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Developing an “International Issues in ICT” Course

By Ross A. Perkins, Ph.D.

Given that educational or instructional technology graduate programs are preparing students to work in a highly connected, global society, faculty should seriously consider adding a course to their curriculum that specifically examines ICT integration in educational or training contexts outside of the nation in which the course is offered. Adding a course that examines international perspectives about ICT for teaching and learning would benefit all students no matter their career trajectory, as the issues to be addressed can provide them with critical perspectives within a comparative framework. This article provides a brief overview of a course that I designed for the spring 2011 semester, which was offered as a three-credit hour elective in the Boise State University’s Department of Educational Technology master’s degree program.

Course Goal and Objectives

The primary purpose of the course was to explore the implementation of ICTs in selected educational systems outside of the United States. The central learning goal was for students to confidently discuss the promises and challenges of ICT integration in instructional settings in developed and developing countries, and to apply this knowledge to selected problems.

Some of the objectives of the course included:

1. Discuss issues of cultural hegemony and the digital divide
2. Explore the role that the United Nations, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parastatals, and non-profit organizations play in supporting “ICT4D”

3. Describe various technology tools as they are used in international educational settings
4. Develop and use contextual knowledge to design an instructional product for a selected area of the world
5. Create a culturally neutral resource to be shared via a selected OpenCourseWare consortium
6. Discuss the aspects of diffusion of innovation as they relate to ICT implementation

The class contained units that covered the following areas: 1) Culture, Context, and Instructional Design, 2) ICTs and Development, 3) "Old" Technologies Still in Use (ex., educational radio), 4) Exploration of a Regional Perspective, 5) Open Educational Resources, 6) Diffusion of Innovation, and 7) Mobile Technologies for Learning.

Course Materials

Though many quality texts exist (see "Other Resources," below), I avoided requiring books primarily due to cost. However, I was also confident that electronic versions of selected peer-reviewed articles and chapters would be sufficient to introduce students to any particular topic. Students were given opportunities to view lectures posted on YouTube or other media sites such as SlideShare.net. Students were also asked to read or review material found on websites such as those maintained by UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning, or other organizations with a similar focus on ICT integration and adoption for education.

Course Activities

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in designing the course was to develop authentic activities to engage the students and through which to assess their learning. Though students had to write short expository papers on two occasions, the major assignments focused on the integration of knowledge into small developmental projects. Examples of the projects include the design and development of an educational podcast (similar to an educational radio broadcast), the revision of an existing lesson plan with a particular cultural perspective in mind (students had to explicitly describe what changes they were making for a specific region of the world), and the creation of a context-neutral lesson plan that had to be published on a website that organizes open educational resources.

In addition to projects, students were asked to make regular entries to a publicly accessible weblog, as well as to participate in at least one course discussion per unit. The discussions covered such topics as the difficulty of defining “culture,” addressing the digital divide and ICT use in development, examining international standards for distance education, and the consideration of issues related to diffusion of innovations.

Course activities were designed to help students meet selected standards published by the Association for Educational Communication and Technology. These include: instructional systems design, message design, audiovisual technologies, computer-based technologies, diffusion of innovations, policies and regulations, information management, and problem analysis.

Suggestions for the Future

In future iterations of the course, I would like to contact authors of the selected readings, as well as other scholars working in the field, and ask them to lead guest lectures on a particular regional perspective or about a particular topic (or perhaps interview them for a short podcast). Students who took the course suggested it might be helpful for them to develop and lead short units of their own making, again either presenting regional concerns or insights into selected topics. Using a case-based book (such as some listed below) might be particularly useful for facilitating a course focused on contextual factors that impact instructional design, development, and evaluation. Another possible direction would be to find ways to integrate service learning projects into the course by connecting students with teachers working in international settings who have needs that can be solved at a distance through creative use of ICTs.

Other Resources

The following books might be considered for future iterations of the course, though the cost of some of the texts is prohibitive. The least expensive edition available at the time of this article's writing is listed for each book (excluding any electronic edition that maybe available, but these seem to be very limited in any case). I have previously published reviews of three of texts, and these have been noted. Should anyone wish to contact me for more information about the course or the materials I assembled or created for it, I would be happy to share.

- Dyson, L. E., Hendriks, M., & Grant, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Information technology and indigenous people*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. (Hardcover, US \$89.95)
- Edmundson, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Cases on globalized and culturally appropriate e-learning: Challenges and solutions*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. (Hardcover, US \$180.00)
- Marshall, S. & Kinuthia, W. (Eds.). (2009). *Cases 'n' places: Global cases in educational and performance technology*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. (Paperback, US \$45.99)
- Law, N., Pelgrum, W. J., & Plomp, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Pedagogy and ICT use in schools around the world: Findings from the IEA Sites 2006 study*. Hong Kong: Center for Information Technology in Education, University of Hong Kong and Springer. (Paperback, US \$165.87)
- Perraton, H. (2006). *Open and distance learning in the developing world* (2nd Ed.). London: Routledge. [Reviewed 1st Ed. in *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 8, 3] (Paperback, US \$49.95)
- Unwin, T. (Ed.). (2009). *ICT4D: Information and communication technology for development*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. [Reviewed in *TechTrends*, 54.5] (Paperback, US \$43.25)
- Vrasidas, C., Zembylas, M., and Glass, G. (2009). *ICT for education, development, and social justice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. [Reviewed in *TechTrends*, 54.1] (Paperback, US \$45.99)