

## Book Review:

**Andrea Edmondson, ed. *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*.  
Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing, 2007.**

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E-learning has evolved rapidly from being thought of as an electronic delivery system for correspondence courses to a significant sub-strata within education theory and practice. Because of the borderless nature of e-learning, instructors and designers have a unprecedented opportunity to interact with learner from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This reality fronts the issues of cross-cultural communication related to education. *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*, edited by Andrea Edmondson, provides not only the best resource on this issue in a single-volume to date, but also one of the better contributions related to cross-cultural education in general. Edmondson has assembled materials from various theoretical perspectives creating a rich discussion of relevant issues related to globalized e-learning.

The first section provides an excellent overview of the various theories of cross-cultural studies of education. Most interesting in this section are the culture specific perspectives: Kinuthia on Africa and Palaigou on Greece.

Section two seeks to address the question of whether the Western educational paradigms used in most e-learning can be used in non-Western settings. Catterick urges caution citing previous research and his own experiences in China. Catterick provides a helpful analysis of three different potential responses to cultural differences: the non-accommodation response, the intervention response, and the modification response. An important thought that Catterick brings to the discussion is that adaptation is built in to every cross-cultural learning experience; either the learners or the instructor is called upon to adapt to the culture of the other. The only question that remains is whether Westerners, with their stated belief in learner-centered, will accommodate the educational preferences of learners in cross-cultural e-learning contexts.

McCarty offers an excellent case study in Japan where such methodologies were well-received. McCarty's example raises the question as to whether his success in the Japanese context was an anomaly or a sign of things to come. The Japanese students' acceptance of constructivist methodologies may have been due to previous exposure to significant amounts of Western culture through their studies of teaching English as well as through various international media. The positive response may have resulted from the novelty of the program and may prove less effective over time. To his credit, McCarty notes that this case study alone does not prove that such methodologies are universally applicable or even widely applicable in various Japanese contexts. Henderson suggests that an either-or approach to educational-cultures is inadequate. Instead, she devises a fascinating and complicated model that seeks to blend various epistemologies of the teaching and learning cultures.

Section three focuses on language and semiotics. Lin and Lee emphasize the importance of translating educational materials into the language of the learners as experienced to the OOPS project. They also report the usual complexities involved with a translating large amount of material. Martin Schell offers the important recommendation of removing slang and difficult wording from English language e-learning materials, adopting a more globalized English. Schell's idea is good, but he repeatedly insists that globalized English is a preferable language of delivery over that language of target learners. While Schell concedes that translation into local languages may be important for marketing, it is logistically unreasonable for e-learning providers. Yet, as e-learning markets grow, it is likely that e-learning providers who do localize their materials may tap significant markets that global English may leave untouched.

Watson's case study on a French language e-course offers an excellent example of blending culture into e-learning through semiotics. Cook and Crawford offer a similar perspective offering numerous practical suggestions of culturally appropriate semiotics. Yet, their examples of "non-cultural specific icons" demonstrate the complexity of adapting materials for other cultures. For instance, the 'heart' symbol does not necessarily represent love or even a heart in all cultures. Though it represents 'love' in many Western cultures, it carries a strong sexual connotation in East African cultures. In fact, many of these "non-cultural specific icons" are indeed culture specific. This underscores the difficulty in

recognizing our own culture-bound symbols and ideas.

Section four offers several approaches to adapting e-learning to various cultures. McLoughlin offers a more extensive approach to analyzing and adapting e-learning based on constructive alignment approach. Elberle and Childress employ the Universal Design theory, which gives students control of the method by which they access the information thus allowing instructor/facilitator to monitor with occasional intervention. Dunn and Marinetti offer a more intense examination of our learning materials in light of culture. They advocate the original production of learning materials with the target culture in focus, instead of than simply modifying pre-existing e-learning piece. They argue that simply adapting pre-existing e-learning materials is insufficient because they are based on the source culture's values and cannot be separated from it effectively.

Edmundson also provides an extensive and useful model for adapting materials in cross-cultural settings. Her Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP Model) first analyzes the course content complexity, source culture methodological preferences, and target culture methodological preferences. Edmundson then recommends four levels of adaptation (Marinetti & Dunn 2002) based on the content type/complexity: translation, localization, modularization, and origination. Edmundson recommends that for more complicated materials, e-learning designers should use the more complicated levels of adaptation, modularization or origination. Modularization employs reusable learning objectives (RLOs), while origination uses cultural insiders in the production of original context. Edmundson's CAP Model offers the most comprehensive tool for analysis and adaptation of e-learning materials.

In Chapter 18, Zaltsman details the potential for miscommunication and conflict in a cross-cultural e-learning contexts. Khalsa considers the unique social situation provided by e-learning environments for the perspective of both social theory and learning theory. Ali found a positive reception for an internet-based distance education course in Africa. The most significant barrier addressed was the limited access to technology.

Some interesting difference of opinion arose as to the nature of the internet in various cultural contexts. Greeks tend not to think of the internet as a communication tool, "rely more on humans than machines for interaction" according to Palaiologue. Ali details how Africans tend to see the internet for entertainment and perhaps for communication purposes but not as much for educational applications. Both McCarty and Edmundson report that Japanese and Indian students were open to the idea of using the internet for communication and education purposes.

In quests for adaptation, Henderson, and Dunn & Marinetti argued for the production of original materials to adequately address issues of cross-cultural delivery. Edmundson also advocates originating materials under certain conditions.

*Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges* contributes significantly to this discussion with good material and a variety of perspectives; it is essential reading for anyone working with learners from cultures other than their own.