



Intercultural communication

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What is it?

Intercultural communication describes any interaction between two or more members of different cultural groups (international, interfaith, interethnic, interracial). Cross-cultural is sometimes used as a synonym, though technically that implies comparison of two or more cultures. Any one culture provides its members a particular way of life, including language, behavior, material culture, ideas and beliefs, which they transmit to the next generation. Thus when members of different cultural groups come into contact, they often discover their expectations diverge considerably.

Who uses the concept?

Intercultural communication is studied widely within communication, where research has often emphasized international business or international student contexts. Linguistics, language teaching, and English departments outside the USA often treat intercultural communication as an essential part of learning about a new language and culture. The phrase "language and intercultural communication" predominates in these disciplines. Research initially examined language, nonverbal behavior, and concepts such as culture shock, stereotyping, and prejudice, but has now expanded into broader topics such as identity, migration, health communication, intercultural relationships, tourism, and intercultural uses of new media.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Although intercultural communication occasionally is treated as a synonym for intercultural dialogue, it makes more sense for it to describe all encounters between members of different cultural groups. Intercultural dialogue then describes those times individuals explicitly attempt to address differences in their cultural assumptions. In this way, intercultural communication provides the larger context within which intercultural dialogues occur.

What work remains?

In terms of data collection, the most critical task remaining is to examine more instances of actual intercultural encounters. In terms of theory, only a few indigenous perspectives have yet been considered. Work by researchers in various disciplines needs to be integrated.

Resources

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Martin, J., N. & Nakayama, T. K. (2013). *Experiencing intercultural communication: An introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.