

The Impact of Culture on Instructional Design

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Abstract

Cultural differences are a part of any school of higher education. People are different, even if they live across the street, city, state, country, or worlds apart from each other, differences will exist on everything from understanding to speech. This paper will look at the need for understanding cultural diversity in instructional design. Understanding the differences between people will make the designing of instruction easier to understand and much clearer to each of the learners.

The Impact of Culture on Instructional Design

Culture will always play an important role in the lives of each and every person. Culture will vary from place to place, and region to region. Cultural values are those that are learned through family and peer teaching. Each and everything that is learned is considered part of a person's cultural heritage. This can be from time management to personal dress and the way people speak. Cultural differences are the person's personal way of thinking and reacting to outside stimuli.

Cultural differences are not bad or wrong, but are just that - differences. One objective in instructional design is to make sure that everything is well written and explained so different people are able to understand the directions without misunderstandings. Explanations must be clear and precise, with no leeway to generate any misunderstandings or interpretation.

Needs Assessment

Needs assessments are completed to define the needs of a defined population. Needs assessments can be done for regional classes, or may incorporate a global learning situation. The needs assessment should be written to take advantage of non-culturally biased writing. It should address the content on the basis of being direct and to the point. If the content is being developed for an international population, needs may include English diction if it is an English speaking school, or may need to be written in foreign script if the target population does not speak English.

Needs assessments must also have clear directions with no cultural bias. Each piece must be explained with clear directions. If the assessment is done on a scale format with fill in the bubbles, this must be explained to the student. Not all areas of the world utilize a Scan-Tron© (a regional company) or bubble sheet for questionnaires and answer sheets. If the instructions say to

fill in the Scan-Tron© the perspective learner may not know what this is. The needs assessment giver may need to label each piece as A, B, C and this could be explained in the directions.

Objectives

The objectives in instructional design must be clear and precise. There should be no cultural bias in the writing so that each instruction is to the point. It is easy to start using regionalism in writing and must be avoided so that misunderstandings do not take place. An example of this in surgical technology, “The student will be able to relate the steps of a UPPP to the instrumentation needed for each step.” This is considered regional in surgical technology. UPPP can be expressed as a U Triple P in some parts of the country and should use its proper naming. The proper name is a Uvulopalatopharyngealplasty; this example and other proper names should be used to avoid possible misunderstandings.

Each objective must be written in such a way that each piece is easily understood by all. The instructor must also go further in class and take the time to make sure the objectives are understood and rewrite them if need be so that they are easily understood. When the student population is kept in mind when writing the objectives or rewriting the objectives, this will make the directions easier to follow for subsequent classes.

Goals

Goals must be listed so that they are also clear and precise. It will give the student a clear idea of what the class is designed to help the student learn on a higher level. These expectations should follow a pattern of writing that will give insight into the overall goals of each class. When writing a goal, it should give an expectation of what is desired. It is a more broad based expectation than an objective. An example of a goal could include: “The student will broaden their ability to critically think in a surgical environment.” This is broad based, but may be able to

be written for a better explanation. Some students may not understand the context of broaden such as in broaden the horizon. Broaden may be better replaced with: “The student’s ability to critically think will be increased significantly within the surgical environment.” This wording does a better job of explaining the goal to the student.

Cultural Issues and Diversity

Cultural issues and diversity is every where. People think and behave differently depending upon how they were raised and under what situations. One of the primary cultural diversity issues in the United States and globally can be fiscal diversity. The amount of cumulative wealth within a country can play an important part in how people think. This difference can be seen between regions of the United States, different countries, and even within age groups from the same regions. Some people are raised in an environment of wealth. They are able to afford to do things that may seem normal to them, but may be inconceivable to others. An example of this could be a vacation to another country. Examining three different diverse groups will display a wide range of thinking on this subject.

The wealthy class of a country may see the possibility of traveling to another country on a vacation as a natural part of their life while growing up. They view the activity as a normal event in their lives. Other people, who do not have the wealth or funds to afford this trip, may see it as out of their reach. They may want to take such a trip, but do not have the means to do so. They may see such a trip as a once in a lifetime momentous occasion. A third group may be those who grew up during the depression. They may have the funds to do such a thing, but may see the whole trip as a waste of resources and money. The idea that people would spend so much money on something as frivolous as a vacation may not make sense to them. This could be three different groups/individuals that may have grown up within the same town.

Another issue could be speech within regions of one nation and between nations. Various areas of the United States and even within differing social economic backgrounds from the same areas of the country may have different ways of speaking and dialects. One term that comes to mind is the term “Sick”. To some people, the term “Sick” means that a person is not feeling well as far as their health is concerned. In other diverse groups the term “Sick” means something really good, as in, “The paint job on the motorcycle looks sick.” This is just one term with different meanings for different groups.

In terms of instructional design, it is important that each piece of the material is written clearly and without cultural bias. Each piece should be distinct without using words upon which different meanings can be mistakenly placed within the explanation. This must also be considered when writing expectations.

Expectations must plainly explain what is expected of the students. If the expectation is that students will log into the classroom regularly as distance students, regularly must be explained. Some students may see regular as 1 time every 4 or 5 days. Other students may see regularly as 3 to 4 times a day. It must be assumed that different people will think differently and need to have each piece of any work explained to them in clear and precise directions.

Conclusion

Different people will have had different life experiences in their daily lives. People will see things differently. Each and every piece of information will be looked at from different perspectives and different angles. Cultural diversity and instructional design can work together to make sure that each person is given the chance to succeed. This will come in the form of well written directions and explanations that are clear and precise. If they are found to be ambiguous,

they must be rewritten to a better standard. Individuals deserve a good education, and the differences in people need to be acknowledged and planned for in each circumstance.