



Chapter XIV

Universal Design for Culturally-Diverse Online Learning

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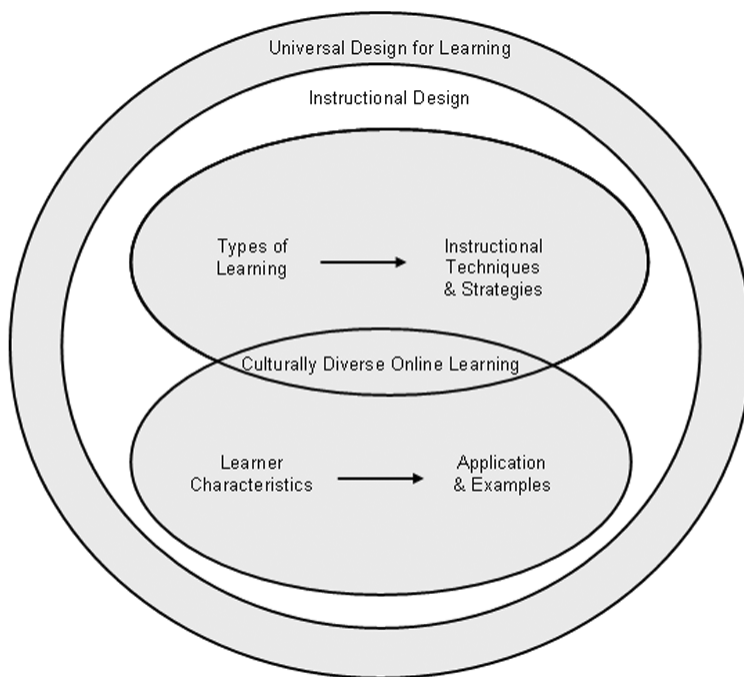
Abstract

This chapter outlines a framework for designing online learning using the principles of universal design. The authors define and give practical examples of instructional design models and universal design for learning as adapted for culturally-diverse populations and global learning. Online learning in a global society presents a variety of teaching issues that must be addressed if learning is to be universal, consistent, and culturally-sensitive. Adapting principles that the Center for Assistive Special Technology has developed for learners with special needs and combining those with practical instructional design techniques and instructional strategies can ensure that diverse learners will have equal access to the learning that will take place in their online courses.

Introduction

Information technology has created new opportunities and challenges for both corporations and educational institutions. Businesses must compete in a global market. They can now enter foreign markets virtually overnight and deploy operations and resources

Figure 1. Universal design for online learning framework



across the globe to support these new markets. A tremendous amount of information must be disseminated among employees, including sales and inventory figures, and customer service as well as other employee training. Indeed, corporations have found that with online training they can reduce training costs and keep staff knowledge and skills current at a worldwide level. This global employee-centered training must be both multicultural and multilingual.

Educational institutions such as colleges and universities have also adopted online learning in order to reach a broader/larger segment of the worldwide population and to better meet the needs of today's non-traditional and more mobile students. "Reaching the goal of global training requires solid knowledge of the differences among learners throughout the world—and careful design for these differences" (Horton, 2000, p. 439). While addressing cultural differences in a face-to-face class presents a variety of concerns, distance learning provides similar concerns as well as others. Similarly, whether global business markets or global educational markets, the challenge is the same: equity to learning access.

This chapter will focus on the use of universal design for learning (UDL) as a means to address cultural diversity and access to online learning. Figure 1 provides an advance organizer for the arrangement of this chapter's contents, showing the hierarchical relationship among UDL, instructional design, instructional techniques, and teaching strategies. It is hoped that this universal design for online learning framework will guide

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