

A Preliminary Study and Research Protocol for Investigating Sociocultural Issues in Instructional Design

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to initiate a program of research to explore how instructional designers around the world use design to make a social difference locally and globally. The central research question was, “Are there social and political purposes for design that are culturally based?” A growing body of research is concerned with the design of culturally-appropriate learning resources and environments, but the focus of this research is the instructional designer as the *agent* of the design. Colloquially put, if we design for ourselves, we should understand the sociocultural influences on us and how they inform our practices. We should also develop respect for, and learn from, how various global cultures address similar design problems differently. This paper reports the results of a preliminary investigation held with instructional designers from ten countries to examine culturally situated values and practices of instructional design, and it presents a research protocol that was developed to expand the investigation internationally.

Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just as there are different learning cultures, we think that there may be different cultural models of instructional design. In this pilot study we propose to bring together instructional designers from different parts of the world to consider the implications of culture on instructional design, and culturally-based ways of knowing and practice. Ultimately, we hope to recruit and engage a team of researchers in a program of research to address this important and emerging area of research.

Design and Outcomes of the Singapore Symposium

A two-day symposium of instructional design professionals and scholars was held in Singapore, with representatives from Canada, Australia, Asia, North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. The primary purpose of the meeting was to identify a core group to participate in the study and conduct a preliminary exploration of the notion of instructional design cultures from different cultural perspectives. A second purpose was to collaborate on developing a research protocol that each representative could employ in conducting interviews with other designers by videoconference or audioconference in every country and continent we could reach. The remainder of this paper is a narrative account of the organization

and results of the pilot (symposium), the preliminary data, and the potential research protocol to be used in the larger international program of research exploring culturally situated values and practice, for example, models or frameworks, of instructional designers.

The invitation

In the spring of 2006, I (Campbell) sent an email to my colleague Dr. AK, at the Open University of Malaysia, asking her to join our very small research network. Rick and I had presented the paper “*Transforming Higher Education: Agency and the Instructional Designer*” at the 2006 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and had sat down over coffee to ask, ‘what’s the next step?’ Rick had been working with a research network, *IDT Futures*, and was very interested in what scholars and practitioners in design professions, as a community of practice, could learn from one another. I was interested in pursuing further the idea of moral coherence and design metaphors in agentic instructional design. By the end of the chat, we had sketched out a project to explore both strands, but with an international scope, and I immediately thought of AK as a research partner, or at least facilitator. Figure 1 shows the email invitation I sent to AK and, Figure 2, was her response. Over the next eighteen months Rick, AK and I sent ideas and links back and forth over email, and when I visited the University of Saskatchewan the following January on another pilot study (*Instructional designer disciplinary-based formation of self*) we invited Dr. Dirk Morrison and Dr. Heather Kanuka onto the team to make four. Figure 3 shows the types of responses we began to receive in our “probes” for interest in the idea, and tried to follow up on, during this time.

We were interested, and encouraged, to discover that our hunch that instructional design as a concept and a profession was not universal had some merit. In other words, while most of the designers and scholars that began to contact us, for example through AK and her contacts, were graduates of American graduate programs in instructional design; others did not have a graduate credential because there was no ID field or discipline in their areas of the world. Although this presented us with a problem in recruiting colleagues from many areas (e.g. Eastern Europe), we wondered how practitioners and scholars from different geopolitical areas were framing their praxis and research. This was really the key research issue.

By the winter of 2007 a few of our early contacts became impatient (Figure 4). An invitation to join an international research network, as loose as it was in spring of 2006, was seen as prestigious in several of the tertiary institutions involved. Although we had failed to attract external funding, I had enough internal funding to support a face-to-face meeting of a core of about one dozen ID scholars/practitioners. At this point we had three goals: 1) to seed a community of practice; 2) to share our research on instructional design; and 3) to determine interest in developing further an international research proposal. During this time in the higher education sector interest in approaches to instructional design for cultural diversity was growing. Much of the discussion centered on either usability (e.g. internationalization and/or localization) or content for online learning, but not on the culture of instructional design or sociocultural influences on the instructional designer as a moral agent, that is, as influencing the shape of the learning design. Figure 5, a posting from *ITForum* (<http://it.coe.uga.edu/itforum>), is a rare departure from this discourse. In this posting, the author proposes an ethnographic approach to understanding ID as a diverse learning community comprised of multi-members including teachers, designers, and learners.

By the spring of 2008 we had developed contacts in twelve regions and were trying to fill in our gaps, and had written an executive summary of the proposed network that included a preliminary literature review. The idea of a representative, generative symposium in a mutually accessible location was taking shape; given our level of funding we worked out several scenarios and decided that we could afford to meet in Singapore for two days; most of the participants would be able to join us if we were able to cover at least a portion of their expenses. We were determined to involve designers or self-described ID scholars from as many cultures as possible, without excluding those from less wealthy or less well-connected countries, or whether their English skills were fluent or not. After some lively online discussion we reached consensus on an honorarium for each participant to help defray travel expenses, while the project would cover all hotel and most meal costs. We soon realized that framing the symposium as an invitational research conference would assist several of our colleagues to convince their department heads to send them to the

meeting. We also acknowledged that there could be a sense of unequal authority based on dominant culture perceptions, range of research and/or design experience, cultural background (e.g. language ability), academic status, and other factors (Figures 4 & 6). Formal letters of invitation were sent, along with a formal agenda (Appendix 1). To this point the participants were not necessarily known to one another, although every one of them had had contact with a member of the original team and many knew each other from conferences, local projects, and even the years they'd spent at an American tertiary institution. In late June 2008 we asked each confirmed participant individually if they would like to become part of a secure social network supported by elgg (elgg.com) to develop a community of practice (Figure 7). We added members of the new community once they confirmed by return email that they were willing to be "known". The first activity of the community was to negotiate the confidentiality compact. In the end, the community has served mainly as an administrative site. As the meeting date drew near, we began to experience our first attritions, losing representation from Brazil, the US, and Australia. The community, however, all agreed that each "regret" could stay active in elgg and participate offline.

The symposium in Singapore

During the summer months of 2008 Shairoz, our administrative assistant, tried to finalize all the travel and meeting arrangements. She had made contact with a colleague of AK's at U21Global who was willing to host the meetings. The contact recommended a hotel close by. Purchase orders and invoices began to cross each other in the mail and on the Internet, regularly being misdirected and misinterpreted. We were required to pay one-half of the full amount 90 days before the date of the symposium, the final amount to be received one week before we arrived. The concept of "half-board" confused Sharon and her contact was unable to clarify.

While she struggled with international processes and procedures the Canadian team worked on the formal meeting agenda, seeking feedback on the community site. Most often our suggestions were greeted with polite, if not enthusiastic, agreement (see Appendix 1 for agenda). We didn't want to overplan the two days, preferring to leave enough flexibility for emerging issues and for building trust among members. Furthermore, we were cognizant of our dominant authority status and ethnocentric experiences with instructional design, the very culture we were proposing to deconstruct. At the same time, however, we needed to respect the time commitment of these colleagues who were traveling from as far away as Switzerland to join us for two days. How to use the time profitably to meet our goals was a challenge to this team of designers. Finally, we agreed that Rick would develop two case studies designed to tease out sociocultural differences in design practice. We attached the two cases (Appendix 2) with the final pre-meeting email in Figure 8. We packed. And then just days before we left U21Global alerted us that October **date** was a national holiday and that the university buildings would be locked. We found it fitting and even somewhat amusing that a cultural holiday we had overlooked caused last minute complications. Sharon, who probably found it less amusing, was back on the telephone with our hotel, hoping that hotel meeting rooms were, after all, available (they were). Hasty email revisions, and---finally, we arrived in Singapore.

The day of the first meeting we all arrived in the hotel boardroom, formally dressed, bristling with notebooks and research papers. We took random places around the table except for the Canadians, who were left at one end. Ethnic groupings formed. Laptops appeared and the inevitable competition for electrical outlets and delay for wireless access occurred. Everyone agreed to be (audio) recorded so that we would be able to develop a comprehensive meeting report for the participants. I began by greeting everyone and thanking them for making a (mostly) self-funded trip and for their commitment to ID research. I then modeled the first planned activity, a narrative account of "coming to" instructional design. I told my story of maternal teaching culture; my first teaching appointment in a rural community where I was forced to quickly develop curriculum; then beginning to reflect on my teaching and relate it to theory; returning to graduate school and its terrible surprises; meeting a mentor and having an epiphany about technology and learning; becoming an instructional designer without formal preparation, how I learned about ID retrospectively and discovering that the literature was not describing my practice; the beginning of my research into a constructivist practice of instructional design – but mostly all about serendipity and unexpected outcomes. I expected to be followed by other stories of paths taken and not, but instead was greeted with surprised silence and curiosity that a narrative approach was considered valid in the field. In

the conversation that followed it was clear that personal narrative was not particularly comfortable for members of the group. In particular, our colleague from the Middle East was unprepared to share such personal feelings, and in any case was not fluent enough in English to speak profoundly and reflectively. What had not occurred to us – to me – was that narrative inquiry might be a North American methodology. The subsequent offerings reflected chronological accounts of graduate learning, mostly in American universities with PhD programs in Educational Technology such as Syracuse, experience with ISD models of ID and quasi-experimental research designs, and institutional expectations of scholarship.

Following lunch and a group walk, Rick and Heather shared their stories of practice and began to focus on their research interests, sharing published papers and, in Rick's case, a slide presentation and exploration of several of his online projects. By the afternoon individuals were more comfortable asking each other questions and revealing their "design artifacts". We noticed that our participant from Africa stayed mostly silent but seemed engaged, the participant from Western Europe quickly attuned to the idea of narrative and ID, and began to assertively weave his experience with faculty development into the discussion, while a group from Asia formed a sub-group that chatted quietly during the presentations—probing their understandings among themselves and developing ideas for a local project. By the end of the day it was clear that the "metaphor" activity would not be productive or meaningful. The community caucused and decided to forgo formal presentations of their current research papers. As well, because we felt more comfortable with each other, the Canadians suggested dressing more casually for the next day, a suggestion that met at first with uneasiness and then relief. During the evening's dinner party one of the Asian participants told us that the cultural expectation for such meetings was very formal and often served as a status check for participants, hence the initial discomfort with our invitation to let the next day evolve more organically.

We had thought comparing approaches to Rick's cases would tease out sociocultural differences in design approaches. However, the next day the activity encouraged participants to discuss approaches to designing for diversity within the cases. Our original team tried explicitly to bring the conversation back to our research question, but this did not occur. At one point Western Europe strongly lobbied for us to come to consensus about the meaning of "culture" itself, so that we could all use the same frame. Rick, the informal moderator, immediately started a community wiki and we began creating a common understanding of "culture". Those with laptops began to google related terms. I pulled up several sites and articles from the usability literature, for example Nielsen's (<http://www.useit.com>) observations about internationalization; Hofstede's (c.f.) work on cultural dimensions and research using that framework. Others worked with Rick on a first sentence. As I worked I reflected that academics inevitably want to immediately define terms before the deep meaning-making can occur; the process of arriving at understanding interested me more. As the day wore on, however, and our efforts to develop a common understanding of culture increasingly became a source of tension, it was clear that we needed to shift the discussion away from "culture" as a concept and towards next steps for the community. A complete break was required; we scheduled an hour for napping, visiting, shopping, doing email...and quietly putting our core team heads together to decide how to retrieve the warm and productive ethos of the morning and the day before.

Break over, and group refreshed, the force of expectation turned on the team. Although we had hoped that by afternoon #2 we would have found complete collaboration, evidently it was still our agenda. We had underestimated the moral authority of the Western team, who had subsidized the symposium and set the agenda. A social networking site, mostly untested, and existing relationships had not automatically breached the sociocultural boundaries. However, we would be able to find a *lingua franca* through the global requirements of the academic culture—an externally-funded, international research collaboration. The Asian members of the community who had been a subgroup during the two days had worked together to propose a study, originating and funded in Malaysia, to explore design and meta-design issues related to curriculum development for an online teacher education course with international participants. Those who did not understand, or were not interested in, our question, "Are there social and political purposes for design that are culturally based?" would work on issues of designing for cultural diversity, while those of us interested in the design praxis could refer to the course design process itself.

What's next?

To prepare for this session, we posted several questions to our community (Appendix 3). To date we have three responses. Common threads include cultural expectations embedded in instructional design for diversity, particularly where indigenous peoples explicitly form part of the learning community: “The adaptation of these models for my own cultural context was not a conscious experience as sensitivity to the multi-racial composition seems to be firmly planted at the sub-conscious level.”

This is a direct contrast with Canadian design practice, where Aboriginals are all but invisible, and diversity, let alone accessibility, is usually considered only when a needs assessment identifies specific learner groups.

We are generally concerned with the multi-racial composition, not only in terms of the three primary races (Malays, Chinese and Indians) but also the various indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak. Generally, the former drives our decision with regard to ensuring that we represent every race in our learning examples, remembering to include as many or at least the major religious/festive celebrations and remembering the taboos of each race and respecting the cultural differences so as not to unintentionally offend the other....In professional environments such as in training, the predominant language used is English or Malay depending on the audience but in some instances, we offer a bi-lingual option to ensure a wider reach among the audience...There are some major differences between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) and minor differences between each of the states in Malaysia. We try to include as many examples in terms of food, places, festivals, flowers, etc. in examples or stories.

Those individuals trained in North America recognize that Asians “are largely in behaviorist and cognitivist modes of learning....lesser constructivist or connectivist learning principles are applied. We are largely assessment driven and assessments are largely based on learning outcomes commonly based on Bloom’s taxonomy. Hence, when doing ID, I will have these in mind” and, “I was more interested in their philosophical approach (referring to graduate study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison)... Constructivism dominated to my graduate work which still is in difficulty adopting to Korean instructional culture.” However, while each respondent is aware of their design provenance they are able to be both critical and adaptive, “I learned instructional design made by Western scholars” and, with professional experience they were able to identify the uneasy “fits”, for example by recognizing “those ID models do not represent our circumstances such as learner analysis. Korean schools or institutes do not need to pay attention much to religion, race, language or age gaps due to the relatively homogenous society.”

From my own institutional context in which social networking is viewed with anxiety and actively discouraged as a teaching/learning tool, I am interested in the apparently enthusiastic adoption of Web 2.0 (and beyond) in Asian countries, “...well encouraged to adopt SN in instruction...Cyworld is the first social networking environment in the world where more than 50% of Koreans have accounts. Web 2.0 is one of tools strongly encouraged to use when instruction is designed.”

Finally, ethics approval for transforming, retroactively, a networking meeting into a pilot study is complex at best, and has to date consumed four months. At issue is whether informed consent can be obtained retroactively, and how to obtain institutional consent from ten international universities, whose expectations and requirements differ from each other.

What have we learned so far, and where can we go from here? We offer a few thoughts, and additional questions, here.

1. The research question itself reflects an ethnocentric concern, or at least curiosity.
2. The process of developing an international research partnership is worthy of study.
3. The Canadian team did not do the hard work of surfacing their own cultural assumptions about developing an international research design community.
4. Most international instructional designers with graduate preparation have been enculturated with ISD.
5. Language fluency is critical to deep processing to collaboratively develop conceptual understanding.
6. Narrative inquiry is not universally accepted or well-understood as an appropriate research method in EdTech.
7. Western journals are not the main source of either research information or dissemination. For example, several colleagues regularly publish in, and read the *Journal of Instructional Research in Southeast Asia*.

8. While trained in the U.S., designers in different cultures will naturally modify their practice to accommodate local concerns. At the same time, we wonder whether the dominance of North American institutions in preparing instructional designers results in a form of unintentional cultural imperialism.
9. Power and authority issues were shared, but academic authority seems to vary significantly between the North American academy and elsewhere.
10. It is likely to take considerable time to develop the level of trust necessary to explore cross-cultural issues.
11. Does the commonality of the professional culture of ID complicate the challenge of teasing out culture-specific issues?
12. Did the structure of the meeting, while helpful in many cases, introduce barriers to open disclosure?
13. Is it possible that the academic cultures where instructional designers work are more influential than the social cultures in which they live?

Instructional designers with North American education return to their institutions to practice in diverse sociocultural contexts. What impact does this have on the design of learning for social action around the world? What impact will different sociocultural contexts have on the North American culture of ID? These, and other questions, are worth exploring through innovative theoretical and methodological lens. In this pilot, we were quite eclectic, employing, narrative and constructivist grounded theory, but ethnography, autoethnography, case study, phenomenology, discourse analysis, and participatory and emancipatory research approaches are all appropriate, depending on our theoretical framework(s). Our core team is informed by constructivism, post-structuralism, and social interactionism, but cultural and critical theory also provide a way to look at key issues, for example, “cultural imperialism”. With ethics approval, we will be able to examine artifacts of design, such as online courses, texts, course forums, etc., and are able to examine graduate curricula posted online.

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A Preliminary Study and Research Protocol for Investigating Sociocultural Issues in Instructional Design

Figures and Tables

Figure 1. First contact with Dr. AK

From: Katy Campbell
Date: May 2, 2006 8:22:22 PM MDT (CA)
To: AK
Subject: connecting again and a research idea

Hi Abtar, It's been way too long since we've been in touch! Much has happened... I have a research proposition for you.... One of my research partners... is Dr. Rick Schwier from the University of Saskatchewan. He has a good network in Australia and New Zealand....I've attached a few of our most recent papers. We've ended up with an agentic model with 4 components that are reconciled with the notion of moral coherence. I've been very interested in post-structuralism so we've been looking at non-unitary subjectivities and positionality.... In any event, we want to take a different angle now on this. Rick has been very interested in communities of practice and I have been interested in gender issues for a long time, as you know. For me this has broadened into the idea of culture and inclusive instructional design. For quite a while I've wondered whether instructional design is a cultural construct. For example, I love going to ICCE because the papers of ID seem to me to reflect a cultural perspective on the field. The Americans have a PARTICULAR history and view of theory and practice. This is reflected in their graduate education programs. I think the same is true of Canada, we share some of the same history but have a different sociocultural context in which to practice which, in turn, shapes OUR theory and practice. I have observed some of the same thing in colleagues from the UK, and from the Netherlands. Canada and Australia seem to be very similar (for example, lots of research on dominant culture issues, designing for indigenous learners...)....Rick and I would like to explore this in a 3-year study that we would propose in October to our major funding agency (\$250k, Cdn, available). We want to assemble an international, collaborative research team. Would you be interested in being a co-investigator on this? We're thinking an EU (or several) partners, one or two from Australia/NZ, Canada, the US, you in Malaysia, perhaps Singapore, I don't know anyone in Africa but that would be great, Mexico....

Figure 2. AK's first response to invitation

My Dearest Katy, I'm so happy to hear from you....It's wonderful to know all is well and Congratulations, Prof!. The proposal is timely and if things turn out well and (we) get to meet we must give Rick a beautiful treat on our recent promotions....Katy, I like all those intellectual words, very jazzy yet concerns humans. I'd love to be involved in the proposed research. Thanks. As you and Rick are probably aware, my forte is still ID but I have not done a whole lot of good research work in this area. It is timely. Further to that, I have been giving workshops in ID and will be conducting three very soon, one for MOE, Malaysia and two more for teams of academics who will be here from Saudi Arabia... I was in Montreal last Summer and met up with Hedberg and Ron. We wrote the Blended Learning chapters for Curt and Graham's book on Blended Learning....I have contacts in South Africa and one particular ID is very enthusiastic in this area having done lots of practical ID on the ground. Please keep me posted and I look forward to further input from you.

I just came back from Palembang, Indonesia and I attach the most recent photographs.

Figure 3. Widening the net

Hi Katy, Let me contact a couple of my colleagues at ITESM. There has been a shift in some of the personnel in ITESM in the last couple of years, so I'm not as in touch with their instructional design group as I once was. In the last two years, I've been working with people in Croatia, which has been quite interesting. There is no such position as an Instructional Designer in that part of Europe! UBC helped the Croatian post-secondary system to develop professional development certificates covering planning and management, tutoring and course design, so I'm hoping that in a few years, there will be more people who see themselves in a design position within some of the Croatian universities. Have you talked to anyone in the Open University of Catalonia? They have quite a big group of instructional designers and I might be able to find you some names there, too.

Figure 4. What's happening?

From: Dr. Sem@African University
Subject: Re: invitation to participate in a research project
Date: February 13, 2007 11:06:29 PM MST (CA)

Good morning colleagues, May I take this opportunity to greet you in the new. African University is still keen to participate in the international research project suggested last year, in the area of culture of instructional designing in various countries. Is there any new developments that I can share with my seniors?

Figure 5. Posting from *ITForum*

From: ben@BENERLANDSON.COM
Subject: Culture(s), Learning, and Communities of Practice
Date: February 14, 2007 11:30:57 AM MST (CA)
To: ITFORUM@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU

In my opinion, one of the most interesting questions raised by this week's paper is this: "How do we come to understand what a more dynamic approach to instructional design might look like?" To best account for complexities of learners' cultural predispositions, learners' individual uniqueness, and learners' ability to change, I think a sound approach would be to consider students and instructional designers (along with teachers, and other participant roles of the educational process) as part of a large community of practice that consists of members somehow participating in the practice of learning. Within this community, instructional designers can serve as a type of "boundary agent" or broker that facilitates the process of learning through informed design. This process of design is informed by an ethnological approach to enhance the three modes of belonging within this community: engagement, alignment, and imagination. Wenger (2000) provides some questions that can serve as a framework for enhancing these three modes, based on three "boundary dimensions": coordination, transparency, and negotiation. In terms of the original "dynamic approach" question posed in the Rogers paper, transparency and negotiation seem to be the most pertinent. Taken from Table 2 in Wenger's article, the boundary dimension questions are as follows, with my additions in parentheses:

Engagement and Transparency: Do people provide explanations, coaching, and demonstrations in the context of joint activities to open windows on to each other's practices (cultures)?

Imagination and Transparency: What stories, documents, and models are available to build a picture of another practice (culture)? What experience will allow people to walk in the other's shoes? Do they listen deeply enough?

Imagination and Negotiation: Can both sides (cultures) see themselves as members of an overarching community in which they have common interests and needs?

Alignment and Transparency: Are intentions, commitments, norms, and traditions made clear enough to reveal common ground and differences in perspectives and expectations?

In this way, the cultures of all participants can be seen as additional communities to which these participants belong, in turn making each of the participants "multi-members:" as a member of the learning community, as a member of any number of cultural communities, and as a member of a participant communities (i.e., student community vs. teacher community).

Framed solely from the perspective of diversity, each participant can be considered a multi-member based on culture(s) alone. MacDonald and Bernardo (2005) define "diversity" as a dynamic, more specifically as "continually expanding awareness of the dynamics of difference in regard to social power, personal perceptions, and judgments about others." With this definition, let's consider the on-line classroom to be globally oriented across the multiple cultures of the hundreds of thousands (and eventually millions) of learners to which any particular set of instructional material is offered. Each of these cultures could be considered a "marginalized" culture in the eyes of the MacDonald and Bernardo definition of diversity, especially if we frame our progress in instructional design as that of moving "away" or "beyond" a Western perspective of ID for the on-line learning community. It would be essentially impossible to find learners that are strictly members of only one culture (considering race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. here as grounds for separate cultures). As cultural multi-members, student participants of the learning community now have the potential as "boundary brokers" to bring down pre-existing barriers between different cultures access to materials and processes (thanks to a facilitated multiplicity of perspectives within the community – based on the work of newly enlightened instructional designers). This facilitation would manifest as instructional materials that allow the movement of participants (especially students) from peripheral participation towards higher levels of engagement, alignment, and imagination within the global on-line learning community. The "enlightenment" of the instructional designers responsible for the creation of these materials would transpire in the process of asking and seeking answers to the boundary dimension questions posed above.

References:

MacDonald, P. P. & Bernardo, M. C. (2005). Reconceptualizing diversity in higher education.

Figure 6. Requesting a formal invitation

From: zo@yahoo.com
Subject: Re: Invitation to a research project
Date: June 16, 2008 3:09:21 AM MDT (CA)

Dear Dr. Campbell,
I am really appreciated when I have received your e-mail. Dr. R. already mentioned that he gave my e-mail address to Dr. AK for research project. It would be a great opportunity for me to attend this workshop in Singapore on October. In fact, this trip would be my first international trip to abroad. I am definitely interested in be a part of this workshop on instructional design practice. I am afraid, I could not understand what the content of this workshop will be and what you specifically want me to present at this workshop. If you please clarify these points, I would be appreciating that. I need to figure out what the travel expenses to Singapore from Turkey would be. Glad to know what you will be covering accommodation, meals and etc. which might really help.

Second email on June 17, 2008

Thanks for your quick reply. Let me clarify you what my concern is: I have already passed English Proficiency Exams that are required in my university. Although, I have written my dissertation in Turkish, I am capable of writing in English. However, my only concern is that my practice in English is not as good as my writing. Do you think that might it be a problem in the meeting?

As I understand from your e-mail this meeting needs a spontaneous discussion and conversation with the other participants. However, I can do my best. What do you think? I hope that I can be a part of this project since I am a hardworking person. And, I hope this situation can not be a challenge for the theme of meeting.

I talked to my department chair who is also my academic advisor about your invitation. He became very happy for me. However, he said that since this is not a conference, my university probably may not support the traveling expenses to Singapore. I am still investigating possible alternatives to find some funding for travel. Otherwise this travel may effect my economic situation.

In addition, if this challenge is not a problem for you, you may send me an invitation letter. I will try do my best to attend the meeting. I am sure that this would be a good experience for me. Thanks for your understanding.

Figure 7. The elgg set-up

From: mh@ualberta.ca
Subject: RE: re ID Culture
Date: June 25, 2008 12:47:16 PM MDT (CA)

Slight change of plans Katy. I suggest we rename the site Extension Connections – a generic site for faculty of extension research partnerships; within this Connections space I will create a sub-community for ID Culture – which will be your area, private (access restricted to those you choose ton allow in), to work with your research group.

Figure 8. Final details

From: katy.campbell@ualberta.ca
Subject: agenda for ID Symposium in Singapore
Date: October 21, 2008 9:42:14 PM MDT (CA)

Hello everyone,

I hope you are all as excited about our two days together as we are! Your "team" has been busy organizing accommodations, and thinking about the activities for the two days. WE wanted to provide a nice combination of exploration, creation, reflection and, most importantly, socializing! Thanks to SR, without whose commitment this would not have been possible, we have a wonderful venue, enough food to feed an army, and an honorarium for each participant...We have planned several activities, a few of which we ask you to prepare ahead of time. One of our goals, as we described in the summary we sent you early in this process, is to determine if there are diverse and multiple "cultural ways of knowing" that we use as designers. We hope that we can explore this by sharing personal examples and stories of our educational backgrounds, beliefs about teaching and learning, career paths, decision-making processes, institutional contexts, professional and scholarly influences, approaches to projects, etc.

Rick Schwier has developed a "case" that we ask you to think about. How would YOU approach this design problem? I have attached it here and it will also be posted on our web site. I'll confess here that I haven't been to the site very much but I promise I will be better :=) We're also asking that you bring with you a paper you've written, or a course that you've designed, or a student assignment, or a paper that someone else has written, or anything else that really reflects how you think about our field. For example, Rick and I will bring a presentation of the 'agentic model on design' that we developed over a 4-year research study of Western Canadian instructional designers in higher education. We will also post a paper from that study. Heather has joined us now in looking at different aspects of that model. It will also be fine if you would rather "just listen" and share something significant to you later in the project.

The attached agenda is an outline of what we have planned and it indicates where we want you to spend a little time in advance. But, again, if you don't have 'just the right thing' in your files right now there will be plenty of time, we hope, to share later. In that case, come with a good question or two.

We are passionate about instructional design, and instructional designers, and qualitative approaches to exploring the field. An important outcome for us will be to meet colleagues who share our commitment to this field, and to make new friends. Please email us if you have ideas of questions and look in the elgg site regularly now for new or additional details.