

Chapter 7

Distance Education and E–Learning across Cultures

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines distance education and e-learning across cultures. It first reviews the standards of distance education from five countries, UNESCO, and industry. Next, it shows how the curriculum in distance education must match the cultural and rhetorical traditions of the target culture. It prepares curriculum writers to understand how to adapt and develop distance education courses to the appropriate rhetoric and cultural expectations of the target audience.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays out a broad framework for developing distance and e-learning across cultures, showing how to internationalize the distance education curricular models for academia and industry. Currently, there is a massive amount of research concerning the development and delivery of distance education with an important area being the global and intercultural context (see, for example, *Globalized E-Learning*, Andrea Edmundson, 2007; *Global perspectives on e-learning*, Alison A. Carr-Chellman, 2005). Likewise, e-learning has become a key mechanism for training in the multinational organization (Fee, 2009). Although some of the research contextualizes e-learning from intercultural perspectives (Edmundson, 2007; Carr-Chellman, 2005), the vast majority ignores the intercultural context, especially when connecting culture to more than superficial

taboos and Do's and Don'ts across culture. For example, Carr-Chellman's 2005 collection does a nice job of contextualizing e-learning across a variety of cultures in Asia and Europe, but the collection minimally connects the curricular and program design of e-learning to these specific cultural contexts. Edmundson's 2007 collection is better at connecting cultural values to curricular design, but these connections do not ground the curriculum holistically in a universal framework, drawing on the multitude of value sets that impact curriculum design.

Further, in rhetoric and professional communication, much has been written about distance education, especially in light of professional communication, including some work about the international elements of distance education (Starke-Meyerring, 2008; St. Amant, 2007a). However, much like many other areas of professional communication, little of this work in rhetoric

and professional communication systematically evaluates e-learning curriculum and programs from an intercultural perspective. For example, much work in rhetoric and professional communication examines the communications developed in collaborative classes across cultures, focusing mostly on issues of student-student and student-teacher interactions across universities in online classes (Starke-Meyerring, 2008). This collection also theorizes globalization from an academic perspective and explores issues of global communication technologies and professional communication. However, this collection does not develop and then operationalize a theory of intercultural rhetoric and professional communication and only minimally grounds the work in distance education. Likewise, the work of St. Amant (2007a) looks at some features of intercultural education but does not focus on some of the deep structural issues related to curriculum development and the value sets. Thus, we do not understand adequately how the intercultural rhetoric is influencing the design and delivery of distance education and e-learning.

Consequently, intercultural professional communication educators and trainers working in distance or e-learning settings have little guidance for developing programs, courses, and training materials. For example, how do instructional designs for technical information across cultures differ according to the etic borders or other key indicators? How are problems of space, personal presence, motivation, and communication mediated by e-learning technologies? How much does the communication technology of e-learning influence learning and classroom management? How does technology transfer relate to curriculum design for implementing new manufacturing procedures across cultures? And how is knowledge managed across different countries and organizations?

Answering these questions fully would require a book-length approach; however, this chapter seeks to sketch a broad evaluative and planning framework for intercultural professional communicators working in distance education.

This chapter presents seven major guidelines for evaluating the effective of distance education and course development. As it presents these seven sections, it simultaneously grounds the design of distance education curriculum using accreditation guidelines from five countries, UNESCO, and prevailing e-learning designs in industry. It also shows how the elements of curricular design vary according to the intercultural etic borders. And it explores a tentative framework for developing intercultural distance education curriculum.

DISTANCE EDUCATION ACCREDITATION MODELS AND INDUSTRY EXAMPLES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING CURRICULUM

In response to the great amount of research and practice in distance education around the world, many countries have developed evaluation or accreditation criteria for distance education programs, which generally represent the best models and practices for each country. Accordingly, this Chapter compares the distance education accreditation models and guidelines in five countries (United States, the UK, Canada, Mexico, and India), from UNESCO's teaching training, and some of the leading industry e-learning models and evaluate these models from intercultural perspective, drawing on the value sets and other intercultural indicators.

For the United States, this Chapter presents the accreditation model from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA; www.chea.org). This is the most widely used and recognized model for evaluating distance education at US universities. For the UK and Canada, this Chapter presents the evaluation criteria for distance education from The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA; www.qaa.ac.uk) and the Canadian Association of Community Education (CACE; <http://cauce-aepuc.ca/>), which are also

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