



Intercultural Dialogue

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz

Director, Center for Intercultural Dialogue

Harron Family Endowed Chair in Communication, Villanova University, PA, USA

What is it?

Intercultural dialogue occurs when members of different cultural groups, who hold conflicting opinions and assumptions, speak to one another in acknowledgment of those differences. Wishing to present his or her own views and have them heard, each participant agrees to listen to the views of the other(s) in exchange. Intercultural dialogue is co-constructed, requiring the cooperation of participants to engage in different ways of interacting. Although by common definition dialogue does not require agreement as a result, participants frequently express hope that agreement in at least some areas may be achieved. At the very least, understanding serves as a reasonable beginning, and is preferable to conflict. Dialogues between those holding the most divergent viewpoints are the most difficult, but also the most critical.

Who uses the concept?

Intercultural dialogue is most frequently promoted by diplomats describing an ideal world, rather than as a statement of current reality. Over the past few decades, the term has increasingly been used as shorthand for cooperation between nations and/or among cultural groups within national borders, especially within Europe since the establishment of the European Union. Typically, those calling for intercultural dialogue assume it will promote tolerance, openness, mutual respect, thus resolving intergroup conflict and increasing peace and harmony.

What work remains?

Despite its significance to diplomats and practitioners, intercultural dialogue rarely has been the technical term of choice for academics, let alone served as the primary object of research, although many investigations on relevant topics have used overlapping vocabulary. In addition to synthesis of those research results, studies are needed to confirm whether intercultural dialogue can in fact bring about the positive results with which has been credited. Certainly knowing which elements are critical, and how these can be taught and learned, would be valuable. The discipline of Communication should, logically, play a central role in answering these questions, for it is through communication that participants engage in dialogue.

Resources

- Council of Europe. (2008). *White paper on intercultural dialogue: "Living together as equals in dignity."* Available from www.coe.int/dialogue
- Ganesh, S., & Holmes, P. (2011). Positioning intercultural dialogue: Theories, pragmatics, and an agenda. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 4(2), 81-86.
- Näss, H.E. (2010). The ambiguities of intercultural dialogue: Critical perspectives on the European Union's new agenda for culture. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 23. Available from <http://immi.se/intercultural>