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What International Teaching Has Taught Me About Instructional Design

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Instructional Design
Teaching Effectiveness

As instructional designers, we rarely get an opportunity to interact with the learners who actually experience what we develop. We typically rely on learner evaluations, input from teaching faculty, or future enrollment numbers as evidence of positive instructional design interventions. However, there are many reasons why learning events succeed or fail. If a course is well designed, but the instructor is not up to par, can we blame the development of the course? What if the *designer* of a particular course is also the individual who*teaches* it? Taking it a step (or a flight) further, what if the class is taught overseas?

Since 2010, I have visited Kosovo, Croatia, China, and the United Arab Emirates multiple times for the sole mission of teaching executive-style, graduate-level classes. Each course required the instructor to teach in person for roughly two weeks with the balance of the class being taught online. These experiences have made me a better faculty member, but more importantly, they have made me a better instructional designer and leader of instructional design projects.

As Executive Director of Design and Operations at Franklin University's International Institute for Innovative Instruction, I work with a team of talented people to develop learning opportunities for institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, and corporate clients, both domestic and international. As I teach and manage projects that have global impact, I have found the following four concepts to be true of all instructional design projects, regardless of geographic location.

All education is local. Are you familiar with the phrase, "all politics is local"? I have learned that all education is local as well. Regardless of the specific concepts you introduce, you must make the content relevant to your audience. I often use local examples to explain concepts. While in Beijing, I will talk about Amazon, but I will also discuss Alibaba, a very successful Chinese organization that sells many of the same products. In Zagreb, Croatia, I discuss the impact of tourism on the economy of the region's Dalmatian Coast.

All adult learners are learners. Regardless of geographic location, adult learners are learners. They want to know why they are learning something and how application of that content will have an impact on the challenges they face in the workplace. Additionally, adult learners may not have experienced a variety of teaching styles, but I have found that not only are they willing to try different experiences, but they are also delighted to admit that they enjoy those varied opportunities. While teaching in Prishtina, Kosovo, I had to understand how surviving a war as children affected their learning styles as adults. This influenced curriculum decisions as well as delivery models.

Time management is an issue everywhere. Adult learners typically lead full lives, balancing families with careers, which makes the time that they spend in class that much more precious. From an instructional design standpoint, this means that course activities and assessments have to be relevant and engaging. As a faculty member, I need to take into account that students may have worked all day and then fought through traffic in Dubai before coming to class. Culturally, students may be embarrassed to arrive late to class, but I still have to be excited to see them and tell them so (even if, as an instructor, I may be frustrated that I need to repeat key concepts). As a side note, I have also found that international learners are willing to take the strategies they learn in the classroom and implement them in the workplace the very next day—another example of how important time management can be to the learners.

The ADDIE model still holds true. Having been involved in the field of instructional design for more than twenty years, I would never have imagined that the ADDIE model I first encountered at Georgia State University in 1996 could possibly still work. So many concepts either phase out, prove to be incorrect, or evolve into something else that is more relevant. However, the core concepts of ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation) continue to hold true. Regardless of geographic location, I still use this framework to develop and deliver learning interventions. As I become exposed to different models, I often see the remnants of ADDIE embedded.

These international experiences feed my spirit. I get to travel and teach, both of which have been lifelong passions. I experience different cultures in much the same way my students do—becoming in a sense a short-term member of the community. Even more importantly, I get to practice the craft of instructional design to which I owe so much. I am not sure where will my adventures take me next, but I do know that I will always take my instructional design toolbox with me.

About the Author

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Niccole Hyatt leads a team of professionals to develop instructional design and learning interventions for academic institutions, governmental entities, and corporations (domestic and international)