Book Review on Karen L. Milheim's *Cultivating Diverse Online Classrooms through Effective Instructional Design* by Dr Kandi Kamala

The title of this book is very promising. Those designing and facilitating in online classrooms know the importance of cultivating diversity in this space and could benefit from sound advice and evidence-based approaches. This is particularly true in theological and religious classrooms where faculty often grapple with personal and sensitive topics of identity and how we make meaning in the world. Hence, careful attention to cultural dynamics is warranted. Unfortunately, much of the literature in this area relies on potentially reductive characterizations of culture such as categorized personality traits.

These often approach cultural diversity as something that needs to be accommodated in particular groups of people rather than acknowledging the impact of culture across all participants in a learning experience and making room for individual differences. Only a few chapters in this collection buck this trend. Reliance on convenience samples—the researcher's own classes and contexts—is another common shortcoming of research on culture in instructional design. In

this collection, only one third of the articles are research studies and all of these rely on convenience samples. Yet, if new to the topic of considering diversity and culture in instructional design and online learning, a reader will learn common vocabulary in this field, be introduced to commonly used theoretical frameworks, and see a useful range of perspectives on this topic.

The book has fourteen chapters divided into four sections: (1) Culturally Responsive Instructional Design; (2) Supporting Student Culture and Diversity; (3) Global eLearning; and (4) Instructional Design Models, Frameworks, and Research. The first two sections are probably the most useful for faculty and academic support staff in theology and religion. Two chapters are worth highlighting in these sections: "Exploring Social Presence in the Culturally Diverse Classroom" by Debra K. Smith and "Social Presence and Cultural Identity: Exploring Culturally Responsive Instructional Design in the Online Environment" by Bethany Simunich and Amy M. Grincewicz. Both of these articles use social presence to frame their explorations of cultural dynamics and offer helpful cross-referencing of available models and practical course design and facilitation advice.

They remind us to ask the most pertinent question: Is the student perceived as a real person? Theological faculty could also benefit from strategies and ideas to create living learning communities in the article "Bridging the Social, Academic, and Cultural Divide for International Students: Using Peer-to-Peer Support Strategies Online" by Kimberly Palermo-Kielb and Christy Fraenza. As Karen Milheim, the editor, reveals by

gathering such a broad selection of resources, our responsibility to students in creating diverse and inclusive classrooms ranges from how one models value systems in a course to how one carries out some of the most tedious tasks such as translation. Throughout this volume, theological educators will find value in the literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, and classroom strategies that help us understand the slippery construct of culture as it functions in online classrooms.

About the reviewer

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