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## **Chapter III**

# **Designing Quality Online Education to Promote Cross-Cultural Understanding**

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## **Abstract**

*This chapter focuses on four main areas: (1) the relationship between cultural value systems and education, (2) the influence of cultural values on assessment systems, (3) the use of technology to facilitate cross-cultural communication, and (4) online education promoting the development of social capital. It argues that in order to design an effective curriculum that can be applied in a cross-cultural learning environment, both instructors and students need to be aware of diverse cultural value systems and their characteristics. This cross-cultural understanding and the creation of social capital can be developed through effective communication with the assistance of technology.*

## Introduction

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The advent of Web technology has brought learning to a global scale through online education. That students from all over the world attend virtual classes is no longer a newborn phenomenon. Many higher educational institutions hasten to catch up with this new trend, offering degree programs and courses online to meet the needs of many non-traditional students. The growth is not only likely to continue but to accelerate (Salman, 2000). According to the federal government's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), "by 2009-10, online courses are projected to account for 31% of all course enrollments at the postsecondary level" (Eldson & Pittman, 2001, p. 4). However, this trend is not just a fashion: "As we move further into a society dominated by technology and communication, both educators and students will increasingly use e-learning to minimize the costs of educational products and services" (Partow & Slusky, 2001, p. 70). Due to the dynamic nature of distance learning (anywhere, anytime), "Web-based electronic delivery is fast becoming the dominant mode of instruction" (Edelson & Pittman, 2001, p. 3). At the same time, institutions and faculty members are facing new challenges to maintain and improve the instructional quality in this international online classroom. In order to design an effective and cultural-inclusive (Kenneth & Zeichner, 1992) curriculum that can be applied in a cross-cultural learning environment, instructors need to be aware of diverse cultural value systems and of their characteristics. "It is not possible, in the view of some scholars, to create a model of the good teacher without taking issues of culture and context into account (Cole & Griffin, 1987; Delpit, 1988). We need to understand the value differences regarding educational systems to create a learning environment in which "all students felt valued and capable of academic success" (Cummins, 1986; Olsen & Mullen, 1990).

This chapter promotes cross-cultural understanding in an online learning environment. Through online learning communities, both instructors and students from different cultural backgrounds can reduce cultural misunderstanding and build mutual respect and trust to improve the quality of education. Cross-cultural online education provides students with a global context in which students can improve their cultural awareness and gain social competency to accommodate the changes in the global community. Web technology can be used effectively to expand the learning community, to facilitate interaction and engagement in community activities, and to promote mutual understanding and trust. One of the most important issues raised in this chapter is that cross-cultural online education is a great venue to develop social capital on a worldwide scale. In a cross-cultural learning community, students from different cultural backgrounds share values, information, and knowledge with each other. Meanwhile, they also build up a strong social networking, which furthers the exploration and utilization of social resources in benefiting mankind in the most efficient way.

This chapter provides a comparison of value differences between Eastern cultures and Western cultures. The terms "Asians", "Eastern cultures", and "Easterners" are used alternatively to indicate East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Korea, and the countries close to China and influenced by Chinese culture. "Westerners" and "Western cultures" are used to indicate North Americans influenced by European value systems.

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