	A preference for particularistic approaches that take into account the context and the nature of the relationships involved. (pp. 61-62)

Nisbett (2004).

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 familiar with 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, cited in Spronk, 2004, p.172) 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, cited in Spronk, 2004, p.172), and in specifically academic contexts by Scollon and Scollon (1981, cited in Spronk, 2004, p.172).

Adoption Concerns

Burnham (2005, cited in Rogers, 2007, p.198) reminds us once again that, "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". The need for instructional designers to become cognizant of how their own culture perspectives is represented in the design decisions they make as well as the outcome of those decisions, will contribute greatly to practice of instructional design and that of educational technology. As many authors have noted

(Henderson 1996, Thomas, Mitchell, & Joseph, 2002) the difficulty in trying to divorce oneself from the societal context and worldview of the designer, becomes critical for the designer to self-examine his or her approach when designing instruction. Such a study is important in identifying cultural barriers that may impinge on the performance of diverse populations, and role of instructional designers working within the confines of online instruction and the way they have developed (or not developed) their instructional materials.

In association with culture and cultural dimensions, Hofstede's framework is one that is often considered for studying cross-cultural communications. His idea is based on a four-dimensional model of cultural difference that is used to characterize cultural behaviors that originate from different societies. According to his research, differences may lie between different cultural groups along with the perplexities between teacher and student interactions (Liu *et al.,* 2010). Hofstede's model has been challenged and criticized but his work has been proven to have foundation to cultural differences in learning and teaching (Wang, 2007). Hofstede (1991) states that 'culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values' (p. 5). Though his work has made contribution in discussing differences in cultural groups, it is often based on national differences and is less likely to be conclusive. He attempts to imply set levels of characteristics onto individuals of a group and then onto a national scale. Maitland and Bauer (2001) call this problem *ecological fallacy* that is: "the impulse to apply group or societal level characteristics onto individuals within that group" (p.90). A flaw should be noted here, due to the generalizability of descriptions of a group that are less likely to be

applicable to any one individual (Rogers *et al.,* 2007). Maitland and Bauer later conclude, "national level characteristics must not be interpreted at the individual level" (p.90). In trying to reveal individual placement on some scale refutes much of the generalized frameworks and application to understanding cultural differences in groups, and thus would mean to think cautiously about such research, especially those that part take in borrowing terminologies from other fields. How this applies to culture and the literature in ID is quite similar to Hofstede's view of culture and system of collective programming. Here, culture has been utilized adversely in ID, having also borrowed definitions from other branches of knowledge and prescribed upon the theoretical and practical works of ID. In both circumstances having borrowed frameworks, shed lights on some areas but also discloses others, hence the difficult task in defining culture. In order for online instruction to be reach its full potential, instructional designers must take note of the persons they are designing for, as well as the learner's cultural predisposition in order to see the importance of designing culturally appropriate and sensitive products that are likely to impact learning and future enterprises.

The evolution of the word culture has now made its way in the field of instructional design, encompassing definitions founded upon sociology, anthropology and educational perspectives (Chen *et al*., 1999 p.220). Having drawn upon other disciplines (imposing pre-existing theoretical framework), on new questions of cross-cultural instructional design, generates the complex term and its application to ID. With that comes an unsupportive and unexplained phenomenon of online learning that does not fully address the concept of culture and its attributes situated in an online learning environment, along with the many definitions of what culture is, how it is used and what

is meant by it. So the question now becomes how do we come to understand what culture means or even what culture is supposed to mean and or look like in ID? What theory or new theories need to be developed for a more enriched approach to ID? The role of culture in ID has many meanings that inform learners and learning. There is no debate that culture and learning are both evolving more rapidly than we could have ever possibly imagined, and so with that comes the need to identify those dimensions of culture that are most likely to impact instructional design and designers. In order to understand and or bridge the gap between culture and online education, the need for cross-cultural training should be put at the forefront.

Rather than providing a synopsis of the many definitions of culture, I prefer not to place one definition of culture as first-rate, rather to leave a general notion of what culture is. Culture can be defined as "the sum total of ways of living, including values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication" (Powell, 1997, p. 15). In addition Powell points out that cultures are not static entities because of the interaction that takes place between cultures and the people who are part of them. This statement clearly shows that culture plays a significant role in the daily lives of people and that we are a product of our own culture. By keeping a neutral position of what is culture, the meaning of culture and the definition of culture, what I hope to accomplish is for the participants to reflect deeply on their own perspective on what culture is or is not, and its influence on the materials they design. However, for the purpose of this discussion, I refer to Scheel's and Branch' (1993) definition of culture, offering a thorough interdisciplinary perspective of culture:

...the patterns of behavior and thinking by which members of groups

recognize and interact with one another. These patterns are shaped by a group's values, norms, traditions, beliefs, and artifacts. Culture is the manifestation of a group's adaptation to its environment, which includes other cultural groups and as such, is continually changing. Culture is interpreted very broadly here so as to encompass the patterns shaped by ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, geography, profession, ideology, gender, and lifestyle. Individuals are members of more than one culture, and they embody a subset rather than the totality of cultures identifiable characteristics. (p. 7)

Essentially what needs to be done is to address the absence of culture within the educational materials being created for the so-called diverse learner in order for educational efforts to reach multiple audiences. From this we can derive that it is critical for not only instructors but also instructional designers to develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction. To conclude this section instructional designers need to become aware of the importance of the role that culture plays when designing online curriculum for the multicultural online classroom. An individual's culture affects the way they interpret, understand, communicate, interact and receive information. The uniqueness of every individual's ability to retain information needs to be taken into consideration and instructional designers need to avoid designing in a manner that ignores the individuals' culture and develop a form of enculturation that ensures cultural pluralism in instruction design pedagogy and all aspects of the educational experience.

Chapter Three

Culture in the Context of Instructional Design

Because the move towards online learning is already here in the 21st century and its audience encompasses a global and widespread diverse population, educational institutions want to provide culturally neutral learning environments. But the question of how well are we accomplishing such a task and or how far or close we are to the truth in getting to know the learner and culture when designing is still up for debate. Due to the fact that culture not only affects how one behaves, thinks, and learns, it is crucial in seeing the impact of culture and learning within ISD. In looking back at what Henderson said,

"Instructional design cannot and does not, exist outside of a consideration of culture," inevitably transcribes that culture and learning are intertwined and forever shall be. Thus, it is safe to say that culture cannot and should not be disregarded as it pertains to the current and future situation of online learning. Aspects such as the perceived role of the facilitator, usage of technology towards learning, type of assessment systems, more lectures versus more hands-on learning, to name a few are some of the factors that are deeply influenced by our culture. Indeed, in order to be successful, designers of online education should strive to be culturally sensitive and practice culture-sensitive learning strategies if we are to accommodate for the needs of culturally diverse learners.

Instructional design and integration of culture therefore lends itself to teacher education and good teaching practices. Accordingly culture influences instruction at several levels: institutional, instructional content, instructors and learners (Kinuthia, 2009). These levels inform the acceptance and use of instructional resources, impacting

cross-cultural interactions in instruction and integration of cultural knowledge. Collis (1999) reminds us that cultural variables interact and influence each other on four levels: societal, personal, organizational, and disciplinary. Therefore, the combinations of social and cultural factors are closely related to that of learning processes and promoting knowledge acquisition for students, and also to the development of courses and materials in delivering culturally sensitive instruction. Although there seems to exist several based models pertaining to integrating culture in ID (Henderson, 1996; Henderson & Cook, 2007; Lee, 2003; Thomas, Mitchell & Joseph, 2002), there are no formalized models or guidelines that classifies unity amongst everyone, thereby providing discrepancy across papers and knowledge transformation. This creates a conflict that limits the potentiality of cultural content being used to inform the practice of ID, and understanding of instructional designers and educational technologists who must design for learning contexts that are increasingly diverse. Provided that culture lends itself to the needs of a rapidly changing world of diverse learners and that of teacher education, creates the need for new dimensions for culturally relevant pedagogy in ID along with teaching/learning, and, to be critically conscious of how this can be done.

However, the comment that culture is overlooked in ID is one that conveys that culture does not play an even and or greater role for co-constructing knowledge and understanding socio-cultural contexts. This implication is not directly addressing culture in the design of instruction undermines instructional products and use of potentially effective products. Therefore, the call for instructional designers to consolidate about aligning cultural aspects to that of their designs includes not only the promotion of human interaction but also embracing cultural history. For Schwier, Campbell & Kenny (2004)

"… culture is an important value for instructors and instructional designers to hold because they are clearly in the position of social agents having substantial influence on their learners". And because instructional designers come from a variety of backgrounds and unique experiences, understanding and or seeing how relevant technology integration is on a global scale and academic success of learners is linked to that realization. To give an example of what is meant by integrating culture dynamics in instructional content is to take into account how different cultures respond to the layout of the graphical interface, images, symbols, color and sounds. By examining how culture and cultural differences interact with the design process, will illuminate the disillusionment to understanding the socio-cultural issues in instructional design foundations, and explicitly address cultural diversity amongst learners.

We are then again left with yet another question of can instructional design be culturally neutral? Are we able to separate ourselves from reality and own cultural barrier? In response to understanding culture in the context of instructional design is to note that culture in education goes beyond the idea of training and effective practices of teaching and learning. In this way, culture includes the very presence of whom we are, what we know but also how we come to know it. Essentially when we teach, we are teaching culture, including its manifestos of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In this way, we can come to understand education as being a process that is fundamentally sociocultural in nature (Thomas, 2003). Liu, Liu, Lee, and Magjuka (2010) suggest that a "culturally inclusive learning environment needs to consider diversity in course design in order to ensure full participation of the international students" (p. 187). In this sense it is critical to for instructional providers to take the responsibility of acculturating learners

and the framework within ID in moving forward to reaching a larger audience of diversified learners through online instructional designs. What I am proposing is to acquire research to discover the cultural aspects present within instructional design and practiced by instructional designers, in order to help us, myself included, design instruction that can help cross-cultural learners, learn in ways that coincide with their culture, their values, beliefs and styles of learning.

The Case Study

Definition of a Case Study

According to Cresewell (1998), a case study is a holistic inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its natural setting. Specifying particular terms in greater detail:

- _The **phenomenon** can be many different things: a program, an event, an activity, a problem or an individual(s).

- _The **natural setting** is the context within which this phenomenon appears. Context is included because contextual conditions are considered highly pertinent to the phenomenon being studied either because many factors in the setting impinge on the phenomenon or because the separation between the phenomenon and the context is not clearly evident.

- _The phenomenon and setting are a bound system; that is, there are limits on what is considered relevant or workable. The boundaries are set in terms of time, place, events, and processes.

- _**Holistic inquiry** involves collection of in-depth and detailed data that are rich in content and involve multiple sources of information including direct observation,

participant observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents, reports
and physical artifacts. The multiple sources of information provide the wide array
of information needed to provide an in-depth picture.

By conducting a case study, will allow myself as a researcher to go beyond statistical
results in exploring and understanding the complex issues of culture within the context of
instructional design. By examining the outset of cross-cultural online contexts, will in
turn bridge the gap between effective design and acknowledgement of learner difference,
as well as answering a key question of: how can informational and relational bridges
between an instructor and online participants be constructed? Again, the research focuses
on how culture might influence the practice of instructional designers, allowing for the
study of the central phenomenon being investigated and understanding of such precedent
issues.

Like all qualitative data, almost all of the information can be considered to be
interpretative and therefore can be viewed differently depending on the individual. The
issue of generalization often appears within the literature when it comes to the application
of a case study and research strategy. Thus, the nature of this study is not to generalize
past research findings, rather to emphasize specific aspects when designing cross-
culturally via online, and noting any commonalities amongst instructional designers in
trying to understand the impact of cultural differences in the practice of instructional
designers.

Research Design

The research presented here, uses a purposive sampling method in order to discover, understand and or gain insight of a specific population in which it is likely to lead to informative knowledge and understanding of the research. It was not a random sample, but rather, I sought to find instructional designers who have created and or currently engaged in creating culturally sensitive instructional designs. The purpose of this study was to seek out instructional designers whom developed cross-cultural online instruction.

The subjects of the study included 12 participants who have been designing instruction for one or more cultures other than their own, and or persons who work closely with instructional designers. 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 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 caries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (p.29). The twelve participants in this study included six females and six males. Out of the twelve instructional designers that were interviewed, only eight were used as part of the study, due to having answered the original research question as well as a way to compare and contrast different perspectives. Although I selected twelve instructional designers that

acknowledge the complexities of culture within the ID, this does not mean that the other participants did not provide insightful information surrounding this issue. Rather, these participants were chosen based on the content of their responses, and also the context in which they spoke of. The participants used in this study discuss culture within ID while examining how it appears in their work as instructional designers and student engagement. One could surely argue that by selecting twelve instructional designers we exclude all other participants and their views, which places the study to be of lesser value. Although, this is a limitation, it is also an opening that allows for a cultural mix of specific case studies in connection with the overall research problem. Therefore, having a small sample size demonstrates how tightly focus the study is, but also provides the importance to understanding culture and how cultural factors can impact the work of instructional designers and pedagogy.

The researcher decided that to understand the impact of minority workers having fewer participants in the study formulate a better conclusion to the overall data analysis and interpretations. Although some of the instructional designers do bring useful information throughout the discussions, several of them do drift off topic, and makes it difficult in interpreting such responses. In explaining the current study's participants, all individuals represented in this study are all from different origins and work in different contexts. This is important to mention, because research has analyzed teacher's perceptions of these contexts and how individual identities helps to conceptualize the effects of diverse identities. This is to say that although instructional designers may have a common characteristic, does not equate them to talking about these issues in the same manner. For example, having an overall theme as 'awareness of culture' could in fact be

talked about very differently depending on the individual, either by him or her adding to a previous point and or describing a new aspect. Although these participants express similar experiences and concerns does not give voice to all instructional designers, rather it portrays the experience and perception of an individual in a specific situation and cannot be induced to every member of society. The narratives provided here, should be warranted as important information in examining how culture plays and continues to play a role in the educational field, and its relation to the broader spectrum of multiculturalism and differences within learners. Further, even though the instructional designers vary in age, experience, the commonality between these instructional designers is in retrospect to providing important information concerning cultural issues within ID and the field of educational technology. Consequently in limiting this study to seven participants, I have attempted to build an in-depth portrait of the metacognitive reflections and introverted information designers have gained in time of their practice. Therefore, this qualitative study uses intensive semi-structured open-ended interviews for data collection in examining perceptions, experiences, and relationships amongst instructors. Each interview was conducted either in person, telephone or via computerized technologies due to the geographical spread of research participants. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. Interviews explored the stated research questions of this study.

My questions posed to instructional designers should not be viewed as structured interview questions although they might be seen as such. Rather I utilized these questions as a way for other questions to emerge from my discussions and interactions with the participants. By this, what became important and most relevant was the dialogue between instructional designers and myself, in which the conversation inadvertently answered

most of if not all the questions originally produced for the participants. Therefore, new and other themes were introduced in conversation with participant(s), which was also used in later conversations with other participants in order to get a sense of what others might have thought surrounding this issue. Although the majority of the data came from the interviews, I also asked for instructional designers to provide, where possible, related materials they had written as well as examples of online instruction they have created that they felt was at least somewhat culturally sensitive. Due to circumstances, not many of these materials were available for me to examine.

Limitation of Method

One major limitation that can be pointed early on in my research is the sampling population. Due to having chosen certain participants to partake in this research study, the participant selection may not be representative of the entire community. However, the goal of this study is to explore the notion of culture and question instructional designers of its importance and impact within their design materials. The participants provided the opportunity to obtain insightful information surrounding this topic. In this respect, the participants used in this study should be considered as specific narrative case studies as they each describe unique situations, experiences and perspectives around this topic, which informs the reader about the meaning of the data. This does not mean that the non-participants should be categorized as uninformative; rather, their meaning of culture and cross-cultural instruction do not address the workings of multicultural instruction and the goal of this research paper. Their perceptions could be linked to 'how they think culture can affect certain aspects, rather than 'how it does'. This preference of participant

selection shows how meaningful the participants' experiences and their effectiveness to openly discuss culture and instructional design. Furthermore, having not had the opportunity to see the work of these participants and identifying how they integrate culture aspects into instructional design could serve as the feedback needed to provide a better foundation to the research study.

Data Collection - Interview Protocol

Interview questions were developed based on the existing literature and used in the following way. Prior to conducting the interviews, the interview questions were reviewed with a faculty member in the department of Educational Technology at Concordia University. The faculty provided feedback for the final design of the survey to be used. In order to maintain accuracy, I requested permission to audio record the interviews. Each interview began with intentionally vague questions in order for the participant to speak freely about whatever they felt are the most important issues. The interviewees were then asked a series of more specific semi-structured questions intended to extract helpful data about their perceptions regarding the research questions. Participants were allowed to express their ideas and opinions candidly, whereby if a specific topic was raised I immediately encouraged the new direction and aspired to know more about the topic. In order to preserve confidentiality of subjects, I eliminated any references that may result in the identification of a specific participant, although participants were given the option of having their real names used or anonymity. I kept a copy of the recordings of each participant, and created field notes during and after each interview session in which directed me to form the initial themes of analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was properly categorized in order to make judgments about the meaning of the data. This process became the unit of coding whereby the participant's responses provided theoretical justification to the research being studied. Three phases of coding (open coding, refinement of coding and axial coding) were used in order for key themes and patterns to be identified and developed into later coding categories (Glaser, 1992, cited in Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). The results produced by the twelve instructional designers were used for comparative measures, whereby the information was treated as one cohort– relating the experiences, perspectives and suggestions of all instructional designers in which allowed me to formulate an overall conclusion. A 'constant comparative method' was used in order to ensure reliability of this study. In using pre-established categories, allowed for the development of a data analysis that could be applied to participants. Through such refinement of using the constant comparative method, data related to previous themes is described in the study, but not always discussed in the same way. While instructional designers' views may or may not be in close relation to pre-existing categories, describes the difficulty in this type of qualitative research, as interpretations of the data sources can be seen and understood very differently for different people. Based on the data collected, I believe that is important for readers to understand the complexities that are involved in a study such as this one, as there are several measures that have to be kept in mind in collecting and analyzing cross-cultural research. 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). Due to the fact I served as the main instrument for collecting data for this study, researcher bias is a unique element in qualitative inquiry. This poses a problem in my study since I serve as being a major bias demonstrating the notion of qualitative rigor. As a researcher, one tries his or her best to reduce such biases by following certain procedures; however, such measures could have been detrimental to the study if those suggestions would have been met. Therefore, my involvement in the study in which I not only serve as a researcher but also the bias in the data collection, leads a reader to have some skepticism about the research findings. In interpreting the data, I felt it was important for readers to understand how the data were collected and interpreted. For many, it could be regarded as inconclusive due to the research being too subjective, intuitive, and value-laden. However, at the same time in order for one to draw any conclusions around this area of interest sometimes means emerging oneself into the context where issues of culture, context, and or language, are part of and in part the dilemma that is being explored. Thus, using myself as a candidate for misrepresenting the data, should only been seen as a marginal error in the data analysis. In addition, the measures undertaken for this study still holds meaning despite my own individual idiosyncrasies. Trying to understand the socio-cultural challenges within ID, reflects the feedback that needs to be delivered that can only be done qualitatively by way of asking important questions in hopes that the responses are meaningful and informative. My overall data analysis drew on instructional designers' narratives as well as secondary sources.

Report of Data

Williams Horton, in his great work *Designing Web-based Training*, asserted:

>…putting training on the web makes it available around the globe, but availability is not enough. Barriers of language, custom, and expectations limit the use of our training. Local economic and business conditions further restrict who can take our training. Reaching the goal of global training requires solid knowledge of the differences among learners throughout the world—and careful design for these differences (p.439).

Based on the data collected during the interviews, three themes emerged that characterized the experiences of the participants in this study. These themes included (a) Awareness; (b) Assumptions; (c) Faculty; (d) Educational Challenges. In addition other themes emerged in the study that can be taken up as important information, however, these were not used due not having fully explored all points of the instructional designers' responses. Therefore, the following information used represent shared understandings of instructional designers responses that are conceptualized in order to understand and see the relevance of having an ethnic teacher in front of a classroom. In addition, based on these themes, analyses of the findings are founded on how the instructional designers describe the socio-cultural aspects in the field of instructional design that is grounded in their experience rather than objective research. The instructional designers whose interviews are presented here speak about themselves in terms of their experiences, their work contexts and their practice with their learners. Findings from this study reveal that there is a need for instructional designers to develop skills in knowing how to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction, which may in fact contribute to the effectiveness of what we design and how we design it.

It is important to note that because a series of questions were asked to instructional designers during the interviews, not all questions can be illustrated in the result section. Rather, several questions have been chosen as a way to conceptualize several of the themes being described and reflect best the set conditions of instructional designers in the context of instructional design and culture. Thus, these questions were drawn only after having done the interviews with all instructional designers and thereby regarded as significant to answering the research problem. The questions that are found throughout the research have been asked in such a way so as not to discriminate against certain persons but are necessary in order to get to the heart of the matter. Other questions have been altered slightly (meaning they were asked differently depending on the individual) however, remain relevant to the research. The information that follows should only be viewed as a preliminary exercise as many things can be pointed out as flaws in the research.

As one might have easily expected, culture is a topic that is most often discussed and is seen almost anywhere. It should be no secret that cultural issues are in fact involved in the workings of instructional design and educational technology. Throughout my discussions with the participants, cultural issues do arise regarding the lived experiences of these participants as they have revealed several issues regarding this topic. In collecting this data, it is important for me to mention that the goal of this research was to capture and document the challenges regarding the creation of online instruction faced by instructional designers while working cross-culturally. For this reason, it is important to clarify that although some of the issues raised within the research are culturally found, not all are purely "cultural," but still remain of value and integrated into the following

discussion. Issues such as the English language of learners and or technological infrastructure can arguably be less of a purely cultural matter, however, they are still issues that these instructional designers have encountered while working cross-culturally. However, I feel it is important to clarify the perspective that will be taken up in this paper so as not to confuse the reader. In addition, participants from this research have claimed that cultural differences are significant enough to make a difference in the way how learners use the online materials instructional designers create. Based on this, my intention was to simply explore 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. Apart from the importance of cultural competence, findings from this study reveal that the participants have a general consensus concerning principles of good instruction but must always be considered in the light of the context and existing mental framework of the learner. Although participants indicated some form of universality amongst principles, much more research needs to be done surrounding this issue so as not to study learners from one culture alone and then make generalize statements about all people. Having said this, the discussion of results reflects how participants responded to research questions found within this paper. The following questions were asked:

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

Based on instructional designer's responses it appears that the majority of participants in this study have an understanding of cultural differences and its contribution to the field of ID. Throughout my discussion with the participants, many of them pointed out that they are aware of differences between themselves and the cultural group they are designing

instruction for, however came to such realizations long before entering the field of ID. How they became aware of cultural differences differs between participants and will be discussed throughout this paper. However, it is important to note that my intention was to find instructional designers who were likely to be aware of cultural differences so as to note how instructional designers incorporate socio-cultural aspects in their teaching and or practice. It is also important to mention that although instructional designers were aware of some significant differences amongst cultures does not mean that they know what all of them are and how it alters their design. Admittedly many of the participants mentioned that there was still a lot that they were unaware of in speaking about cultural differences, but emphasized how important it is to consider when designing. Consider the following quote:

Christine describes her own situation in which the understanding of cultural differences played a pivotal role in her classroom and how her awareness of cultural differences emulated through her observation as a trainer.

> When I was doing classroom base training, because I am bilingual I would sometimes deliver the training in French and also deliver the training in English and I noticed that there was something different in how I had to deliver the training in order to suit the needs of the group, and I was not all equipped to qualify as yet but there was something different. Eventually I was involved in training for the internal association of civil aviation so I was delivering training to entire classroom of Russians or classrooms that had people coming from all kinds of different cultures altogether. The training was in English but I could sense that the expectations of the people were different in terms of how I interacted with them, how they interacted with the content, how they interacted with each other. I also had the same experience working in a not profit organization where some of the students were newly arrived immigrants so I became aware of the differences but I did not know how to qualify them and I guess at that point I was dealing more with natural differences. I didn't see it as cultures within cultures as yet, that happened later.

As part of the discussion surrounding the topic of instructional design and cultural challenges, I further investigated to understand if the education that instructional designers received as students in anyway helped them learn how to design instruction for students from a multitude of ethnic backgrounds. Throughout every interview all the participants brought up his and or her own credential towards school outlining several courses that were deemed necessary to take, however, none ever being allocated to the topic of instructional design and knowledge of culture and cultural differences. Although spoken quite differently as well as in different contexts, most participants agreed to not having a theoretical basis for cross-cultural instructional design. Therefore, the question of how instructional designers became aware of cultural differences was also a significant question that was posed to participants in order to understand how they came to understand and or take into account the learner's cultural perspective when designing. By describing their own understanding and their position as an instructional designer, participants acknowledged the conceptions of culture and their own ethical background. By sharing their own experiences, instructional designers discussed explicitly the "culture of power" and the "power of their own culture" and related it to issues of educational technology. Because culture is not an easy topic to approach, the importance of culture and cultural considerations must be viewed by practitioners in a professional matter in the attempt for online instructional design to be enriched and made possible.

Awareness

Throughout my discussions with the participants, multicultural instruction continues to taint the educational experiences of students, as I have come to realize that there are many factors that can be held accountable for the underachievement of ethnic learners. In saying that, there is no easy was to discuss the effects of culture and teaching as any teacher who has had a class where about the issue of culture, race, gender etc. was brought up, could surely point out how difficult it was in discussing such sensitive issues. The growing multicultural nature of education and training environments makes it critical for instructional providers to become more knowledgeable about the cultural differences found in their learners. As previous research has shown, there may be limitations to thinking that culture is not an important issue to discuss in relation with instructional design. With the unpredictable number of learner population, instructional providers can no longer believe and or make overreaching judgments about demographics of their learners before interacting with them (Lea & Goodfellow, 2003). Also the fact that culture is often overlooked, circumvents the cultural problem in not considering culturally sensitive learning materials within instructional design, while proliferating negative cultural dimensions of learning contributing to student performance. Therefore, instructors and ID's should consider the learner population and the dynamics within the classroom in developing a higher degree of awareness. Furthermore, educators must also become aware of the cultural biases embedded within their own teaching and instructional designs, including the selection of instructional activities, their presentation styles as well as the expectations they hold for students. Recognizing one's own behavior and cultural biases can help increase cultural diversity and create stronger empathy for learners.

We are then faced once again with unanswered questions. How can we come to understand intra-cultural value variations within cultures? How can we understand the meaning of cultures from contextual and different points of view? How do we come to understand cultures in the age of globalization? Due to the limited knowledge that these instructional designers have in terms of the changes needed to be made to better create learning materials that meet their learner audiences, comprises an expansion of the instructional design process in order to acculturate students and to better understand their needs and preferences. As part of the discussions, one of the greatest problems with the issue of cross-cultural pedagogy is determining the direction an instructional event should take and much greater, how several layers of cultural analysis is difficult and calls for additional research in order to accommodate culturally based learning.

Because I believe that there are marked disparities in the educational system that lead learners to be viewed as inadequate to the school settings, is largely influenced by instructors expectations and attitudes and which creates a racialized barrier between teacher and students. For students who are part of this sort of environment, they cannot truly benefit from the education system due to the social structures that exist in the school system and that often go unnoticed. Because a deficit model might be in place for ethnic students held by educators, the aims for ethnic learners to show their full potential cannot be built on. Whereby instructors who model certain behaviors around issues of cultural characteristics and cultural preference in the classroom, which is presumed missing from student's backgrounds is the instructor's attempt to make ethnic students fit into the existing system of teaching and learning (Santoro, 2007). In saying that, consideration of

cultural differences is a process whereby it reflects both instructional provider and learners and critical to leading to effective multicultural sensitive practice. The question of how did these participants become aware of cultural differences provides guidance in determining the degree to which instructional designers consider differences, while transcending their cultural inclinations in identifying the elements that contributed to increased knowledge of about cultural diversity. Out of all the participants interviewed, most recognized that there were differences between cultures and were somewhere intertwined between knowing what they are and how it impacted their learning. These participants however, developed their level of awareness both informally and formally in which allowed them to better incorporate consideration of cultural diversity into ISD. Both of these paths will be discussed.

Informal Ways

By informal, I mean that developing cultural awareness was not part of the job description but an unintentional result due to a lived experience and or personal temperament regarding cultural issues. Several of the participants stated that they became more aware of cultural differences because of multiple engaging encounters with people of different cultures and or trial and error. Several designers expressed that traveling to different countries assisted them in understanding differences between cultures and developing their awareness. Two examples of this come from Nidia and Adam's comments:

> Even for me just having to design for people here it is challenging…
> Within the years that I have been working here, not in a formal way but
> in an informal way, with the work that you do, you kind of start learning
> what to do what not to do, what to use, how to say this or how to say that.

I felt [experienced] it more it the beginning because I knew that I didn't know… Okay, if I wanted to site an example I could have examples but they were examples from my background and my experience, but examples from here [I could] use hockey or Tim Horton's or coffee or a cartoon that kids were watching when they were kids. I have no idea what they were watching when they were kids; for me it's more challenging, maybe I have heard of it but it's not something that I grew up with it. (Nidia)

Adam mentions:

I think part of what helped me… I lived in China for two months, I went to study there and the university I was studying at had a lot of international students. I got to see the Chinese perspective on things and at the same time meet people from other cultures and importantly, see how these people from different cultures reacted to the Chinese Culture. It was a two-layered thing where I was being exposed to different cultures and observed other people's reactions to that culture and I think that really helped me to see how cultural differences come into play. The same thing again when I went to Geneva, I was there for almost seven months so I learned a lot about European culture and it's not a homogeneous thing either, each country is different, even regions within countries are different. On top of that people from all over the country came to work at the UN so I got to see how they interacted with each other, a lot of them would make fun of each other based on stereotypes that they knew about different cultures so I got to see how they think about each other but also how much people really live up to these stereotypes and how a lot of the stereotypes were of them and other ones they would get annoyed when people would bring them up. It was such an interaction of different cultures that I thought it helped me to become aware of how different cultures think, but also, how well and how badly they interact with each other and how people with open minds tend to get along better with people from different cultures than with some people who were just stubborn and stuck in their ways and they really had a lot of trouble interacting with each other.

With respect to this, Ining also speaks about her experience. Previous to her commenting on the how she became aware of cultural differences, the following question was asked which generated her answer.

Do you think it is easy to separate oneself from one's own personal epistemologies compared to that of the Western way of thinking?

It's not always easy and it takes great effort for each individual. As an instructional designer it took me a great effort to understand what my background is, how I came into this and having an 'ah-ha' moment [realizing], "oh I think of things this way because that was what my Chinese background told me", then of course I immersed myself in Canadian society long enough and I acquired a lot of Canadian values that are now embedded in me as well. Now I am more aware of that and I can separate [the two], "this is consistent with what a Canadian would be thinking" and I also think like that too. So it takes great effort for each individual to have that in perspective and to be able to separate those things by using your words and separate, not in terms of the actions will be completely different or my beliefs will be completely contradictory but knowing where does this come from and this is where the other things come from and how they may or may not converge and some parts will remain separate…so the same scenario on the faculty side and the student side they also need to separate those things out and to understand how things come together or not, what those difference are in themselves as well.

And it actually took me a long time, I didn't really come to this perspective well into the 10th year that I've been in Canada but it took that long because I came here (Canada) and I want to be part of it I want to be successful. So I got a Canadian education, I got jobs in the Canadian education system I interact professionally mostly with Canadian colleagues (referring to people of different ethnicities but who are Canadian citizens) and this is probably not very intentional on my part, but just because of the environment I just try to act and think like Canadians, I never thought about my past and I wasn't really aware that there was a completely different me or thinking behind me and gradually I thought, "well yes there is" and probably some conflict arise within me and I started to think "how does this work?" I need to resolve those, so I started to become aware that I have two different paths here that I need to bring together and I need to make it work together. So I can see the students and the faculty going through similar journeys as well, but they will start to see that it is going to be different and where the differences and being very conscious about choosing to keep things the way they are or choosing to change or choosing to find middle ground. All those are very conscious decisions you need to first understand and know what the differences are then be able to make those decisions.

In addition to recognizing the diversity of cultures that exist amongst learners, one other interesting point that can be seen throughout the preceding quote is her description of her attitude towards cross-cultural situations. We see that her disposition as well her having

experience in working with faculty members has allowed her to engage in multiple

encounters, and in so doing seeing the different aspects of cultures which are likely to

propagate cultural awareness. This being said we come to understand that a higher level

of awareness can be the by-product of possessing a certain attitude or way of being.

Jacques gives another example of how he came to be aware of cultural

differences. He presents the argument of trial and error and how through his experience

of communication and presenting new ideas helped him become more aware of cultural

differences:

> I guess I would have to say that it [was] probably more trial and error in the sense
> that you design materials as you normally do in a more culturally neutral context
> and then you implement that design and then you realize that it's not working as
> you thought. You start to think of why and you make some adaptations to that. I
> think it's something that we should take into account during the design process as
> oppose to after. (*He later goes on to talk about learners*). This is kind of
> simplistic I guess but a principle that works quite well when you're not exactly
> sure what characteristics your learners have. It's variety, it's as simple as that and
> as complicated as that because providing variety in your learning design is both
> expensive in terms of time and money…so when you're looking at that from an
> instructional design perspective for example, in French language learning there's
> going to be text and reading you can't avoid that but the idea of any variety is
> about that is making sure that every sensory channel is covered and that you got a
> lot of video, you got a lot of imagery, you got a lot of or willing to read
> everything. Just those kinds of ideas in terms of how you handle cultures or
> different learner's characteristics; different types of interactivity, different types of
> learner control, some activities are very much externally controlled and other
> activities are very exploratory where people who are more willing and able to
> research things much on their own are able to do that.

Jacques's way of being is a method of "guess and check" which can often resort in

various strategies. His application of having 'variety' can be an attempt to sort through

the possibilities of acquiring knowledge of cultural differences when no apparent rule

applies. Nevertheless, it is a method that he has used in order to communicate effectively

in the sense of providing different means of communication in getting across to those

who he is speaking with while simultaneously learning from consequences. His way of being is such that he is keenly aware of cultural differences and tries to underlie several systems in order to successfully develop an essential ingredient to simply understanding cultural differences and how he might connect better with them. It should be pointed out however, that many of the other participants also mention this so called 'open dialogue' and discuss its beneficiaries when trying to learn about other cultures. In an attempt to recognizing diversity of cultures and seeking to understand and connect with those coming from other contexts and cultures, Jacques and others have inferred the idea of open communication and allowing learners to see the fruits of their labor. By doing so can posit increase awareness for instructional designers and help learners find relevance in the instructional experience. Inning reminds us:

> So the approach that I am taking now, is we are trying to keep an open dialogue and keep things as open as possible allowing those feedback and interactions to happen between the design of the course, the delivery of the course and our audiences or students who could tell us well this doesn't make sense to me or this is how I see it.

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 understanding cultural differences and perhaps even developing a guide or some sort of framework in improving the instructional experience amongst learners from different cultures and them seeing the relevance and how it applies to them.

In further speaking with Jacques concerning different cultures and his method of how he deals with culture differences, he mentions his use of avatars and simple translation of learning materials as his way of assisting learners in their learning. The following question was asked in order to discover if there were any other attempts he

made to further his knowledge as well as enhancing his design process:

In your opinion do you think that these two elements in which you just named (the presence of avatars and translating the material) is enough to help learners reach their maximum potential?

> It's a good question, but I would counter with a question: *what is the work that has to be done in order to create a course that is all encompassing* and once you have figured out all the backgrounds you have to consider how do you to create the course so that its fits all these people? You have to simplify it, you have to fragment it, you have to offer different versions of the course and the question also becomes if you're going to do this *how much is it going to cost?* Because if you are going to be creating a course that you're targeting based [on] cultural background within a Canadian context, then you have to look at how many different ways you're going to be teaching this and how much it's going to cost. There are things that we do though, for example we make sure that whatever we use will not be negatively viewed by certain cultural groups.

In addition, there seems to be a range of informal ways of how instructional designers have developed increase understanding of different cultures, from traveling to speaking with different groups of people, to even being married cross-culturally. All of the variants have contributed to the informalities of becoming more aware of cultural differences.

In Formal Ways

On a more formal note, instructional designers developed awareness in several other ways in which helped them obtain a better understanding of cultural differences and multicultural situations. Many of the suggestions that will be named have transpired in conversation with participants but are too short phrased to put in this paper. However, some responses have been placed in this section so as to see the relevancy of instructional designer's awareness and their cultural transmission. Some of this awareness however, will be discussed in a general manner but is representative of the expressions of interviewees. Several of participants have named the suggestion of enhancing one's

knowledge i.e. taking courses as a way of building their awareness of multicultural instruction. Taking a course and discussing issues of multicultural pedagogy can clearly help shape a better understanding of another culture and how it differs from the one that you are coming from. Also participating in research and reading existing literature can also help increase understanding of cultural dimensions and cultural differences and seeing how those differences vary in those dimensions. Other types of courses are also very valuable in helping people understand their own culture and their own personal assumptions. By doing so this can help people get a greater sense as to why things seem different, and set their expectations closer to reality. Once again, the idea of instructional providers having pre-conceived notions about their students is reiterated here. Being aware of the racial bias in the teaching field caused by instructional designer and or provider can determine or influence the attitudes that can be effectuated by one's own personal frame of reference, progresses to how educators interact with ethnic students, and in return affecting the teacher-student relationship. Not understanding an individual for whom they really are, gives stereotypes the upper hand in judging our students. Trying to establish a relationship with students is definitely based on a person's socialization but should not manifold to seeing ethnic students as being different. Holding strong and negative ideas against certain people creates the harmful relationship that some automatically think how others should be treated.

One suggestion for increasing cultural sensitivity and awareness in the design process is to have multi-cultural design teams and or subject matter experts. Several of these participants mentioned the assistance they received in talking with someone else who had prior knowledge in the field and or had some sort of network which allowed to

have relations with individuals from a variety of cultures especially persons who are part of the targeted group. Dawn and Nidia confirm this approach in their experience.

Dawn notes:

> Well I think it depends on the company, but the companies that I've worked [for], work on stakeholder teams. They could go to someone on the team who has a contact in that specific part of the world to get feedback so you have to be proactive about [it] if what you're designing is going to be appropriate. At a more basic level I have given people [a] checklist if your program is going to be delivered in different parts of the world [to] consider these things as you design and develop your program so they get a checklist of things to consider.

Nidia states:

> In my job, I have the luxury to work with diverse subject matters that give me the opportunity to challenge my own cultural barriers. For example, I worked with an instructor who created a course in sociology of business and had traveled to different places in the world. His personal experiences gave us a unique opportunity to contextualize, offer examples and point to many unexpected differences or similarities in how people do business in the world based on their own set of values and perceptions.

We see that there is great value to having multi-cultural design teams, as they can contribute to improving the instructional experience as well as the instructional designer in becoming more culturally sensitive. Thus, there needs to be a greater understanding and acknowledgment of cultural knowledge in ISD and what valuable contributions they can potentially make to the education of students. Due to the different cultural understandings and expectations of learning and teaching, this will promote how important it is for instructional providers to understand and come to know their students. Although seeing the value of cross-cultural learning materials may not necessarily address the needs to students who come from different ethnic backgrounds, the hope that instructors see the need to understand culture and be free of any biases, places the equality and academic success for students.

Other suggestions that were also discussed was the notion of traveling and the added value that comes with visiting new places and meeting new people. Allowing one to immerge in a different culture expresses new cultural experiences that can thus foster a different kind of awareness, in that you learn from the insights of others and build on the educational experience and approaches. Essentially what is taking place is a unique educational approach, in that you indulge yourself into an instruction that was created by those of another culture. As an active learner one not only takes away from this experience the development of cultural awareness, but more importantly the antithesis of how learners from other cultures might feel when first encountering something they consider to be foreign in terms of ISD.

Another point that can be made concerning this section can be placed on using instructional design models. Christine states how her use of models helps her to think 'outside the box,' allowing her more room for interaction with leaners while paying close attention to the needs of the learner and improving communication skills across cultures. Her view is the following:

> At this point, I find that the reflection that I have made on culture is becoming acquainted with the different models of it and the research that has been done… I'm thinking about Haul's model the needs of the A's and the B's, [and] I am trying to design courses where all these needs can be met or where these different profiles can be accommodated but without thinking of any specific culture. But I am particular [about] paying attention to the micro design so when I write the examples, when I write the text, the case studies to make sure that they are varied enough, inclusive enough that they don't address or they don't reflect the reality of all various models, that's where I pay the most attention to.

In relation to all of these suggestions, I am simply trying to explore the benefits of being aware of these differences that instructional designers typically might have when

engaging in the design of cross-cultural online instruction. Overall these instructional designers have pointed out the level of awareness they developed whether intentionally or unintentionally through informal and formal means. It was through both these methods that these participants developed awareness and became culturally sensitive.

Assumptions

One of the themes that emerged from instructional providers concerns personal epistemologies. As we have all suspected instructional designers have epistemological assumptions about their learners that can in fact hinder students' ability to learn from diverse backgrounds. One would naturally assume that instructional designers would not allow their own personal beliefs to affect the educational needs of students, however, more often we realize personal epistemologies do contribute to student's academic learning and at times make it difficult for certain students to move forward. Regardless of this fact, having pre-conceived notions about a group of people from different diversities can be detrimental, as many instructional designers tend to assume that others think and value in the same manner as them. Consider the following statement by Adam:

> My brother is a pilot and [he] is teaching a bunch of students from China. The Chinese government sent over a bunch of students to become pilots. They are trying to really have a lot more pilots because I guess they anticipate a lot more air travel in the future and he said that in the beginning when his students were there, they would sit there and not say anything and he would lecture them and he would ask them questions and no one would answer, so he would just go on. Because I knew a little bit about the way school is in China I told him 'no really, you have to pick people, point to them, say their names and say, "you answer me", otherwise no one is going to speak up and he started doing that he started being more forceful and getting them to participate. It is working and he's noticed that they are doing a lot better in their flight training, now that they are interacting more in class and he's found out what their weaknesses are.

So in the past they all might have just gone through a course, not say a word, not understanding anything and he had no idea and then he will get up in a plane with them and they weren't able to do a security check. So he will give them a scenario like if the plane is on fire what do you do and they wouldn't know how to answer and he's like well we just had the class on this yesterday and you didn't say you had any problems with it. Now he's being more interactive and picking one guy and saying "you what do you do" and if he doesn't know he'll pick someone else and then someone else would answer and even though that guy gets the right answer he will go to others and say you what do you think about that guy's answer and he'll involve the whole class more. That is not something that's typically part of Chinese culture. He's also instilling a bit of fear in them, he's said if you guy's don't raise your hand and you tell me you understand everything and that I move on and then I ask you a question later and you don't understand it I'm going to be pissed because you all made me believe that you did understand it. So now he's got them to the point where if they don't understand something they're jumping up and putting their hands up and saying "sir can you go over that, can you repeat that?" That was a culture difference that he managed to break and at least from our perspective it was to their benefit because they need to be able to think on their own …. And that's something that's common in China, you never ask questions to the teacher, you never raise any doubt about what the teacher is saying. The teacher doesn't really ask you any questions in class, they just lecture and that's it and it's all just memorization. [But] I think in this case especially, it doesn't work, they need to be autonomous, they need to be questioning when they don't understand something, [they need to be perfect on everything]….so that might be something where you need to be aware of cultural differences but also be able to judge when you can ignore the differences and force them to think a different way or to learn a different way so you maybe need to respect the difference but also break it when its needed.

As for the other participants, they also said similar things, agreeing that one's culture supports life experiences which reflects the way a person designs. Often they mention that certain instructional designers are compartmentalized, meaning that instructional designers are 'boxed' into their own ideologies and therefore, lack the ability to address the needs of diverse students due to one's cultural traits, life experiences, different social, economic and geographical situations. As noted by Henderson (1996), it is important to take into account the fact that: "Instructional design

and instructional designers do not exist in a vacuum, and that they are not neutral. By their very social and cultural nature, they influence and are influenced by world views; gender, culture values, and ideologies; various learning theories, and particular instructional design paradigms" (p.276). Therefore, if an instructional designer's personal frame of reference is a dominating factor, the relationship between the two parties is already at a disadvantage. To develop deep understandings of ethnic students, instructional designers would need to be aware of their own epistemologies and not allow their perceptions to direct their design practices. As Christine mentions, sensitivity towards cultural needs must include embracing cultural practice. It also involves a commitment to change the experiences of inequity and disenfranchisement of some instructional designers so that they can avoid stereotyping and guess work. Instructional providers should therefore be cognizant of their own cultural perspectives as they are often represented in the design decisions, but also examining the assumptions they hold about learners and how they will and should respond to the materials being presented. Although the instructional designer is supposed to embrace cultural diversity and not allow their personal frame of reference to influence how their work is created, the fact of the matter is, certain perspectives are molded within the practice of ID. Because culture can be described as a learned trait and is based on how we as human beings develop, interact, and express ourselves, cultural sensitivity is not just one- way, however. Together culture and human nature have a monumental influence on individual personalities and in essence create the responses and cultural inclinations of the world and of some individuals. In this way we see that *culture* and cultural preferences are strongly embedded within human nature as we tend to be in a position of social agents

having substantial influence on learners and promoting cross-cultural interactions in instruction or lack thereof. The need to help students adapt to specific professional, academic and mainstream cultures in which instructional providers embrace the culture(s) of the student and recognize that's one beliefs and behaviors fall along a spectrum of differences can help increase flexibility in instructional approaches and create stronger empathy for learners (Henderson 1996). This is no small challenge.

Thus it is essential for practitioners to familiarize themselves with the learners throughout every phase of instructional design. As we heard from many of the participants, most instructional providers deal with the understanding of cultural differences by way of trial and error. What also gets brought to our attention is for instructional designers to be more aware of the cultural biases embedded in their own teaching and instructional designs, along with their expectations of students. This is perhaps a reason as to why culture is often overlooked due to having our own cultural biases dictate the avenues of instruction and instructional activities. Thomas, Mitchell and Joseph (2002) remind us that, "culture is so much a part of the construction of knowledge that it must underpin not only the analysis phase but all phases of the design process" (p.41) Therefore, by ignoring these biases puts constraints on the effectiveness in cross-cultural settings and seeing opportunities for more interaction with learners. Several of the participants emphasized how instructional designers tend to assume that others are like themselves having their own cultural ways of thinking and behaving be representative of human nature and thus being interpreted as being the "right" way to think and behave.

Instructional designers perception of the Western education is often acquainted

with such a notion of being 'right,' and dominant in having to teach new cultures. However, for many learners there is a culture shock when first taking an American course due to our value systems in our classrooms and instruction being different, and also due to the heightened expectations and assumptions that instructional designers often hold about the design process as well as their learners. Unfortunately, the effects of having instructional designers attempt to show a kind of connection between ID and learning does not always contribute to having different perceptions for diversification being demonstrated within the practice of ID. The question now becomes what are we going to do? Do we simply continue with designing and creating content and impose the idea of 'the student will eventually get it and know what to do with it'? Do we accept that the work that we are producing is in fact a manifestation of our own epistemological beliefs that does not always promote and or provide opportunities for students to become learners of their own classrooms, as well as not taking into account much of the learner's backgrounds and experiences in this environment? Conceivably this is why designing cross culturally should not be viewed as just another factor that can be programmed into a learning course (Chen *et al.*, 1999 p.220) rather, it would mean for instructional designers to be able to meet specific nuances of particular diverse communities and being able to respond to different cultures while developing, implementing and evaluating culturally sensitive learning products. From this, understanding the relationship between cultural context and instructional design requires practitioners to employ culturally relevant teaching and to develop approaches in which examinations of culture, instruction and learning can thus be applied to cross-cultural learners, designs, and analyses.

By attempting to show how instructional designers are expected to perform and

act a certain way as well as students who either share or do not share the same cultural background as they do, signifies the challenge for instructional designers to socially identify within a specific group and be able to closely connect to youth culture. Part of the problem with socio-cultural issues and instructional design is in the fact that instructional designers are often unsure of how to address culture, which thus creates the dichotomy of knowing how to develop good instructional content. What is often communicated thereafter are preferences of ID having Western culture act as the primary engagement for teaching and learning and instructional content. Because instructional designers have their own cultural norms and part of their enculturation process is to think in a Western system exhibits a lack of flexibility and contextuality of thinking and expectations of and for learners. 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. Dawn talks about the conflict this can stimulate:

> The issue that I find is that most of the training that is developed is developed in the Western Hemisphere. It does not necessarily translate and I don't mean literally translate, but of course that [is] an issue too. But when you're talking to people about developing a certain mindset for example, when you're trying to teach a concept like 'group think', those concepts don't necessarily mean the same thing to people in other cultures, they may have no idea what you're talking about, they may not relate to the culture that your teaching for your company. If you're in a company that is based in the Western hemisphere you may have very European values, European ways of doing business or North American ways of doing business, North American ways of communicating with each other and the participants may not relate to. So you're up against their cultural values and their ways of communicating with each other in doing business and there may be a barrier because of that, so it takes a long time to change cultural values inside a company if they're dramatically different to what they are accustomed to.

Some of the instructional designers who participated in this research also noticed

this challenge. Therefore 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. When speaking to Ining about her experience with instructional designers and their knowledge of integrating culture into their own practice she goes on to mention the following:

> They tend to frame it, as well as how to bring them to the Western way or Canadian way of doing things. So the underlining assumption is that there is one right way and there may be one, if they come here to get a Western education, they are going to be more immersed in and more willing to learn what our way is but that doesn't mean that this is the right way for them.

Questions regarding "what is best" becomes of great concern here. As Ining points out one should not assume that the Western style is one that fits all. There are elements that are applicable and can be beneficial for teaching however; if there is one mistake that instructional designers are making is using their own culture – Western culture as the method for best practices. Similar to what Dawn mentioned earlier and this idea of cross-over between cultures is a clear indication that cultural differences cannot be deeply rooted into one system such as Western and or be reduced to a matter of characteristics. So, for example in the West, lecture is often considered to be predominantly the method for teaching however, if learners are from foreign cultures and are unfamiliar with the education and curriculum whether appropriate or not, the influence is has on instruction and the expectations it has on learners impacts one's practice and the degree of interaction of that culture and that of learners. This creates the issue of over-generalization but also the cultural problem where by it creates a variety of sub-cultures within academia. In allowing instructional designers and or even Subject-Matter Expert (SME) to make assumptions, experts are in fact contextualizing a level of

education involving a combination of expectations, assumptions and conclusions about learners from different cultures. In addition quite often what takes place is the start of 'labeling' and over simplistic stereotypes. Nidia touches upon this point:

> I think that with some people there is nothing you can say or do. Some people are so focused on stereotypes, what they believe is right that they really do not want to challenge what they believe. A lot of people, if you challenge what they believe you challenge their whole life, their whole sense of self, because many lives are built on stereotypes and negating stereotypes means, are you negating information that your parents taught you…therefore if you challenge stereotypes and any of that type of thinking, really it can cost you even with what your parents have taught you… This is how it starts and continues, perpetuates. It's because some people will not challenge and go along with what they've learned and what they were taught and that's it for that…

Dawn also described how certain rules we automatically recognize in the West might not be universally held:

> Well I think the biggest challenge and I mean even though I've been working in this area for many years and have focused on the area of culture and how to deal with it. It's so natural for us to revert to what we know in our day to day life without thinking and these are common things that I see, we use jargon, we use colloquialisms, we use a lot of acronyms that don't necessarily translate, we may put in graphics that are meaningless to them or photos that are very Western but not representing a kind of a global culture. It's a very Western view of the world so it's simple things like that, we don't stop to think when we are developing training programs, we don't stop to think about our grammar and our language and how we are using it and how that impact someone's ability to read our material. So it's very basic really, we just don't stop and think, we don't investigate how other people live and perceive the world and what their values are.

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 did not know quite how to respond. Despite this fact, differences in expectations regarding learners and the assumptions held about them should be considered in cross-cultural instructional design decisions as well as future research and scholarly discourse.

The importance of discussing the nature of how instructional designers navigate the heightened expectations and their impact in their practice regardless of the kind of connection one has with a student or group of students, demonstrates how instructional designers' identities are rooted in the academic potential of ethnic learners. The fact that both instructional designer and student interact to create conceptions of ethnicity, language, gender etc., builds on the values of dominant culture. By attempting to show how instructional designers are expected to perform and act a certain way, as well as students who either share or do not share the same cultural background as they do, signifies the challenge for practitioners to socially identify with a specific group and be able to closely connect to different cultures, but also having an understanding or knowledge of how to shape content in a helpful way for practitioners. With those issues in mind there seems to be what I consider to be a 'knowledge gap' between instructional designer and learners, in its efforts to account for the discrepancy in the quality of education a student receives, and his or her opportunity for learning. This so-called 'cultural mismatch' is indeed the factor that contributes to having different perceptions for diversification between instructional designers their practice and student learning. As demonstrated with the above examples, the gap exits not only with the instructional designers (having kept to what he or she is used too in terms of Western culture), but also

the learners (in not being able to relate to the content being presented). Though there may be a number of other causes for this division between instructional designer and student, there still exists powerful social conditioning that cultivates a disconnect between culture and the field of ID.

As a closing to this theme, the information presented here refers to the awareness of differences that can exist between cultures and how's one work can affect the outcome/understanding of different cultural groups. In my attempt to understand the educational challenges surrounding multicultural instruction, faculty members who refrain from addressing cultural issues and continue to use traditional methods (not ever bringing in new material as part of the curriculum), often show a limited understanding of cultural pedagogy while continuing to undermine students. Secondly, it becomes clear that social and cultural expectations play a big role in terms of the weight learners place on succeeding but also involving the education and schooling that is involved in preparation for instructional designers which can also be part of the discussion of educational challenges; in that instructional designers are not well prepared for the issues often face in the classroom in relation to diversity and or multiculturalism. Although there is a greater issue in getting persons in ID to promote culturally sensitive learning materials in the education field, there is still a pressing need for instructional designers to acknowledge culturally and diverse environments, along with their students and their own misconducts. Through such examinations, these interviews express the awareness of being presented in the classrooms, but also permeate how it is discussed or not discussed in the school environment. We seem to come to an understanding that there is some discomfort in acknowledging cultural issues, as it can have a chilling effect if spoken

about incorrectly. In a world where culture and cultural issues are prevalent, instructional designers who seem to avoid coming to terms with their own vendettas, does not necessarily indicate that they are not aware of the culture issue, rather it represents how the topic is evaded due to one's own cultural background and or fear of not getting it correctly. Similarly, Ining offered her insight voicing that it is important for faculty members to talk about such issues as culture as well as any other topic that can be acquainted with culture (race, gender, language etc.) in the classroom. For her, she thinks that faculty members who somewhat distance themselves from such issues, undermine the principals of a culture and its people. In our efforts to make students feel as though everyone has a sense a belonging, instructional designers need to ensure and understand that their cultural identity guides how one's work is presented, how it is represented and how it is sustained.

Faculty

In speaking with many of the participants, another theme that emerged throughout these interviews was the issue of faculty and work environment. It became clear that most participants found that practitioners often have some difficulty in discussing cultural issues in the course of instructional design due one's lack of awareness but also the lack of preparation for the challenges of cultural issues in their work. Although spoken about quite differently as well as in different contexts, most participants have observed that faculty members in the instructional design field have been reticent to incorporate cultural factors into instructional planning. There are several reasons as to why such an occurrence has taken place. 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). Especially if you are dealing with people in a culture that have not dealt with people from your culture as yet. So for example, you have faculty members who are American designing programs that are American based and trying to reflect societal and cultural change to a group of learners whom do not all share the same culture and or values. Though most practitioners have come to terms that not all persons whom they are designing for share the same cultural background as they do, having already established certain principles and guidelines in reference to their expectations and assumptions permeates the traditional approach of Western culture and in turn gets integrated into the design process. This is because most instructional designers often do not think about culture and or even try to develop culturally sensitive materials.

During my interview with Christine one question that emanated throughout our discussion was *'do you think that instructional designers even think about culture before designing?'* I wanted to know her opinion on whether she believed if instructional designers think about culture and or even considered it to be of substance. Christine explains this in regard to her experience:

> Some I feel really don't. When I look at the end product, especially when you get into story telling examples or 'mise en situation', the structure of the training or the type of activities that are suggested to the learners and the actual content [and] how it's used in the activity, examples and interviews and so on. I find that the area where a lot of culture specific content is located and sometimes I look at it and I cannot figure out how people can relate to it. I remember an example of online customer service training that was developed in the States and I was asked to assess its value for training here in Quebec. In terms of language, the people spoke English fluently, they were expected to handle it, but the way people behaved in the examples just wouldn't make sense here in terms of behavior. How they approached each other was totally inappropriate, not relevant but had nothing to do with the language. It had to do with the

values and the beliefs and what you consider to be proper behavior when you meet a stranger, and which varies widely throughout the world, it really didn't work.

In the above excerpt of interview data, Christine is emphasizing the importance of incorporating cultural issues and topics into the design process and the potential influence it has on the field of ID and its learners. Like many, Christine found that often times many instructional designers refrain from topics related to culture in fear of getting it wrong, but also, in conjunction with the organization and organizational culture. Some of the problems have to do with the organizational culture in reference with the way in which the organization including its stakeholders act and think. This also becomes problematic due to having your client having certain expectations of what the end product should look like and having him/her dictate what they want. As a result, instructional designers skip several steps within their work due to having their employer mandate the instruction; "This is what I want, just teach them this part," in which instructional designers comply with it and produce a product that is of lesser quality and less significant and relevant to learners. In trying to produce a quality product without asking specific questions and or having a specific work plan and procedures creates a failing organization of instructional system design and evaluation as well as for future instructional designers in their preparedness to face increasing diverse learning audiences. However, understanding the culture of the organizations *mental make-up* is more than structure or strategy, it is the decisive factor in obtaining success. First, organizational culture is not solely based on just a decision, but rather it is a lasting process, in which the attitude, beliefs and behavior of people are gradually shaped. Let us take the *organization* and compare it to that of a human. If the structure of the

organization is the body: the bone structure, the feeding structure of blood vessels and the communication channels of nervous system, then the personality or soul is the way people deal with one another, the values and beliefs that exist within the organization. Restructuring an organization, in order to achieve a certain goal, often fails or gets stuck because the personality does not change. The organization's culture can be described in terms of Hofstede's 'onion' (which will be discussed later) however for now let us consider Dawn also indicated her view on this regard:

> I don't think though that inherently, instructional developers think about culture, I think that it's a learned trait, a learned habit. (*When asked why)* I think it's a product of who we are, of our society and if you're a society that is not global in their perspective and if you yourself don't travel a lot, you may not be aware of the differences. You may just assume that everyone lives in the same kind of houses, and travels in the same manner and has the same family values. It's a worldview that you have to develop.

This statement revealed by Dawn is a clear example that of instructional designers demonstrating the way people think and how a person's socialization also impacts the perception of and or interaction with people who are ethnically, culturally and socially diverse. Although there may be noticeable differences in cultures between these participants, we can see that culture has an impact on the teaching method and on student's learning. Once again, the idea of instructors having pre-conceived notions about their students is reiterated in the following analysis. In echoing her experience, we see a very important aspect of racial bias in the teaching field that can inflict a teacher and also the students. Trying to establish a relationship with students is definitely based on a person's socialization but should not manifold to seeing ethnic students as being different. Holding strong and negative ideas against certain people of color creates the harmful relationship that some automatically think how others should be treated. In

contrast it is important to understand the conventional stereotypes that can adversely affect learners. Being aware that one's personal socialization can determine or influence the attitudes that can be effectuated by one's own personal frame of reference, progresses to how educators interact with ethnic students, and in return affecting the teacher-student relationship. Not understanding an individual for whom they really are, gives stereotypes the upper hand in judging our learners.

Second, there are differences in perception of teaching and learning. As part of the discussion surrounding the topic of educational challenges, I further investigated to understand if the education that these instructional designers received as students in anyway helped them with their design process for learners from a multitude of ethnic backgrounds. Throughout each interview all the participants agreed that the courses they did receive as part of their degree requirements did not touch on the topic of culture nor of them being effective for teaching purposes in reference to diversity issues faced today in the classroom. As previous research has shown regarding the awareness level of faculty members in ID/ISD programs with respect to principles and guidelines related to cultural diversity and instructional design, Powell (1993) discovered faculty in the ID/ISD field did not view cultural sensitivity of instructional materials as a priority factor to establish effective instructional programs. These faculties were somewhat aware of the concepts, principles, guidelines, strategies and prescriptions for designing instruction for culturally heterogeneous learners but they were not including these topics in their classes. In 1996 Thompson observed that faculty members in the instructional design field have been reluctant to incorporate cultural factors into instructional planning and would unlikely include cultural sensitive topics within their instruction. Fourteen years later,

have instructional designers improved their way of thinking in trying to incorporate culturally sensitive materials into their design? In fact what you nearly always find is that the learners' needs are not the same as the Subject Matter Expert's [SME] thought or assumed they would be. Many of these experts are people who not even located in the same city as the learner and or the context of the classroom. Very often materials are given to experts to write but they are experts only in the subject area and not in reaching particular learners. With that being said, the material(s) gets handed to a practitioner who then tries to grasp the information and put it into practice within their classroom. This is where the problem begins due to the fact that the instructional designers are not always in the context of the learner in which the instructors are actually working, and the reality of their problems in the classroom especially in reference to distance education. 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. For example, let us imagine a University having both white and black students attending school along with white and black areas in the community some more affluent then others. Now it would be wrong to say that all black students are this and or all white students are that strictly based on the environment. Due to having different experiences, different educational experiences, different expectations etc., one cannot assume that all black or white persons are the same even if they came from the same city. In this regard, the people who design the programs are inevitably making a lot of assumptions because of their lack of experience.

The third level comes down to the growing cross-cultural curriculum and future

faculty. Over the 20 years, the population in the United States has grown tremendously reflecting more and more ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse groups of people. Along with this trend the number of companies that have expanded internationally has allowed for more cross-cultural training to be in high demand. In the past, faculty in instructional design programs has not incorporated cultural value into their curriculum. We now know or have realized thus far how detrimental this can be due to the strong influence culture can have on communication and instructional design. This issue is very important in order to help us get a better understanding of the different cultures and expectations of learning and teaching that will help in developing a theory and practice of education that embraces an ethnocentric approach and multiculturalism discourse. Due to the different cultural understandings and expectations of learning and teaching, this will promote how important it is for instructors to understand and come to know their learners. Therefore instructional designers should incorporate cultural factors into their instructional design in order to bring more of an awareness and knowledge of multicultural issues into their work so that pre-service instructional designers like myself are able to meet the challenges of today's culture. But because research has shown that faculty members are somewhat restrained in some degree in being culturally sensitive, the lack of preparation for the pre-service instructional designers is quite evident. Ining points to this dilemma and indicates her viewpoint:

> A big part of my project now is to work with faculty we call it training I guess for lack of a better word. They [faculty] need to be trained on what inter-culture communication is in an educational context, like I said a lot of them will have some of that awareness, so that's great! We are going to do some workshops, work on the courses and the development of those courses, we are going to have speakers and lectures and activities for the faculty to work through to understand where they are coming from because everyone is a cultural being so they have to be aware of what their

culture standing is. [By] reflecting upon their own cultural views, biases and then comparing that and seeing that students will bring different views and how the faculty can negotiate and interact with the students from completely different cultural backgrounds from theirs. I see that as a big piece of the work in this area, the awareness of the people that are doing the design work, [those] that are doing the content and curriculum work and their skill level and their understanding of how this cultural aspect needs to be dealt with. And a lot of the times they don't really see beyond the fact and I see this often in the work I currently do now, because they simply see this as a language issue. They will say 'well these students' language is not good enough, therefore how do we address the problem' So that's how they friend the issue, is that their language proficiency isn't good enough which is true in some cases but that doesn't really get at the real differences because what might come out as a language issue, there are a lot more underlying things. You know that iceberg metaphor, at the tip of the iceberg is what you see as the cultural differences between cultures but underneath there's a whole bunch of assumptions, views about how many people make decisions, that's the iceberg underneath the surface that you don't see.

Based on what Ining has just mentioned two things should be noted here. One is

the lack of change in the organizational structure (which we are going to revisit) but also

her metaphor of the iceberg and its relation to the organizational life of culture. What is

meant by organizational life is simply the culture of the organization and its development.

We first look at the lack of change that Ining discusses. In her attempt to work with

faculty members and to improve their thought processes about culture and designing

culturally sensitive materials, Ining points out to another problem with organizational

cultures. For one, her strong viewpoint on adapting to a changing environment and her

acting as a 'change agent' in helping the organization change, demonstrates that changing

corporate culture is a difficult task. Part of the problem with strong cultures is that they

focus attention on one model and oppose values from other subcultures. In by so doing

we denounce voice sensitive issues such as culture and allow for organizational culture to

become deep-seated with little room for change. Similar to this, the instructional designer

who develops the material that then gets passed to a teacher who then teaches the course offers little engagement as to the dialogue of cultural issues and or examining the relationship of socio-cultural issues and professional experience. Fortunately for some instructors, having realized that the school environment is not at all what instructional designers often think it is, change their attitude throughout the coming of this realization. Unfortunately, others are forever entrapped in their way of thinking and never arrive at the turn around point for new ideas and new perceptions to be made.

In addition, this brings us to my next point as it concerns the 'silent dialogue' in examining how some instructional designers ignore the cultural issue and are color blind of the significance of other cultures. Once again, Ining points to the fact of how instructional designers often befriend the situation having used such reasoning such as language to be the cultural barrier that contends to one of the greatest problems with issues of ethnical diversity and cultural issues in ID. Though language issues need to be taken into consideration, it is important not to be lured into believing that this is the cause for academic failure cross-culturally. In the sense that instructional designers/instructors can only touch upon certain cultural aspects and note the differences in cultures as they come across them, changes the notions about how the material gets talked about and received by learners in the classroom.

Let us not discount the fact that language can be problematic for learners especially persons who are not English speaking. However, for those who are and or first language is English still have some difficulty in learning, due to different expectation different assumptions instructional designers might hold for their learners and of themselves. Even though people may share a common language, does not necessarily

equate to having a common expectation it is or understanding of what is happening. 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. There are some other ways the end product will look different if instructional designer were sensitive to some of these other cultures that are different from ours. I find that a lot of the things we use are communicating things that we do not 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. It is crucial to remind instructional designers when designing instructional materials for learners with different cultural backgrounds, that different strategies should be considered. In seeing that instructional designers fail to adequately integrate social issues such race, gender, ethnicity and nationality in relation to learning in technology mediated environments, can result in lower expectations, hostility and other such factors, simultaneously reinforcing and imposing the idea that ethnic learners are culturally deprived, labeled and do not meet the standard of academic requirements. To improve the cross-cultural communication between practitioner teacher and student relationship is to note the consequences that are in affiliation with ethnically diverse students, as they still remain greatly underestimated.

Next, the iceberg metaphor or iceberg model is an illustration of how culture can be understood and be better explained in regards to the field of ID. When looking at an iceberg the first thing we see is the top half or the surface of it. We do not see the bottom half or the rest of the iceberg. When we look at cultures and different types of cultures, we tend to judge on what we see and hear first without taking the time to look at the bigger picture. Take a look at the picture below of the iceberg and the interrelated

elements that appear in position with the iceberg.

Figure 2. Iceberg Metaphor
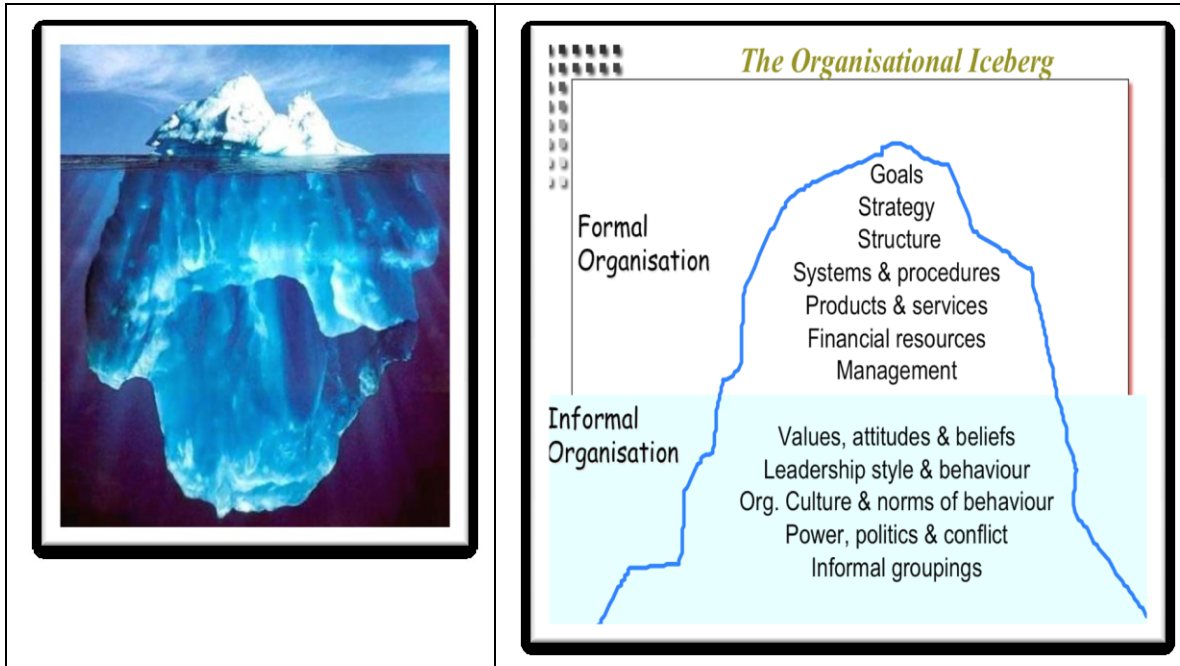
For the first level of the iceberg metaphor, it is call the surface level. The surface level can be described as the most popular culture or what is also known as the stereotype culture. The next level of the iceberg metaphor is the intermediate level, which can be characterized as the meaning and norms of a culture. Many things like a sign, artifact, words, gesture, or a non-verbal behavior could represent something meaningful. The last part of the iceberg metaphor is known as the deep level culture. This part of the iceberg holds some of the deepest beliefs such as, traditions and values. As part of the iceberg metaphor the elements that coalesce with both formal and informal organizations is grounded in the paradoxical view of what culture is (Ting-Toomey, S. & Chung, L.C. 2005). Similar to what Ining what saying and her description of how we are unable to see certain cultural dimensions in reference to the iceberg model, is in essence the contextual

viewpoint that there does exist different cultures, differences within cultures and different perspectives on how people view them. Linking cultures to metaphors, we see that culture and subcultures vary greatly but it also demonstrates the cultural patterns and individual deviations of intra-cultural value variations while also capturing the workings of culture and social behavior. Typically when we look at an iceberg we only see the surface, which is based on a much deeper and bigger reality, yet this reality is usually unexamined. This does not mean that cultures are sitting at the extreme ends of each cultural dimension rather many cultures can lye somewhere in between the two poles. However, to advance our cross-cultural understanding it is crucial to move a step forward in the right direction. It is important to note that the culture and politics of many organisations constrain the degree of change and transformation. But to have a significant and lasting impact, basic values also have to change. In short the variations of formal and informal organization of culture is not merely an issue of differences between the mainstream culture (top of iceberg) and subcultures (bottom of iceberg), but they reflect the inner paradox that coincide with each culture.

The second is closely related to Hofstede's metaphor of an onion. As one can see from the image below, Hofstede view of culture illustrates the different levels of cultures as shown "as the skins of an onion," (Hofstede 1991, 7): symbols, heroes, rituals, and values.

Figure 1. Hofstede's "onion" model
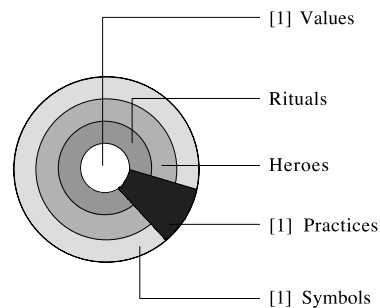
First, the notion of the onion itself and its representation of culture within cultures. According to Hofstede we come to understand that culture can be looked at like an onion having one's own culture be affiliated within a culturally diverse environment. Second, each onion (culture) has their own profile, meaning that no two cultures are ever same. An "onion" cannot be both "big" and "small"—similarly each culture is deterministically different and can be distinguished from each other in terms of cultural dimensions. Third, on the outer surfaces of "onion," we see symbols, heroes, and rituals that are called "practices" of culture by Hofstede (1991, 8). To understand a culture more deeply, we need to peel the "onion" layer by layer to touch its core. At the core lie the basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that guide human behaviors. Fourth, values and beliefs determine behaviors. While the outer layers of the "onion" come and go, the core of the "onion" stands firm. In other words, the behavioral part of culture may change, but the "software" of culture—that is, its deep-seated values—will not, because values remain stable. Finally, when different "onions" meet, they will collide. Similarly, when different cultures meet, they will collide. Cultural differences will be accentuated, and cross-cultural clashes and conflicts will take place, because each culture has its own indigenous

stable history, beliefs, norms, and value systems that hardly change over time. Because no onion and or culture is ever the same we see here that culture can be understood in contrast with the 'onion metaphor' as it pertains to outlining the proponents of cultural dimensions within a culture. Although different researcher have slightly different explanations of the deeper levels of culture, most have agreed upon that culture consists of several layers and is a multilayered construct. As one digs deeper into a culture, the more difficult it becomes to understand and the deeper the level of culture, the more difficult it is to change or influence it. As Hofstede explains (1983), in reference to the onion's core, basic assumptions are difficult to change due to having already been shaped early in a child's life and is constantly reinforced throughout life. However, artifacts and products can change faster as the outer layer is influenced by the external environment and shapes the external reality. From this Hofstede's model has been helpful in seeing the influence that a culture exerts or in analyzing a culture's response to a changing situation while demonstrating how cultural values influence the nature of instructional systems. Edmundson (2007) and Henderson (2007) also pointed out that when instructional design translates a given topic into a tangible object such as instructional or communication software, it becomes an artifact of the culture in which it is embedded. Young (2008a,b) further stated that culture is not a fixed entity but one that is dynamic and fluid given that culture does not have physical or virtual properties in design until an instructional designer assigns those properties. Thus, the cultural environment of those that designed it influences e-learning courses. While it is important to consider all levels of culture we come to understand that the cultural context in which the designer is embedded plays a significant role for cross-cultural learners, which reflects on how they employ culturally

relevant teaching and their own personal biases. Therefore, there is a pressing need to understand each other's background in order to reduce failing cross-cultural activities while simultaneously increasing importance of cross-cultural understanding and embrace this sort of philosophy and universal phenomena.

Returning to the point of organizational culture and the lack of structure Inning discussed earlier while working with other faculty members, shows the level of awareness that these practitioners possess, along with how much more there is to develop. In her case the practice of culturally aware instructional design has not been fully practiced while she has attempted to complement, update and even challenge some of her colleagues. Moreover, the main critique is the out-dated mindset that most of these persons have that often gets sugar coated. Once again, Hoftede's onion can also be applied here in looking deeply into organizational culture. To recall, the exterior layers consist of symbols which can be compared to that of the building, the way employees are dressed, the 'language' they speak etc. The second layer, the 'heroes' – the leader or who is often considered to be the boss or the brains of the operation thereby telling a lot about how to behave here in order to be accepted). Third we have the rituals - eating together or not, greeting each other, how meetings are organized, celebrations of birthdays, etc.) Similarly to what was said earlier concerning the context and its influence on how things get delineated, what gets put in or is left out not only depends on the designer and his or her background but the environment in which he or she is in. Understanding organizational culture is to prepare designers, faculty members, practitioners etc., and help them to understand the impact of cultural differences as well as how they can deal with it, and better perfect it. Culture manifests itself in symbols, e.g. type of environment

(buildings, layout etc.) dress, form of address, type of person employed, the way work gets done etc. In order to change an organisation in any *significant or lasting way*, you need to change the values and beliefs that lie at the core that are shielded by many layers. One can change surface appearances, e.g. by giving the corporation a new image/logo, introducing staff picnics, and by espousing new philosophies and beliefs. But to have a significant and lasting impact, basic values also have to change. This is harder to do, and is built up over a long period of time.

To aid in increasing awareness several instructional design models have been developed in the last decade that are said to take into account cultural differences. However, most tend to be based on entry behaviors, prior knowledge of the topic area, attitude toward content and potential delivery system, academic motivation, attitude towards training organization etc., as observed in commonly used instructional design textbooks (Dick *et al.,* 2008; Morrison *et al.,* 2006; Smaldino *et al.,* 2005; Smith and Ragan, 2005). Rather then name the models previously constructed, here I would make the claim that future models should be constructed to address diverse learners and learning in order to further research of culturally specific knowledge and or suggests ways on how to design more simplistically, and meaningfully inside the field of instructional design.

On this note, I share this view and make critical note of how the school system in which includes the curriculum and the classroom pedagogical practices are in large-scale part of the problem- culture problem. The point that should be made here is that as part of the curriculum and also as part of one's teaching career, instructional designers should implement a range of information not excluding the hard topics such as culture and

similar issues into the curriculum. As many as the participants have noted, most try to provide the matter up front, for other instructional designers to see the reality of how things were and how things are. Building a relationship with students and contributing them to see the dimensions of culture via the school, books, socially etc., posits the integration of ethnically diverse students and points to higher academic achievement. In order to educate learners successfully, instructional designers need to be trained to successfully teach a multicultural curriculum that would in turn provide learners with a sense of belonging and acceptance. Further, practitioners must also show positive attitudes towards diverse learners and not allow personal biases to control the classroom experience and or the expectations of certain students. It is important to be able to recognize the contributions that contribute to the mechanisms of racial inequalities of the school system produced either by teacher attitudes, experience, expectations, etc., that commensurate to the academics of diverse learners. Particularly, instructional designers must tackle fundamental issues of inequity and speak about such relevant issues, so as to ensure that instructors can transmit a sense of knowledge in this area regardless of one's ethnical background. Although the interaction between practitioner and student might be different depending on a their background, it is still more important the informed practice and knowledge surrounding cultural diversity to be transmitted and its significance, so as not to be misguided and misinformed of a group's culture. Finally, providing each learner with rich and challenging material and opportunities for growth and deep reflection, allows for learners to interact greatly with the material, but also providing insight to a culture's background that could lead to a better understanding of a population.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Educational Challenges

Another theme that emerged from the discussions with the participants attributing to the understanding of cultural differences, was determining how important they perceived cultural differences to be and how it effects one's work. Because there seems to be a lack of cross-cultural design including instructors and instructional designers, illustrates a unique challenge for instructional providers to integrate cross-cultural content into courses in order to accommodate the learners' particular cultures, cognitive styles and preferences. As reflected in the interviews, several of the participants have identified cultural values that affect all levels of organizational behavior, including training. For example, instructional designers might often use cases and other examples from traditional counterpart courses, which is often deemed 'Westernized'. Therefore, it is not a surprise that diverse learners feel a lack of connection to these cases, as they do not take into consideration the needs of the learners and diversity in course design. In doing so, failing to analyze the characteristics of an audience is assuming that all learners are alike, even more so that the learners are like the designers. This means that we tend to explain things the way we will understand them, use examples that are familiar to us, and use instructional techniques that work well for us. However, as reported by many of participants many instructional designers do not consider cultural dimensions when designing which can affect a student's learning performance. Consider the following quote from Adam:

I think a lot of instructional designers maybe don't have the background that we have. I think that many people got it because they were Subject Matter Experts and their company needed someone to make courses so they kind of fell into it that way. I don't know how quickly they realize that culture is an issue but I think that in our program, at least with the courses that I have taken, it has been emphasized over and over again that you need to localize your course and if you cannot make it local to one culture because it is [being] given across to multiple cultures, then try to make it culturally neutral. I don't know how well we do that; we don't go over techniques of how we do that, it is kind of like, be aware of it, but figure out how to do it on your own. So I don't know how many people really do it.

Although many have extolled this same idea of the importance placed on cultural differences within instructional design, it becomes critical to understand a different perspective in identifying factors related to cross cultural challenges for instruction. Therefore, in my reasoning to discover as to why instructional designers lack diversified cases but also in developing appropriate cross-cultural training, is to be able to critically analyze instructional strategies in cross-cultural and multicultural situations. Here I look at the challenges that impact cultural concerns while exploring solutions to discovering best practices to cross-cultural teaching. First, Christine explains her view concerning her greatest challenge in instructional development and understanding of learners, alluding to the point that instructional designers make too many assumptions.

In response to the question of *'what do you think the greatest challenge is in trying to incorporate culture into instructional design?'*

Oversimplification- definitely! Stereotyping of any kind and also a very basic thing is, *how much can you really understand of another culture?* Like if you are designing for another culture other than your own, how much of it can you really understand? **Interviewer asks:** *How do you do that?*

Yes, well to me that is a challenge…I simply don't know. I remember many years ago when I was reading Coleman Hein and he wrote about

who he's studying, different cultures, and him being so happy because he developed this wonderful model to analyze any culture. [In it] he is over and above having his own culture influence, how he's reading other cultures and to me, that was absolutely impossible. I don't think that's possible, to have the ability to read another culture without your own cultural references influencing it   and I'm not talking about even national cultures I mean any culture. So unless you're a native of the culture I don't know and even if you're not native of the culture, even then you're not reading your own culture at a distance because you're within it.

Caitlyn also expresses her viewpoint on what she sees to be her greatest challenge. She points out:

> Just the fact that language and words and images have such different meaning and different interpretations, I think within our Canadian organization we're caught up on doing things a certain way and standardizing how practice is done, that we don't leave room for different interpretation or strive to have different interpretations. To me the biggest challenge is to make connections with learners, assuming that we are all going to have different interpretations, but it is a question of finding a common ground where we can make sense out of what each other is saying and doing.

Adam also provided a couple of reasons why language issues need to be taken into consideration. He refers to how even the flexibility of a word order in certain languages has been known to cause confusion among diverse learners:

> I don't think you do it for a while and [then] you've arrived. I think it is just a continuous process of becoming more and more aware, and [since] culture is always changing, it's not like you can learn culture today and you know culture forever, it's a living thing. Languages evolve and you have to be careful not to use expressions that mean something. Something can be vulgar in one culture and mean something normal even in the same language. I think just as much as possible try to stay current. I don't know if there is really one formula for that. For example one of the books I was reading on simplified English, they gave you this example of a Chinese pilot who was flying and there was a lot of fog and air traffic control told him to *pull up* because he was about to fly into a side of a mountain. I think it was on the black box after they investigated, one of the last things he said was "*what does pull up* mean?" because he learned to climb to go up an altitude, so he just flew right into the mountain because he didn't see

it coming and he didn't know what they were telling him and I think *pull up* is more of an American way of saying it and I think the international way is climb. Had they known that, they would have saved him and the rest of the people on the plane. It's an extreme example, but if you are teaching somebody something and you're using a word that means something different to him or her because they did not learn it that way, you are kind of undoing the instruction that you are trying to create.

In relation to the difficulty in language, participants also expressed that the English language may result as a hindrance to non-english speaking individuals as they might feel that technology has nothing to offer learners since they cannot understand the content. It is not uncommon for people in other cultures to feel restricted in adopting the English language due to the language barrier, but also in reference to not acquainting with the information being presented. In fact Henning (2003) points out that when some of her participants viewed Web pages for information, all they saw were words and graphics. She concluded that the personal feel and connection with other learners is not present, and participants' lack of interaction affected willingness to participate in e-learning environments. That being said, we come to understand that the challenge in relation to cultural differences is our medium of expression in that it creates different expectations, different interpretations, and different meanings to learners in e-learning settings. Due to the fact that people perceive their own context and way of thinking as reasonable and self-evident (Schipper, 1993), potentially becomes a barrier to communication. As noted by Caitlyn and Adam, languages are different enough that they do make a significant difference in how one correspondence and those variations can make a difference and or impact. This warrants that our cross-cultural communication skills do have implications in how instructional content should be created. Regardless of the language of instruction what is important is to realize that although culture and language act as separate entities

they are inseparable. As we know the term "culture' incorporates many euphemisms to its meaning, involving such things as race, age, ethnicity, language, national origin, religion, and other social categories. Along with its representation, similarly the content, language, symbols, visuals, can provide a different meaning to learners than the instructional designer expects. We need to pay close attention too the way in which information is being presented and more importantly how it is being used. No longer can simple translation be the answer to teaching cultural instructional content. Thus, the key to resolving cultural problems is to recognize cultural differences by which we limit our assumptions in consideration with the expectations of the learner. Simply put it is to ensure that the information being presented represent in the minds of the learners what we might expect them too. The primary goal is for learners to see the relevancy in the work and how it applies to them.

In addition to being aware of these things, Ining explains the difficulty in separating oneself between cultures that of your own culture and those whom you are creating for.

> No, you can't and sometimes you don't know. Your question of how do I know, well the only way I can know is by interacting with the students, the faculty and myself. The content is sometimes the barrier but sometimes it's the conduit for that type of further conversation. Because we have to have the curriculum set. We can't change the curriculum or change the content greatly because we are going to have a different audience. We can make some tweaks and know that this is going to be a Chinese group or South Arabian students or students with English not as their first language. So how can we make changes here, so we will facilitate their learning knowing some of the challenges that they face either on the language side or on the culture side so there are certain things that we can take into account while designing the curriculum and putting the courses together. But there are a lot of things we don't know until we interact with the student.

One of the questions that I asked throughout the interviews was *' how do instructional designers become aware of cultural differences?'* I wanted to know where instructional designers acquired the knowledge to understand different ethnicities and differences amongst cultures, thereby perhaps making one more conscious and increasing his or her awareness of themselves and their design process(es). By documenting several issues surrounding the context of educational technology and culture, participants were able to openly discuss several issues surrounding the practice of ID as well as their own personal experiences. However, this does not mean that instructional designers were able to mention much about the differences found in cultures, instead present the argument that cultural differences do exist and that we should be aware of them. There is also the matter of does being more aware of cultural differences make a difference in how instructional designers present the material? Does it in fact alter their approach or method when designing? Therefore, a greater challenge is toward a critical understanding of cultural differences and the ability to respond to these differences and change the practice of instructional design. The question now becomes how does this change the process of designing instruction cross-culturally? Does it even have an affect? Another question that was asked throughout the interview process was:

> *As you continue to understand cultural differences, does it change anything about the way you design? In what ways? And specifically for online-learning?*

Overall most of the participants had a difficult time answering this question due to its complexity and the nature of what was being asked. In my attempt to discover the differences between cultures and specifically take note of the different methodologies that can ultimately be used for learning and teaching, most participants could not pinpoint exactly where those differences lye and what they are and or even identify if it altered

one's design process. Instead, what was often outlined was the idea of good design meeting good instruction. In fact most participants mentioned that in order for instructional design to reach its full potential when working cross-culturally would in fact mean for instructional designers to see the impact of and the importance of how these cultural differences affect and are effected in their practice.

> I guess the key element is to be acutely aware of the feedback that people were providing me, to try to read into what was expected from me and to offer a variety of approaches within the same training session. To be able to provide both for example, the vary trans-missive model; the sage on the stage for those who need that, but also to accommodate periods where we would break down into other groups that need to interact with each other and to build their own knowledge, would have the opportunity to do that. My perception of the dominant francophone model is more of a defiant, defiance towards authority so it's not always easy to deal with people who have that need to contest or challenge authority and other people who want to be an authority figure and show the easiest and quickest way to get to the information (totally intuitively). (Christine)

Much of what Christine is saying contributes to the idea of cultural competence in that by creating educational content that supports different cultures and cultural differences allows for higher levels of thinking, application, implementation and so forth for both learner and instructional designer. In her view as well as what the other participants acknowledged, is to allow room for such occurrences (group activities, question periods etc.) to take place so that learners and instructional designers benefit from both the instruction and instructional product. However, what often gets ignored especially in reference to working with subject matter experts (SME) and or working for an institution/organization in which you are not always in control of the materials being presented, often times getting across the idea of the importance of engaging in higher levels of thinking, application and implementation does not always coincide with SMEs

way of thinking. Many for instance have been teaching the subject material for years and are not involved in the process of practice and application, therefore, getting the idea across to them is often most difficult, and getting them to see the need to improve the instruction. For example, if one were to look at China and their culture, a typical Chinese online class may have more content, greater expectation of what the students should do with fewer explanations. And if one were to just give them information, they are also often willing to work at it and try to remember it, and take that information. (as seen previously with Adam and the discussion with of his brother teaching Chinese students). However, participation and application of what they have learned still needs to be seen and be applied. As per what Christine was addressing, we as instructional designers need to find ways to help the users apply the main principles of learning and giving learners a chance to have their own insights in how what they see applies to their own classroom and real life. By allowing different groups to experience different ways of communication those types of interactions can be inferred.

Take a look at what Nidia says. Nidia's example is a perfect example that demonstrates the idea of good design meeting good instruction. Realizing some of the potential errors that could be problematic for students, Nidia pointed out ways on how to improve the design and thus improving on instruction. By doing so, we in turn capture the good parts of it. It is through this process that we can really know if learners truly understand those principles are not. Ining also points to this notion, alluding to the idea that the design should be kept open where one can identify what are some of the problems learners are running into and therefore report and reflect on their application.

The greatest challenge from where I'm sitting as an instructional designer is to support the faculty. I design their courses with them, I advise them on all these different issues and I'm learning with them in terms of this new encounter with culture. So the greatest challenge I see is faculty awareness and open mindedness with this whole [cultural] situation. You asked me how do I approach the design, I have to keep it open and that's a great challenge for the faculty too, in a more traditional way. They have a lot of control over their content 'this is what I'm going to teach, this is my curriculum, I'm going to select these things that they are going to read, and these assignments are done this way and they are going to have these activities' so they have a lot of control over what that is over their design. Now I'm going to say open it up, because you don't know what the students' experience are going to be and you want to take advantage of that and the only way to integrate that is to set enough structure in place so learning and meaningful engagement happens. Keep it open, keep some of the content open, keep some of the choices open but focus on the outcomes and then maybe you don't have to give them so much detailed instruction but rather using a more open framework. And that's hard for faculty or instructors who have are used to having a lot of control over what the content is, what the delivery is and how they're going to teach. On the other side of that, just the training and awareness of that…the faculty is very aware of such things as culture and cultural background but just in terms of that awareness and bring that awareness up to the level where they can actually have skills and knowledge to design a curriculum. To design and deliver a course that is truly intercultural that is always outside of awareness to skill to ability to integrate that.

Once again we can observe that traditionally the people teaching are use to thinking in the same mannerism no equating to any difference in how they present the material. Scholars have documented that instructors are more effective when they provide cultural connections to the curriculum, draw on student cultures in their teaching styles and address the struggles that their students face (Douglas et al., 2008). Despite this, all participants did raise a number of issues that designers face throughout the interviews that reciprocate with culture while other are not interconnected. Issues that did surface are integrated into this paper due to their importance, as well as several topics that emanate while working cross-culturally with educational technology. But because issues of

cultural concern do exist, there seems to be a divide between those who are teaching and those are receiving the academic content. Take for instance Stephen who happens to think about culture but is not always influenced by it.

> Well we look at the target audience, when we determine what the target audience is, we determine what their needs are and ultimately we focus in on saying what is the gap that is here, what is requested to do. Normally for example, a lot of courses were geared towards sale representatives and so we basically assume that they have a certain knowledge base and based on that knowledge we use that as a bench mark for what we are going to create as a course. When it comes to the background for different cultures it has never been requested of us to create a course based on that. The only time that we ever do that, is when we deal with international companies and what we do then is if we are creating a course normally for here [Canada] we are creating a course normally that has Canadian content. As soon as we go outside [of Canada] and we have people from China or from South America, what we will do is change some of the wording and just translate it. Other things we have done are create online avatars and take the appearance of the country that we are training for.

Due to not being able to engage in meaningful conversations about culture and or provide students with the opportunity to develop, creates the discourse in classrooms in which marginalizes the relationship between teacher and student in the struggle to understand different ethnicities of students. Therefore, a greater challenge is toward a critical understanding of teacher practice and instructional style of learning materials.

Jacques:

> The challenge is cost and time as in more effort. You want to appeal to a greater variety of learners, then it costs you more money to do that, it's as simple as that. Every time you're adding a type of learning activity because you want to appeal to a particular kind of person, well it costs you more money. The other challenge I think is that there are cultural differences and there's personal differences within a culture. There's a lots of variability, just individual variability. Not everyone in that culture is typical of that culture so you're always dealing with that kind of variability. In some cases I would say some of the projects that I've been

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> in that cultural diversity comes through most and in most projects, I would
> say that personal differences come through most.

But now it goes back to the question of how do instructional designers find the connections to where people are? Although all the participants reported the need to start developing elaborate framework for culturally sensitive instructional design and the importance of cultural competence, many did not have ample reasoning as to how they apply cultural issues in their work and training. For most, they emphasized the value in supporting good instruction and the need to develop multi-cultural instructional design, however implementing such practices was easier said then done. Regardless, these participants recognized that through experience and careful consideration that it is possible to increase one's knowledge about cultural diversity, but the need remains to use that knowledge in making design decisions to address diversity. This would assume that instructional designers could overcome their cultural inclinations and identify instructional elements that could lead to determining alternatives in both content and learning activities that supports multicultural situations and cultural analysis of learners. In speaking to Christine concerning instructional designers embracing a deeper understanding of cross-cultural learning and creating an instructional product that exhibits cultural considerations of diverse learners, she expresses the difficulty in applying culturally dependent approaches to learning.

> It's very difficult to assess. Again how do [you] assess the effectiveness of
> training? It is one of the underlying issues and as you said there are
> individual variables. Even if I design training in terms of sampling, it
> doesn't mean that because one Arabic student didn't appreciate the
> training, didn't find it helpful, didn't find that he learned very well through
> the training that it had more do to with the individual than whatever
> culture. It may be a language issue or a gazillion things, so unless you
> have a large sample of any group it's very hard to draw conclusions.

We see that both Jacques and Christine indicate issues concerning individual variability and how the diversity in learners can play a key role in considering cultural dimensions when designing. More importantly, they demonstrate that cultural analysis and the process of becoming aware of cultural differences can be associated to a number of things such as one's own conception, cultural setting, educational expectation, experience and so forth. Thus, the degree to which an instructional designer can adapt his or her instruction in order to accommodate leaners, given such things as time and budget constraints, language, organizational culture and the need to acculturate learners into professional developers is limited. As reflected in the interviews, integrating cross-cultural content in courses may offer instructional systems a different means of considering cultural diversity. In order to benefit, instructional designers would need to adapt their instruction to meet the learning preferences of learners. In determining how deeply rooted cultural preferences are as well as how instructional designer's approach instruction, the following question was asked in order to aid with my understanding of the method(s), instructional designers take when considering cultural differences along with its direction so as to expand instructional strategy and instructional development.

What is your approach and or method when it comes to designing for different cultural groups?

Caitlyn:

> Back then I was using activity theory for framework of analysis to help the interns understand the context and culture of the learners. That [way] they could be more prepared to support and develop their own learning goals and see how the use of online collaboration tools could assist them with their work. Again it was challenging for the interns even after receiving training and support and data collection tools to see how culture, rules, customs and all of the things that you are trying to explore in an activity theory framework. Without a certain level of expertise it often became a very superficial analysis... like FATUB sits at this desk and her job is to do

this and it wasn't really a reflection of how their environment affects their learning. We tried it but it did not work out very well. *(She later goes on and discusses her new outlook)* That's where I think the theory really comes into play if you're developing and supporting self-regulated learners. These are people who are going to be able to determine their own learning needs and to develop their own personal learning environments to achieve their own goals so it doesn't become designing for a one size fits all solution but it becomes more of a designer as a facilitator and when a learner expresses their own needs to gain a greater insight to a particular issue. Then they will be capable of asking for additional support and then you will be able to infuse that support when necessary…. I think it's hard to think in any other way.

Christine says:

> I remember I was somewhat involved in a project where we took a French course that was taught here at Telus. We adapted it for an African audience in English. It was not only the language but I had no knowledge of the culture reference model that people had. One of the things that I did was a lot of research on what had been published on distance education by African researchers to insert them into the reference material of the course. The students would be able to read about examples that are similar to their own experience, than about India or South America or the States. I updated webography and bibliographies with references that were from African researchers, however, I was not able to assess to what degree they found the end product appropriate.

Here we see that the participants understand the need for various forms of instruction and the implications on the instructional design practice and process. In speaking with the participants they also note that certain forms of learning might not work at all in certain cultures and that by offering alternative choices in learning activities and instructional formats, espouses a "multicultural approach" that embraces both predominant and minority cultures (Henderson 1996). The details offered by Christine and also Jacques (mentioned much earlier throughout this paper) can be of help in stimulating design adaptations, but it offers no direct device for design decisions. His idea of providing many possible avenues supports a multitudinous design, allowing freedom for students to

follow a direct path and or venture off, however knowing which types of adaptations instruction needs more detailing and further research. Moreover, it also shows that in order to provide a rich tool for analyzing cultural differences and differences in learning preferences, we should be sensitive towards selecting mediums and content-oriented information so as to avoid unnecessary adaptation and to overcome barriers such as language, content development, and real-world practice. Caitlyn on the other hand not only agrees with this statement but also raises another important point. She characterizes:

> In our sector I think we are far too focused on accountability – being able to demonstrate your results, which largely comes from the field of management. But when you are thinking about practice and what's useful for practitioners, is being able to learn from experience, networking with the right people whom you can share knowledge with and capitalizing on your learning and your knowledge and scaling things up and making things bigger and better and having a wider impact. These are what are important to practitioners and so if we go away from learning towards accountability we lose a significant amount of effectiveness and in order to learn effectively between countries, between programs, between offices, you need to have an understanding or common ground about how people interpret things differently and work differently and how you can exchange knowledge, learning appropriately and without an understanding of different cultures and customs that's virtually impossible.

The process of becoming aware of cultural differences was unique for each of the participants, but the general feeling is that much more can be done in terms of cultural awareness on instructional design practice. The information presented here refers to the awareness of differences that affect the academics of diverse learners. In my attempt to understand the educational challenges surrounding cross-cultural design, instructional designers who continue to use traditional methods as part of the curriculum, often show a limited understanding of cultural pedagogy while continuing to undermine diverse learners. Secondly, the type of role that instructional designers play can also be part of

the discussion of educational challenges, in that they are not well prepared for the issues often face in the classroom in relation to diversity and or multiculturalism, thus effecting the instructional product. Although there is a greater issue in getting to cross-cultural training in the education field, the participants have indicated that an approach of sensitivity and responsiveness is best during cultural analysis of learners and that learning environments needs to consider diversity in course design. In addition this brings us to my next point concerning implications for practice and future trends.

Implications for Practice

Based on the data presented, the examples of the participants experiences and its findings are more suggestive than conclusive. At the same time, it does give accreditation for researchers and practitioners to pay close attention to the socio-cultural issues within instructional design and the field of education. The participant's narratives provide evidence to studying cultural factors and the need to consider diversity in course design. Because of the limited amount of research concerning the issue of culture in the field of instructional design greater attention needs to be given to incorporating concepts of developing culturally relevant instruction and developing cultural competence. Such a calling will not only benefit students, but also instructors who often assume and expect students to act a certain way and allowing their biases to control the outcome of the instructional product. This does not mean that there is a formula to knowing how best to integrate cultural aspects into instructional design, nor does this mean that I have discovered on how best to do so. Rather, the implication here is to the need to have a greater understanding and acknowledgment of cultural knowledge in cross-cultural

learning environments and what valuable contributions it can potentially make to the education of diverse learners. Due to the different cultural understandings and expectations of learning and teaching, will promote how important it is for instructional designers to understand and come to know their students while discrediting any biases, he or she might have and thus placing the equality and academic success for students.

Research

As reflected in the interviews, the participants seemed accepting to the fact that socio-cultural issues and multicultural instruction are significant within the field of instructional design. In particular, they indicated that an awareness of cultural issues is extremely important in today's educational environment, and that we must question our intention to be culturally sensitive and cognizant that culture is unavoidable. E-learning is growing tremendously, however requires careful planning and attention to the idiosyncrasies of cultures in order to reach the potential benefits. We must also consider that there are consequences to what we do. The result has been that instructional designers are quite frequently isolated and do not always interact with their learners for whom they are designing instruction. As a result, students' expectations may in fact be different from the instructional designer, without the intention, this creates cultural discontinuity between the two parties and further complicates matters.

Furthermore, the study also reveals that instructional designers should better understand their role in the e-learning environments. There is a notion that "one size fits all" without considering the different cultures and or learning styles of learners. The globalization of education includes an unpredictable learner population in which

instructional designers are unable to make prejudgments about the cultural characteristics of learners. In saying that, instructional designers are often focused on the content and are asked to play on the community and or organization's cultural theme. Often times, instructional designers are required to follow the decisions dictated to them by those administering the content and are expected to be followed. One of the major drawbacks in this type of structure is the fear of *'getting it wrong',* which means not creating an end product that meets the needs of the learners in conjunction with the organization and organizational culture. Due to the fact that communities and organizations also have their culture, clients and stakeholders also influence the intentions of designers.

The culture within the organization has an impact on the instructional designers and their relationship amongst themselves. Often these organizations take material and 'globalize' it within their corporation to make it acceptable for any type of leaner. Occasionally these organizations also focus on content delivery and are pressured with time and budget restraints. This forces instructional designers not to extend beyond their defined task of completing the end product, while respecting the organization's policies and adhering to their guidelines. It also removes the instructional designers from making key decisions regarding the end product and/or experience. Due to the type of role instructional designers are in, it creates a dilemma due to them being employed by an organization whose culture dominates and is domicile. This allows pre-existing conceptions to be imposed on the projects by the client and about the culture of the organization. This however limits the instructional designer's ability to really understand and or be sensitive to any differences in learners. This concept of organizational culture is important to understanding the behavior of organizations as they manage external and

internal social changes affecting the practice of instructional design and its development of content and design.

While the study involved the exploration of instructional designers' experiences, the findings should not be accepted as applicable to other settings. The information presented, relies on the narratives of the eight participants in which deeply confirms the importance of culture and impact within instructional design and instructional design practice. I do not infer that culture and instruction can be so easily joined in discussion and or even create an instructional model that can be used universally. I recognize that the need for more research to verify such implications left by participants in this study should be tested more thoroughly, in order to see if their claims support to enhancing the school environment. In summary the challenges for addressing multicultural education and training can be outlined as the following:

1. Recognizing one's own personal epistemologies and not assuming they represent the 'right way' to think;

2. Understanding and recognizing cultural differences of learners, therefore, allowing better instructional decisions leading to better learning outcomes;

3. Taking the responsibility to acculturate oneself about different cultural groups and backgrounds

4. Realizing that research-based instructional strategies are culturally-based (Westernized) and are not always appropriate for learning

5.

Further future research could investigate multicultural contexts in determining which groups of learners

Many questions remain however in order to move forward.

- What method or procedures are needed in order to assist with the progress of moving towards a more sensitive and culturally responsive design?

- How do these so-called instructional strategies influence the field of ID and that of learning?

- How can we get instructional practitioners/designers to become more culturally responsive and helpful? Should the education of instructional designers be changed in order to accommodate different groups of learners and better learning outcomes?

- What is process by which instructional designers adapt their techniques and or approach to meet learners?

- Can universal principles be created for instructional design? And if so what steps need to be taken in order to do so?

Such research could support the notion of cultural match and or see if there is difference to inducing any of these programs.

In conclusion, I have tried to demonstrate through my research how certain radicalized barriers affect the academic success of diverse learners. From my study, I can conclude that race is an important factor in speaking about different ethnic groups, but also plays an important role in the educational field for instructors and students, and that discussions about race, racism and the like are defined and shared by the color of one's

skin rather than the content. Although this is a small sample of self-reported instructional designers, it does illuminate patterns of similar experiences and opinions based on the themes described earlier. It is also meant that such experiences suggest that for future teaching, a development of meaningful theory and cross-cultural curriculum needs to be implemented, whereas educators play an important role in engaging students in cross-cultural learning environments. I believe that programs that encourage all instructors to engage in a dialogue about issues of culture and cultural differences are imperative to developing a theory and practice of education that embraces an ethnocentric approach and multiculturalism discourse. Commenting on the whole experience and closing remarks based on the study, Caitlyn observes that:

> When we don't bother seeing the differences in culture, it is because we have a dominant culture who is the big bully who kind of says 'we are doing this my way because we believe our way is the best way and you guys should just heed to our way of doing things' and the less grandeur culture need to be capable of standing up and voicing their opinions and gaining a voice in the dialogue of *this is what we need and this is how we do things and this is why it is important to us*. If they are not capable of engaging in those types of discussions and negotiations, then it becomes impossible. Raising awareness for culture, I would just say it comes on both sides. I think we need to be critical of ourselves to see who is the dominant culture and then also to identify who is vulnerable and how we can support them. You can really have a general cultural awareness strategy and again you need to understand where people are coming from and develop targeted strategies. I would say academia plays a huge key role and being critical about the status quo and public education and in criticizing the government and developing alternative and independent ways to make these cultural issues mainstream.

On this note, I share her view and make critical note of how the school system in which includes the curriculum and the classroom pedagogical practices are in large-scale part of the problem. In order to educate diverse learners successfully, instructors need to be trained to successfully teach a multicultural setting and develop a curriculum that would

in turn provide diverse learners with a sense of belonging and acceptance. Further, instructors must also show positive attitudes towards visible minorities and not allow personal biases to control the classroom experience and or the expectations of certain learners.

Inning describes her closing remarks and future direction:

> The only thing that can be done is working towards an open design and getting faculty to understand what having the ability to be an intercultural person [is]. By intercultural I mean [that] they know how to interact with students or people with different cultural backgrounds, not on a superficial level but understanding how the students are going to see things differently because of their cultural upbringing, how students are going to see both the content and the pedagogy. This is probably the most obvious example that people can point to, is that in our culture we really value debate and we encourage discussion in the classroom. We measure engagement by how much you engage in the discourse with you classmates and you're very much encouraged to challenge whatever the professor said. You exhibit your critical thinking by challenging the professor or other classmates. That's not how other cultures view it.

It is important to be able to recognize the contributions that contribute to the mechanisms of cultural inequalities of the school system produced either by teacher attitudes, experience, expectations, etc., that commensurate to the academics of diverse learners. Particularly, instructors must tackle fundamental issues of inequity and speak about such relevant issues, so as to ensure that they can transmit a sense of knowledge in this area regardless of one's ethnical background. Although the interaction between instructor and student might be different depending on a one's ethnic background, it is still more important the informed practice and knowledge surrounding cultural diversity to be transmitted and its significance, so as not to be misguided and misinformed of a group's culture. Finally, providing each learner with rich and challenging material and

opportunities for growth and deep reflection, allows for learners to interact greatly with the material, but also providing insight to a culture's background that could lead to a better understanding of a population. In this respect, my study provided personal insights to help us gain a better understanding of instructional designers' way of thinking concerning cultural differences within the field of ID, while also focusing on the instructors' experiences and their exposure to the classroom environment and practice to academic success of students. Their awareness and knowledge of ethnic affairs is crucial to school success and is the antidote that we have been waiting for.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Have you or do you develop instruction for learners in a different culture? If yes describe what it has been like for you. If no what would your approach be when designing for different cultures?
2. As an instructional designer are you aware of how culture plays a role in your design? If so how? Can you please describe an experience?
3. As an instructional designer are you aware of the differences between yourself and the cultural group for whom you are designing instruction for? If so how did you become aware of such differences and what procedure(s) do you use to measure these differences?
4. What do you think is the greatest challenge when incorporating culture into your design?

- If not aware:
  As an instructional designer how do you build the right context without incorporating the element of culture?

  As an instructional designer how can one be immune to the effects of culture – your own culture and that of learners?

5. As an instructional designer how do you take the cultural aspect into consideration when designing? (how instructional designers take into account the cultural differences of the learners?)
6. As you continue to understand cultural differences, does it change anything about the way you design? In what ways? And specifically for online-learning?

- If not:
Why do you not feel it necessary to further develop awareness of cultural differences in relation to online-learning?
- If yes:
How are your instructional products different? Did you see any ways in which these changes helped the learner?

7. Do you feel it necessary to further develop awareness of cultural differences for any practical reasons? Why or why not?
8. If so, how do you think it is best to do further develop awareness of cultural differences?
9. Are there any factors that are equally or even more important than culture when designing? If so what are they? And why are they important?