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Learning design in a global classroom

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Abstract

Learning design in a global classroom offers an approach to adult and higher education that is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of how God has created people to learn—one that is informed by the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place. This article introduces an approach to learning design which integrates educational theory and pedagogical strategies informed by relevant theological reflection, and explains how this curricular approach can facilitate more inclusive and transformative learning environments, particularly within intercultural contexts.

Keywords

curriculum design, intercultural pedagogy, transformative learning

The growing cultural diversity within today's global classrooms has invited increasing attention within contemporary educational theory and practice. Globalization in its many manifestations, along with immigration, technological connectivity, and religious pluralism, comprises just a few of the factors that have contributed to the growing heterogeneity in our present learning environments. In addition to these macro-level influences, the settings in which educational programs and courses take place—including the space, the time, and the social, cultural, historical, and even political contexts—all serve to shape the motivations, needs, and epistemological orientations of the learners. How do educators ensure these dynamics are taken into account within the design of learning curricula? Further, how can educators cultivate a transformative learning environment—especially within the pluralistic nature of today's educational contexts?

A holistic approach to learning, one that is informed by the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place, reflects the multi-faceted nature of how God has created people to learn. Such an approach acknowledges the rich diversity

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of contextual factors inherent in the "vast array" of God's creation (see Gen 2:1), and honors the uniqueness of each individual learner, respecting the God-given dignity and value of persons as created in the *imago Dei*.

This article introduces an approach to learning design which integrates educational theory and pedagogical strategies informed by relevant theological reflection. It explains how this curricular approach can facilitate more inclusive and transformative learning environments, particularly within intercultural contexts. The first section describes a faith-based relational view of education reflecting a view of personhood that echoes the *imago Dei*. Next, context and dialogue are examined as key elements in culturally responsive curricular strategy and pedagogical practice. The final section proposes a flexible yet structured approach to learning design, informed by context, expressed through dialogue, and undergirded by a relational orientation. Further, it explains how this approach can apply to intercultural classrooms by ensuring relevance, fostering inclusion, and promoting learning that is potentially transformative. This model will be of particular significance for Christian educators who are committed to employing a holistic vision for educational design and practice.

In the beginning: A relational view of education

The educational process itself could be envisioned as a lifelong process of discovery, understanding, and appreciation of the created world and the Creator, as undertaken by the pinnacle of God's creation, human beings (see Gen 1:27; Ps 8:1). Being created in the image of God implies that those qualities or attributes of the Creator are also reflected, albeit in a more finite sense, in his creation. Each woman and man is imbued with inherent dignity, singular worth, divine purpose, and infinite value—regardless of ethnic origin, nationality, gender, religion, political persuasion, or socioeconomic background. As his created beings, human beings have the capacity to know and be known by God (Ps 139). And because we are known by God, we too are capable of knowing (Palmer, 1983: 11).

A Scriptural understanding of knowing is personal, and implies relationship. Meek's (2011) emphasis on covenant epistemology offers a helpful corrective to our "epistemic default" in the West—a reductionist perspective of knowledge primarily understood as a static accumulation of facts (see pp. 3–30 for Meek's analysis of how this came to be). Rather, a more holistic understanding of knowing affirms knowing as a relational pursuit—one with the potential for transformation as we are known by and come to know one another. Like Meek, Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's philosophical treatise on dialogue and personhood, *I and Thou* (1923), reflects the mutuality and interdependence that can only be captured through relationship with another. As he puts it, "All real living is meeting." Every encounter is sacred—reflecting the image-bearing nature of each individual.

The existence of a loving personal immanent Creator necessitates the existence of relationship. As the original relational being, God created human beings to relate to one another. And as relational beings, human beings are charged with

both responsibility and privilege toward one another and toward the creation (see Gen 1:27–28). Scripture repeatedly speaks of the value of relationship—from "iron sharpening iron" in the book of Proverbs (Prov 27:17) to the emphasis on "one another" in the New Testament and the importance of the church as the body of Christ, whose members relate to one another. Moreover, these relationships do not take place in isolation but are interdependent. Scripture affirms the value of individual persons having dignity and worth as created in the image of God, but not so that there is a distorted individualism as we see in much of society and the church today. There is a dual emphasis on both person and community—it is a self that is always inhabited or indwelled by others (Volf, 1998: 3). Indeed, the second great commandment is to love our neighbor, and we learn to love, not just by word, but also by actions and truth (1 John 1:18).

Palmer reminds us that the structure of the universe is that of "an organic, interrelated, mutually responsive community of being" (Palmer, 1983: 53), and it is for this reason that relationships are so key to the process of learning and knowing. Palmer explains that the expansion of our knowledge is in direct proportion to our capacity for relationship. He continues, "The deepest calling in our quest for knowledge is not to observe and analyze and alter things. Instead, it is personal participation in the organic community of human and nonhuman being, participation in the network of caring and accountability called truth" (Palmer, 1983: 53).

Palmer's often quoted assertion that "to teach is to create a space where the community of truth is practiced" (Palmer, 1983: 69) invites further reflection on the means of creating a space—or learning design—and the role of the learning community. And indeed, these two themes are essential to a relational understanding of education.

A focus on relationships necessarily leads to a holistic understanding of learning. God created human beings as whole persons; learning engages our whole bodies and not only our minds. So much more than merely knowledge transmission, learning is an embodied experience undertaken by persons. As Jarvis and Parker (2005) puts it, "Education is fundamentally about individuals who learn, grow, and develop, and not about merely transmitting knowledge" (Jarvis and Parker, 2005: 14). Or, in Meek's words, "All truth is bodily lived" (Meek, 2011: 413). Thus, for learning to truly be "educative," and even transformative, it is best practiced within the context of relationship.

Elsewhere, I have contended that transformative learning has both personal and societal implications (McEwen, 2012) and that Christian education itself can be transformative. Christian educators can cultivate transformative thinking and acting by nurturing a supportive environment for learners, "where thought-provoking questions are encouraged within the context of dialogical inquiry" (McEwen, 2012: 353–354). Though it is beyond the scope of this article to develop a more nuanced and substantive explication of transformative learning, suffice it to say that diversity can serve as both a catalyst and resource for transformative education. A purposeful orientation toward the potentiality of transformative

learning from a faith-based perspective might be considered ''teleological teaching''—in other words, there is a higher objective or vision for change beyond simply content-mastery—one that points towards and affirms the Divine author of creativity.

Context matters

Increasingly, educational theorists are paying heed to the significance of the sociocultural context in the learning process. Not only is learning so much more than a ''jug to mug'' filling of content (see Willard (1999), alluding to Freire's (1970) iconic ''banking model''), students come to the educational environment already embedded in a social-cultural-historical narrative. Jarvis explains, ''The process of learning is located at the interface of people's biography and the sociocultural milieu in which they live, for it is at this intersection that experiences occur'' (Jarvis, 2012: 17). Moreover, it follows that people learn most effectively if the context and content of what they learn is meaningful to them. Indeed, learning is always inextricably linked to the sociocultural environment in which it takes place: ''the human person and human learning must always be understood in relationship to the wider society'' (Jarvis and Parker, 2005: 1). Place, space, time, vision, outcomes, people, method, and content—together these elements contribute to the entire context of learning.

Geert Hofstede's (1986) classic work on culture extends to differences in teaching and learning—especially as these impact the perceptions of social positions of teachers and students in any given society, differences in relevance of curriculum, differences in modes of cognition (e.g. linear vs holistic), role expectations for interaction between teacher and students and students with each other. And while he generally attributes these to his four classic dimensions of cultural difference (individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity), nevertheless, it becomes apparent that context really does matter in our understanding and practice of teaching and learning. Adult educators affirm that prior experience impacts learning, acting both as a resource and as a gatekeeper to new learning (see Knowles et al., 2015: 175–178).

The way in which people acquire and understand knowledge, their epistemological orientation, is also impacted by culture. A collective way of viewing one's stance in the world differs sharply from the western individualism upon which much of our educational system is based. As exemplified by the African concept of Ubuntu, this worldview affirms the interdependence of a person's identity: ''I am because we are.'' Interestingly, such a perspective bears remarkable similarity to the theological framework described in the previous section. In contrast, Descartes' oft-quoted adage, ''I think, therefore I am,'' is fundamental to western-based models of education that have traditionally focused on individual cognition where ''the mind has been privileged as the site of learning and knowing'' (Merriam and Kim, 2008: 76). And yet, learning that is embedded in one's everyday experience impacts *not only* the intellect, but also emotions, spirit, and our

bodies—our whole selves (Merriam and Kim, 2008: 77). This understanding is most prevalent within global ways of understanding education, though a relatively recent realization in western education. Moreover, in many cultures, learning is both holistic and communal.

In fact, it is through culture that our knowledge finds its expression, Tisdell asserts, and thus "learning will be better anchored if teaching is approached in a way that is culturally relevant to learners' lives" (Tisdell, 2003: x). Gay (2010: 8), too, affirms that "culture counts" and "is at the heart of all we do in the name of education"—whether implicitly or explicitly acknowledged. Further, she declares that "Teaching is a contextual, situational, and personal process; a complex and never-ending journey" (Gay, 2010: 22). Indeed, one size does not fit all, and thus students need opportunity to apply content in a way that is meaningful to their particular life contexts.

An increasingly recognized concept in contemporary education literature, culturally responsive pedagogy integrates "prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students" to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Gay, 2010: 22, 106). Though this emphasis highlights the importance of designing an inclusive curriculum which welcomes and affirms all learners, much of this scholarship has been directed toward multicultural education within K-12 contexts. Further, "culturally-responsive teaching" refers to particular pedagogical strategies that work best with ethnically diverse students in order to promote improved school achievement (Gay, 2010). Nevertheless, there is much to be gleaned from these strategies which can apply to students in all life contexts—including adult and higher education.

Moreover, when teachers respect the diversity of social and cultural contexts that shape our students' motivations, passions, learning styles, and interests, they honor learners as whole persons, each representing a distinct cultural narrative—a story to share, each with insights to contribute to the community. Taking the time to tap into our learners' generative themes, as Paulo Freire (1970) expounds, not only provides clues to effective pedagogical strategies and content that connects with learners' interests and epistemological orientations, it is also a way of honoring the *imago Dei* that is represented in both individuals and the multicultural learning community.

A Christian understanding of humanity serves to inform both pedagogy and curricular models within education (Spears and Loomis, 2009: 68). As human beings are created "hardwired" for relationship as God's image-bearers in accordance with a Christian anthropological perspective (Estep, 2010: 11–28—see also Gushee, 2005: 80–82), it follows then that this is how people learn best. Transformative change in people's lives often requires the encouragement of supportive relationships; isolation and opposition can mitigate against positive change. As well, contemporary adult education scholarship (for example, Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Knowles et al., 2015; Vella, 2008) points to the increased effectiveness when people learn in the context of small groups, engaged in meaningful dialogue together.

Dialogue through difference

Dialogue creates an opportunity to learn from others who may have differing views from our own. Drawing upon Bohm's work, Senge explains that the purpose in dialogue is to go beyond any one individual's understanding, and gain insight that could not be achieved alone (Senge, 2006: 224–225). Learning together in a global classroom, in the midst of diversity, takes courage to move beyond that which is familiar—to learn "through and from differences" (Groen and Kawalilak, 2014: 216). Yet, engaging the uniqueness that is represented in each individual both honors the *imago Dei* and affirms the value of a relational orientation to learning.

Dialogue invites us to consider a topic in a new way, from an alternate point of view. It is in dialogue that our assumptions are exposed through the use of questions and critical reflection. Isaacs calls dialogue a shared inquiry—a conversation in which people think and reflect together in relationship—and by doing this, we can open ourselves to new options and the thinking underlying our assumptions (Isaacs, 1999: 9, 19, 44). Through the questioning of assumptions, this collaborative process of analysis through purposeful conversation "provides the kind of engagement that enables profound change and learning ... to take place" (Isaacs, 1999: 384). As Tisdell (2003: 215) explains, "significant learning is often not solitary. Furthermore, activities that facilitate social transformation are almost never solitary."

In a discussion on "conditions for transformation," Charaniya affirms the strengths of including the cultural and spiritual aspects of a learner's identity in the learning process and "interacting with co-learners from a holistic perspective" (Charaniya, 2012: 236). Conversely, she cautions that if the cultural dimension is suppressed in a learning environment, whether through "ignorance, resistance, or simply fear of the unknown" (Charaniya, 2012: 237), then the results will limit and stifle transformation.

In collaboration with others, the skills of critical reflection and the negotiation of new meanings through dialogue are central to the process of transformative learning. When "others" represent experiences, backgrounds, and cultures which differ from our own, then the dialogical process itself may provide opportunities for the construction of new perspectives, meanings, and understandings of us and our world. Taylor and Mezirow (2009: 9) explains that "dialogue is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed ... the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed."

Moreover, dialogue always takes place in a sociocultural context with individuals who bring unique perspectives, values, behaviors, and assumptions to the learning process. In our increasingly globalized world, and as we teach within increasingly pluralistic classrooms, effective intercultural dialogue is essential for productive and potentially transformative relationships. And within a classroom environment, Cranton (2006: 5, 112) reminds us that our capacity to foster transformative learning "depends to a large extent on establishing meaningful, genuine

relationships with students.'' In other words, dialogue is most effective, most generative, when it is nurtured within the context of respectful and trusting relationships—those which include and affirm others, acknowledging the multiplicity of gifts each brings to the learning environment. Thus, a relational orientation to transformative education, particularly within intercultural environments, attends to contextual factors and promotes genuine dialogue within the learning process.

Transformative teaching strives to cultivate a community of learners and a shared learning experience that enables learners to make personal meaning—whether in a learning session, course, or across the curriculum—that can lead to positive change. Moreover, when grounded in a Christian world and life view perspective, transformative teaching honors the *imago Dei* by engaging the web of relationships both present in the classroom as well as those that inform the larger context of learning. This network of relationships refers to both explicit relationships with other persons and the implicit relationships which constitute the social-cultural-historical narratives of the life of each learner.

Yet for this to occur, educators must develop appropriate open questions that facilitate reflection and critical thinking through dialogue in their research, design, facilitation, and evaluation throughout the learning process. In order to foster authentic dialogue, educators must have a deep understanding of the complexities of each learning and teaching situation, including sociocultural factors. It is through an in-depth discovery process that educators purposefully engage their learners so that they feel safe and respected enough to meet the challenge of learning.

Learning by design

Inspired by the work of Jane Vella, the following learning-centered approach to design fosters greater accountability for teachers *and* learners. As Vella (2008: 11) explains, ''Structure means safety for the learner as well as accountability for the teacher. Without a structured design, you can have brilliant teaching but little learning.'' Structure ensures that each element of the design informs the learning process. Oftentimes, educators, and especially those in higher education, will spend the majority of preparatory time organizing the content. Yet, learning design for the global classroom recognizes that each part of the curricular framework is essential to the entire process of teaching and learning.

The following elements may seem deceptively rudimentary; nevertheless, when educators attend to each of these facets as part of a comprehensive learning framework, they are better able to focus on the learners and the learning. Though not a blueprint, together these elements provide a generative context that promotes dialogue in a holistic framework. This attention to contextual factors and consideration for the uniqueness of each learning situation acknowledges that learners are more than simply receptacles of content, but rather, as persons created in God's image, they have gifts to offer each learning event. Moreover, such intentionality in the learning design can help to cultivate an environment that is conducive to transformative learning, especially within pluralistic contexts.

Differentiating plan from design, Vella (2008: 31) explains that a plan "assumes a control over curriculum and learners that does not exist," whereas design implies "a flexible structure for inviting and enhancing learning." And though each of these eight design elements contributes to an iterative process, rather than a lock-step progression, nevertheless, the description that follows represents a commonly used sequence.

It should be noted that Vella originally developed seven steps (Vella, 2002), but practitioners with Global Learning Partners (www.globallearningpartners.com) have added an eighth step to include the broader vision for change. This approach has been applied in a multitude of contexts around the globe, including higher education, non-formal education, community and international development organizations, leadership training, and both for-profit and non-profit organizations. For our purposes, the focus on design is particularly applicable to the themes of intercultural teaching and learning, as it denotes thoughtful attention to both curricular content and pedagogical strategy.

The initial three questions inquire: Who is the learning for? Why are we doing it? What outcome are we hoping for? Consideration of each of these questions will form the foundation for an integrated learning-centered design.

A description of *the people* includes those who are involved in the event (the learners, instructor(s), and potential stakeholders, such as institutional leaders) and factors about them that are important to consider in the learning design. Educators should consider what their learners already know about the topic, their motivations/perspectives, relationships with one another, and professional, vocational, sociocultural and/or personal background—any input that will impact and inform the curriculum. As previously discussed, in a pluralistic classroom, learners will have differing learning styles and epistemological orientations that may impact how and in what ways they learn new content. Also, the answers to these questions may or may not be readily apparent, and could require additional exploration through researching relevant documentation, interviews, pre-course surveys, consulting with others who are familiar with the learners, etc. And though this front-end investment may seem time-consuming, nevertheless, the effort taken to articulate these details will help to ensure the appropriateness of the learning design. Furthermore, this focus recognizes that, from a Christian perspective, ultimately learning is about people and relationships. Nonetheless, in order to implement such an approach, educators must take the time to explore how and in what ways God has shaped their learners as well as the inherent resources, perspectives, motivations, hopes, and fears that each learner brings to the classroom.

At this point, it is helpful to be mindful not only of the educator's role, but also the person of the educator and how their own attitude, motivation, experience, confidence, and background with the content will inform the learning design. Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter (2002) bring attention to the differing expectations of teachers and students, including perceptions of power and power distance, most especially within intercultural contexts. Knowing oneself as an educator is critical

to effective teaching, as Palmer (2017) asserts in his exploration of ''the inner landscape of a teacher's life.''

The situation explains the circumstances, problem, concern, need, or opportunity that has initiated the course, session, or program. And *the purpose* provides a realistic description of the expected outcome, including the vision for change, or the difference the learning will make in the lives of the learners. Rather than a list of learning outcomes, it is helpful to describe the purpose in a clear and succinct sentence as an overarching goal. For example, instructors might consider the point at which learners will leave the classroom or learning event and name how and in what ways they expect learners will be different or what will have changed. For Christian educators, it is also helpful to bear in mind the broader teleological vision for transformation—one that impacts the whole person.

An examination of *the time* states the number of actual learning hours, with attention to what can realistically be accomplished in the time frame. In some cases, this will be non-negotiable and educators will have little input, and in others, the teacher is able to assess the appropriate timing based upon the amount of content to be taught. *The place* describes the space available, along with its amenities, environment, technology, supplies, etc. It is helpful to consider how the space and tools available (including technology) will impact the learners, and what can be accomplished. In most institutions, these two elements—time and place—are pre-determined, but nevertheless it is helpful to name these explicitly, as these factors may restrict or enhance the learning design.

The content refers to a list of the issues or topics to be addressed, including knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Educators should determine what is of highest priority for the learners in light of the purpose and the time available. And in order to focus on learning, rather than content coverage, it is helpful to realistically assess the appropriate amount of material for the time allotted—ensuring that learners also have adequate time for process. *The objectives* clearly state what learners will do to learn the new content and achieve the stated purpose. In Vella's model (2000, 2008), ''achievement-based objectives'' are written in the future perfect tense, and describe what learners will have done with the content using active verbs (e.g. analyzed, experienced, identified) rather than passive (e.g. understand, know, consider).

The process describes the teaching plan, including all the tasks or directions in the sequence that best ensures the objectives are achieved. Learning tasks should be crafted in a way that is meaningful for the learners, taking into account their background and motivation for learning the topic, but also so that the content is addressed, evidence is demonstrated, or the purpose or vision for the session is achieved. Activities should balance rigor and substance with accessibility to the diversity of interests, needs, and experiential backgrounds of a particular group of learners.

Further, learning tasks provide opportunity for learners to create new knowledge expressed in a variety of meaningful ways. When teaching in intercultural contexts, the use of ''music, visual art, storytelling, dance, writing'' can serve as

indicators of learning that are especially relevant for diverse learners. ''Therefore, learning will be better anchored if teaching is approached in a way that is culturally relevant to the learners' lives'' (Tisdell, 2003: x).

To construct a learning task, Vella (2000, 2008) offers a helpful ''4A'' model. ''Anchor'' grounds the new learning in a task that asks learners to access prior knowledge, attitudes, or experience that connects with the topic before introducing new content. ''Add'' offers new input for learners to see, hear, or experience new content (e.g. information, research, theory, disposition, skill). ''Apply'' invites learners to do something (there and then) with the new content (e.g. practice questions, case study analysis, simulation, group project—often accomplished with others through dialogue). ''Away'' connects the new learning back to the learner's life context and its future use (e.g. commitments, action plan, anticipated research or project). Ginsberg and Wlodkowski affirm that an authentic learning task can provide a useful conclusion to the educational session ''because it promotes transfer of learning, enhances motivation for related work, and clarifies learner competence'' (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2009: 279). Some academic courses may provide opportunity to incorporate the 4A sequence in every lesson, but in other courses this sequence may be distributed over the semester or entire program.

When introducing new content, the inclusion of an ''anchor'' invites the learner to connect the learning with their own life context. This strategy can be especially effective when utilized with learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds as it helps to situate the new learning within an idea, experience, or motivation that is meaningful to each particular learner. An initial ''anchor'' often takes the form of an open question, inviting learners to reflect upon and choose a relevant connection from their own life narrative.

The aforementioned approach to learning design requires educators to consider each learning event from a multiplicity of interrelated perspectives: the people, situation, purpose, time, place, content, objectives, and process. Moreover, this iterative method can provide a helpful scaffolding to then consider effective practices which help to facilitate an inclusive educational environment most conducive to a global classroom.

In this respect, Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) four-fold motivational framework provides a helpful overlay in selecting appropriate teaching methods that respect and affirm cultural diversity and enhance student motivation. This framework advocates instructional practices that: (i) establish inclusion—''an environment in which learners and teachers feel respected and connected to one another;'' (ii) develop attitude—''a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and volition;'' (iii) enhance meaning—''learning experiences that include learners' perspectives and values;'' and (iv) engender competence—''learning something they value and is of authentic value to their community'' (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2009: 34–35). By consciously applying these criteria as a lens by which to select instructional methods, educators can be more attentive to those strategies which are most conducive to cultivating a transformative learning environment within a global classroom.

Moving beyond curricular structure, their holistic approach to learning design invites educators to intentionally cultivate educational practices which honor a relational ethic—affirming the personal aspirations and cultural background of the learners. More than simply a "motivational tool," this purposeful approach pays attention to the richness of each God-ordained individual story, and considers appropriate strategies to weave these stories together to bolster both individual learning and that within the learning community.

Reflecting core principles of adult learning (Knowles et al., 2015; Vella, 2002, 2008), Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2009) reiterate: "When people feel *respected* and *connected* in the learning setting, when people *endorse* or *determine* learning they find *relevant*, and when people *engage* in *challenging* and *authentic* experiences that enhance their *effectiveness* in what they value, people learn" (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2009: 372). Though these principles certainly hold true for adult learners in general, the pluralistic environment of many of today's classrooms and learning contexts compels educators to incorporate these principles into their curricular design. Such investment is not only beneficial for student learning, but when grounded in an overarching commitment to valuing persons as created in God's image, educators, too, have the opportunity for mutual learning as co-participants in the learning community.

From a faith-based perspective, this comprehensive approach to learning design respects the diversity with which human beings have been created, engages this diversity through a dialogical approach, and appreciates the rich potential that we have to learn from others whose views may differ from ours. As Groen and Kawalilak affirm:

> If we have the courage to be open to the unknown and unexpected, we will recognize that we have so much to learn from one another and that our greatest potential for learning is gained from authentically engaging with others who experience and view the world through a lens that is different from our own. (Groen and Kawalilak, 2014: 229)

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Thus, this approach to learning design lends itself to a holistic orientation that affirms a relational understanding of learning. Such an orientation is not only whole-person, but also whole-context, recognizing that learning is a multi-orbed process, and thus requires attention to a multiplicity of factors: the learners (including their background and experience), the learning context or situation, and the ultimate purpose, time, place, objectives, content, and methods or learning activities, including the role of dialogue. Necessarily fluid in its implementation, this approach could complement the current focus on outcomes-based learning that is so prevalent in our educational institutions. A relational perspective affirms that there is intrinsic value in the learning journey itself through the process of dialogue,

open questions, and ''wonderings'' (including formal and informal research) and even through the experience of cognitive dissonance, confusion, and unintended consequences, including perceived failure. And though it may be helpful to collect evidence of learning as a way to foster accountability, nevertheless, a faith-based understanding of learning recognizes that transformative education is not something which can be contained or controlled by a set of outcomes only.

Further, a relational orientation to learning design is congruent with non-western perspectives of learning and knowing—confirmed in Merriam's (2007) collaborative research analysis with global educators. Recognizing that learners' construction of knowledge is inevitably shaped by their contextual background, including their own unique life-experiences, educators can tap into these formative influences by crafting instructional strategies which incorporate the broader socio-cultural context of the learner into the educational process through an intentional process of learning design. Further, Merriam and Kim suggest that educators can ''encourage learners to build their own knowledge, not just by hypothesis or questions, but by observing and contemplating their unique experiences in real life'' (Merriam and Kim, 2008: 78). Thus, incorporating whole-life experiential learning into our pedagogy can be an especially effective instructional strategy for learners from a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

Such an approach is of particular significance for Christian educators who welcome and celebrate diversity as a reflection of God's creative handiwork. An intentional focus on the learning process that fosters dialogue and invites reflection acknowledges the reality of culture and ensures that individual needs and differences are integrated into the educational design, while at the same time recognizing that encountering the other may actually open new opportunities for growth and transformation that would not otherwise take place in a traditional content-focused classroom.

Seeing beyond ourselves and our own perspective requires a valuing of difference and a respect for the other. And indeed, difference can broaden our understanding. An open attitude toward other ways of doing and thinking and being expands our own vision of the world and can transform an educational experience. But such learning is a process; it does not just happen automatically. It requires intentionality in our curricular design, along with time, space, reflection, dialogue, and patience in the process of teaching and learning. Yet, when we teach within a pluralistic classroom where students encounter classmates who may be different from themselves, these intercultural encounters can become a catalyst for transformative learning—both for our students and for ourselves.

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