CID Occasional Papers #1

Intercultural Dialogue as the Elephant in the Room: Moving from Assumptions to Research Investigations

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August 2020
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ABSTRACT: The result of a broad review of publications and projects using the term ‘intercultural dialogue,’ this paper summarizes the current state of affairs: who has been using the term and in what ways, as well as who has been studying intercultural dialogue or related topics, and what they have learned. Briefly, politicians and diplomats especially in the European Union have frequently used the term, but since they don’t study the subject, of necessity they have made a lot of assumptions. Academics in the EU or elsewhere occasionally study intercultural dialogue, but most often under a variety of related concepts. The paper concludes with suggestions for what needs to happen for intercultural dialogue to be taken seriously as a research topic.

What Is Intercultural Dialogue?

Intercultural dialogue (ICD) gets used as a technical term but different authors assume it has very different meanings (Isar, 2006, 2011; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014a). Isar (2006) points out six different meanings, Isar (2011) focuses on three, and UNESCO Associated Schools (2013) presents six (different) approaches. Of all these suggestions, just two meanings are the most important to distinguish here. At the general level, ICD refers to an interaction involving participants with different cultural backgrounds (e.g., Busch, 2010). What is studied as intercultural communication in the US, would mostly fit under this definition. At a more specific level, ICD refers to one form of intercultural communication, that which takes as the stated goal explicit dialogue about cultural differences, on the assumption that cultural differences can serve as a resource rather than being a problem (Salo-Lee, 2015). This narrower use seems more appropriate, and thus serves as a more helpful beginning point. Unlike other intercultural interactions, which may be multimodal (that is, including nonverbal and unconscious elements as well as words), in this narrow usage ICD typically requires both language and intent. It seems reasonable to choose this second definition as the appropriate beginning point here. This implies accepting as the immediate goal of intercultural dialogue a deliberate verbal exchange of views designed to achieve understanding of cultural others, with the more advanced steps of achieving agreement and cooperation understood to be potential later goals.²

Peter Praxmarer once said that “intercultural dialogue is the art and science of
understanding the Other,” the best short explanation I know. With his permission, that definition was turned into a poster made available on the Center for Intercultural Dialogue website (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017a).

Given the existing cultural diversity, both within political alliances (e.g., the European Union) but even within most countries, ICD typically has been assumed to have considerable value as a practical tool used to prevent or reduce conflict between cultural groups, by using talk to foster respect and tolerance (Wilson, 2014). Thus, ICD frequently has been announced as the way to build or maintain peace, especially by organizations such as the United Nations (Bello, 2013a; Bloom, 2013a, 2014) or the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2018; see also Bello, 2013b; Saillant, 2017). As Isar explains, “’Intercultural dialogue’… is a notion that tends to be deployed in rather rarefied spheres, in circles somewhat distant from the on the ground realities it is supposed to address” (Isar, 2011, p. 43).

The first question to be answered is how ICD is being defined and discussed, the second is how politicians are using the term, and the third is whether and how academics are yet studying the phenomenon.

ICD stands at the meeting place of social interaction, and intercultural communication. Unlike other forms of social interaction, ICD assumes participants come from different cultural contexts (understood broadly, to include nationality, race and ethnicity, language, and/or religion, among other categories). This implies an expectation of divergent assumptions about, and rules for, interaction among participants, the opposite of what is typically assumed in most studies of interaction.

Cultural diversity permits, and intercultural dialogue requires, understanding of one’s own culture but also recognizing that each culture provides only a single alternative drawn from a range of possibilities. Cultural diversity requires, and intercultural dialogue permits, the ability to communicate to others about one’s own culture, accepting in return information from others about theirs.

2008 was a critical year: the European Parliament designated that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and many events, and
activities were held then, with many publications appearing around that year as well (see Grilló, 2018, for discussion). The Council of Europe proposed this widely cited definition:

Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes. (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 10)

It is not chance that this definition comes from a political body rather than an individual scholar. While the term ICD has been used since the 1980s, and the general idea of interaction between members of different cultural groups a focus far earlier, especially by anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead, and sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, the notion of ICD specifically has been less often the focus of academic study than its potential value would support.

As is the case for any example of dialogue, intercultural dialogue must be understood as being actively co-constructed by participants. One person cannot make a dialogue; by definition at least two people are required. As Silvestri (2010) explains, "intercultural dialogue is about learning to tell a shared story" (p. 48). It seems likely that the act of co-construction is critical to the success of the story, if for no other reason than that co-telling results in all speakers investing something of themselves in the act. Ganesh and Holmes (2011) echo this when they suggest that studying ICD "requires approaches that examine the cultural co-production of knowledge" (p. 85). Social construction theory is thus, at least implicitly, an obvious way to approach and study ICD (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009).

All dialogue assumes difference. Wierzbicka (2006) quite reasonably points out that “there can be no ‘dialogue’ between people with the same, or very similar, views” (p. 690). People who already share assumptions have little need for dialogue (especially in formally organized events). Dialogue thus implies the involvement of members of different groups having conflicting opinions and assumptions, who speak to one another despite acknowledging those differences. In fact, they do so in an explicit attempt to bridge the gap they have recognized.

ICD specifically assumes that participants will have cultural differences rather than other sorts. This means that ICD assumes multiple categories of people, each of whom classifies one or more participants in the exchange as a cultural “Other” (Dervin, 2015; Powell & Menendian, 2016; Praxmarer, 2014). ICD is never an accident — it requires intent, whereas interaction merely requires co-presence (being in the same place at the same time), and with the rise of social media, sometimes not even that. In exchange for the opportunity to present their own views and have them heard, during ICD participants agree to listen to the views of the Other(s). ICD thus requires a very simple quid pro quo: I will listen to you if you listen to me. It involves a reversal of what is termed ‘Othering’
so that it becomes positive; the original negative sense implies stopping the interaction at the point when someone has been recognized as an Other. For those engaging in ICD, recognizing someone as an Other is, instead, the logical beginning point.

The most difficult, yet the most essential, dialogues occur between those holding the most divergent viewpoints. For while it is easiest to talk to those whose ideas largely overlap our own assumptions, easy is not the same as important. Clearly, we gain the most when we listen to, and learn from, those with whom we most often disagree, those sharing the fewest background assumptions with us, and this includes cultural assumptions.

Listening is not the same as agreement, and so an important point is that dialogue (intercultural or otherwise) does not always (in fact, may not often) result in agreement, even when most or even all participants hope to achieve agreement in at least some areas. Instead, understanding serves as a reasonable initial step. It is certainly preferable to conflict for most participants. Thus, dialogue “implies that each party makes a step in the direction of the other” as Wierzbicka (p. 692) gracefully suggests, and this is true also of ICD. Or, as Abriszski (2007) puts it, “Dialogue is a gentle way of filling up the intercultural gap. Conflict is a harder one” (p. 335). Dialogue and conflict, then, stand as the extremes of intercultural interaction.

Intercultural dialogue might be called the elephant in the room, a metaphor referring to something obvious which is nonetheless ignored. Most often, practitioners and diplomats use the term intercultural dialogue, but they rarely define it, and conduct little research in order to discover how it works, but only hold it up as a desired end. Academics, who certainly conduct research, rarely use this term, thus have rarely studied it, although some research by other names sheds light on how it works (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2020a). I’ll return to these various contributions after describing who has been using the concept in what ways to date, concluding with a call for further research into ICD.

Assertions About ICD

Since the establishment of the European Union (EU) in 1993, the term ICD has increasingly been used by politicians and diplomats as shorthand for cooperation, both between nations and among cultural groups within national borders. Olsen (2007) points out that the EU as a political body “struggles to find a balance the whole and the parts, between unity and diversity, coordination and autonomy” (p. 44). As a result of this need to find balance, Swiebel (2008) suggests that “intercultural dialogue between the representatives of the Member States - politicians, diplomats and civil servants, but also experts,
business people, professionals, NGO’s and lobby groups – has been essential” and without it, the EU “would hardly have been thinkable” (p. 103).

More recently, various political bodies, especially in Europe, not only use the term, but devote considerable funding to projects intended to encourage ICD (similar funding has not been made available to research studying how ICD works). The term is heard most often in international gatherings, whether sponsored by the UN, UNESCO, EU, or individual countries (e.g., Azerbaijan’s World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, first held in 2011, most recently in 2019). Fuentes (2016) points out that the term ICD has been used by the Council of Europe since 2003. There have been frequent formal statements about the importance of ICD (e.g., Council of Europe, 2005, 2012, 2013, 2016; European Cultural Parliament, 2007; European Commission, 2008), there was a conference Europe for Intercultural Dialogue in 2006 in Granada, Spain, and, as mentioned earlier, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 (announced in European Union, 2006; evaluated in Ecotec Research & Consulting, 2009), which produced both a “rainbow paper” (Platform for Intercultural Europe, 2008), and a “white paper” (Council of Europe, 2008; see Besley & Peters, 2012; Hardy & Hussain, 2019; Lähdesmäki & Wagener, 2015; among others). The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations 5th Global Forum issued the Vienna Declaration (UNAOC, 2013), highlighting the importance of ICD for international diplomacy.

A systematic review of the ways in which these various practitioners use the term (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015a) suggests ICD is assumed to have these positive characteristics:

- Increases respect for cultural diversity, human rights and freedom
- Develops sense of community in multicultural populations
- Promotes tolerance, pluralism, openness, mutual respect
- Improves ways of living together
- Strengthens social cohesion
- Strengthens democratic governance
- Increases peace and harmony in a multicultural world
- Prevents and/or resolves intergroup conflicts

ICD employs communication as a tool to address social change and social justice on an international stage. Clearly these are worthy goals. Who doesn’t want world peace and the resolution of intractable conflicts? However, it is not at all clear ICD can accomplish all, even most, of these worthy goals. In fact, a skeptic would suggest such resolution is highly unlikely. The problem is that ICD has so rarely served as the focus of academic attention that no one really knows what it can accomplish, or how to best make it work. As a result, it is a concept not only available, but crying out, for further research. Studies are needed to confirm whether ICD can in fact bring about all (or even any) of the positive results politicians so casually assign. If so, knowing which elements are critical, and how these can be taught and learned, certainly would be appropriate. Communication as a discipline should, logically, play a central role in the study of ICD, and in answering these questions, for it is through
communication that participants engage in dialogue, intercultural or otherwise.

Funded ICD Projects in Europe

Largely as a result of the creation of the EU, multiple efforts have been made to bring members of different cultures into contact, even when, in fact especially when, there has traditionally been either little contact, or active conflict. Activities occur at three levels: across national boundaries, across cultural groups within a nation, and between individuals within a local community. These can be considered a continuum of macro to micro approaches. The following section outlines the broad parameters of these efforts as context to discussion of who has studied these and other exemplars.

One European effort involved funding for lifelong learning, across multiple cohorts. (*Comenius* funded students and teachers at the elementary and secondary levels; *Erasmus* funded students and teachers in higher education; *Leonardo da Vinci* funded vocational training; *Grundtvig* funded adult education; and *Jean Monnet* funded other sorts of cooperative efforts, including sharing what has been learned from these other programs.) Between 2007 and 2013, the EU devoted €7 billion to the various parts of the Lifelong Learning Project (LLP), involving over 500,000 individuals, so these were not small programs with little impact (Bracht et al, 2006, analyze the impact of one such program; Chirodea & Toca, 2012, summarize the ways in which LLP promoted ICD). LLP was replaced by the Erasmus+ Program (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en) operating between 2014 and 2020, with another €14.7 billion allotted, taking as the goal moving 4 million people around not just Europe but now the entire world for education-related purposes through an expanded range of programs for ever more categories of people.

A second European project provided funding for various transnational research collaborations. The Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, known as FP7, (http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/understanding/fp7inbrief/what-is_en.html) funded scholars from multiple countries working together for several years. FP7 spent €50 billion between 2007 and 2013. Another €80 billion was allocated between 2014 and 2020 to the revised and expanded program, called Horizon 2020 (http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020), again focusing on collaborative international research.

A third European effort has been to fund specific smaller projects intended to deliberately bring about instances of ICD. It is difficult to obtain details of total funding since these have a wider variety of funding sources and often are based within individual countries, but it is easy to find descriptions of specific activities.

- The Council of Europe keeps a public *Compendium of Cultural Practices and Trends in Europe*. One section documents 58 "Cases of Good Practice." As described on their website, "Most of them are projects undertaken within individual countries to facilitate dialogue among the different cultural groups living there. They are initiated on the national, regional or
local level and range from 'hybrid' artistic productions to training programmes, awards, festivals, public events, media productions etc.” (http://www.cultural-policies.net/web/intercultural-dialogue-database.php).

• The Anna Lindh Foundation, established in 2004 to promote ICD between Europe and Mediterranean countries (including much of the Middle East and North Africa), describes a number of case studies in their annual reports (the last one published is The Anna Lindh Report 2018). The Anna Lindh Foundation is governed by the Union for the Mediterranean, partially funded by the EU, and headquartered in Egypt. It spent over €20 million between 2005 and 2011 (current figures have not been made available, but the few numbers posted suggest totals will be at least comparable). One of their successes has been the establishment of a network of over 4000 civil society organizations promoting ICD (http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/networks).

• In 2014, UNESCO expanded the Year of International Dialogue (2008) to the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022). “The objective of the Decade is to promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity, rights and equal dignity between peoples, through intercultural dialogue and concrete initiatives. Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is about solidarity and mutual understanding. It is about building bridges of respect and dignity” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 6). The goal is to encourage multiple projects around the world. The activities following 2008 were summarized in a report prepared by the Committee on Culture and Education for the European Parliament (2015).

• In 2015, the European Agency for Culture was established by EU members to coordinate ICD activities, “focusing on the integration of migrants and refugees in societies through the arts and culture” (https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework/intercultural-dialogue_en). Their report (European Agency for Culture, 2017) includes 46 case studies. Similarly, the European Commission’s European Website on Integration includes over 400 examples of good practices relating to ICD, cultural activities and diversity (https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration). Wilk-Woś (2010) outlines the EC logic, concluding that “the Commission considers intercultural dialogue as one of the main instruments of peace and conflict prevention” and that “making people aware of the cultural diversity as well as the need for intercultural dialogue are the most important issues” (p. 86).

• The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy, funded the project Migrations | Mediations: Arts and Communication as Resources for Intercultural Dialogue, which “tackles the different uses of media, theatre and performance, art and culture in the management of migratory phenomena and the promotion of intercultural dialogue” (https://www.migrations-mediations.com/info/il-progetto). Their results include the production of videotapes, a bibliography for work on
migrants, media and the arts, as well as a database of ethnic restaurants.

As is obvious by these last examples, international migration has led to a lot of publications about ICD from different perspectives, including minority rights (e.g., Berry, 2018; Ennaji, 2019; Peris & Elhefnawy, 2014; Pinheiro, 2008; Prina et al, 2013; Saunders et al., 2015). As Ratzmann explains, “Intercultural dialogue is framed as an alternative policy response to globalisation-induced challenges of cultural diversity” (2019, p. 5).

Suggestions about the important role of media and the arts in fostering ICD have not yet been picked up often enough, given that the arts can serve as a site from which to study ICD (for exceptions, see Gonçalves & Majhanovich, or Sen, 2015). Banda (2015) specifically argues for the need to accept minority media as “a key plank of intercultural dialogue” (p. 35). The Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) Yearbooks, funded by UNESCO and various partners, each include chapters describing various ways in which social media have been used to construct dialogues across cultural boundaries (Carlsson & Culver, 2013; Culver & Kerr, 2014; Singh et al., 2015, 2016). In most of the studies documented, the goal is to bring people (often students) together despite geographic distance and substantially distinct life experiences. The conclusion is often that meeting in real space is best, because participants immerse themselves in a new culture, but that meeting in virtual space is far better than not meeting at all.

There has been increasing consideration of intangible elements of culture as a tool to bring about ICD. As the Council of Europe, among others, suggests, it is through “becoming involved in cooperative activities with people who have different cultural affiliations” that ICD occurs (2013, p. 30). The specific focus recommended has varied, including: food (He, 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017; Lum & de Ferriere la Vayer, 2016); architecture (Ang et al., 2018); drama (Cinquina, 2016; Sirius Training et al, 2020); art (Gonçalves, 2015a; Gonçalves & Majhanovich, 2016); or community media (Carpentier & Doudaki, 2014). As Higgins-Desbiolles suggests, food permits the creation of “a decolonized space” which allows for “intercultural dialogue and understanding” (p. 156). All the same, much more remains to be done. Ang et al. (2018) describe an immersion program for architecture students from Australia to learn about sustainable design and construction across multiple countries in Asia, combining real world experience with ICD.

Often attention in Europe addresses the link between education and ICD (Platform for Intercultural Europe, 2008; Council of Europe, 2010); frequently the focus is specifically on higher education contexts (Gonçalves, 2011; Horga, 2014; Lähdesmäki et al., 2020; Lundgren et al., 2019; Skrefsrud, 2016; Solbue et al., 2017; Vieira et al., 2017), although it may begin as early as nursery school (Stier & Sandström, 2020; Zay, 2011). As Bergan (2009) points out, “There is hardly a more international institution than the university” (p. 9), and this is true whether the focus is on the international population or disciplinary study of international interactions. Where people from different cultures gather, the assumption should be that at least some of
them will wish to engage in dialogue. One of the reasons for this is that “communication is the active aspect of culture, not only permitting the act of constructing culture, but also of transferring cultural knowledge from one generation to the next” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1989, p. 62; Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017b).

Thus, universities are often taken as obvious places from which to begin explicit discussions of, and training in, ICD. Wächter (2010) outlines two roles for higher education: one direct (to foster ICD on their own campuses) and one indirect (to promote ICD outside the university, typically within the immediate surrounding community). In the first case, everyone on campus is treated “as actors in the social world whose actions have an impact on the world” (Woodin et al., 2011, p. 121). In the second case, universities move beyond encouraging ICD within their walls, including preparing students to take on the role of active organizers and facilitators of ICD after graduation.

Other specific projects with substantial budgets and impact include: the Intercultural Cities Programme, which “supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realise the diversity advantage” (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/culture-heritage/culture/Cities/Default_en.asp), and which provides a collection of examples of good practice (https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/good-practice), and European Capitals of Culture, a program dedicated to two seemingly contradictory goals: to “highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe,” while simultaneously seeking to “celebrate the cultural features Europeans share” (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/european-capitals-of-culture_en.htm). Canada has joined the former effort, with Montreal, as the most obvious example of an intercultural city, hosting a conference on “Building Intercultural Cities: From Practice to Policy and Back Again” in 2014, including participation by many of the EU cities involved in the project (Guidikova, 2018).

Among the most innovative designs among the multiple projects funded in the EU are those making use of existing public facilities as safe spaces (Opffer, 2015a) for promoting ICD. These include museums, libraries, community centers and theatres.
• The Museum of World Culture (Göteborg, Sweden) decided “The museum is a place for dialogue, where multiple voices can be heard, an arena for people to feel at home across borders” (http://www.opera-amsterdam.nl/_projects.php?pro_id=14). They brought immigrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia together with museum staff to design a new exhibit matching personal stories, photos, and videos to existing museum collections.

• The Human Library (Copenhagen, Denmark) was designed as a concrete, transferable, affordable way to promote tolerance and understanding, in response to violence. Visitors speak informally with "people on loan" (http://humanlibrary.org) - this latter group being extremely varied in age, gender, and cultural background, but representing local community groups.

• Caisa International Cultural Centre (Helsinki, Finland) provides a safe space for members of different cultural groups to meet, either within their own group or across groups, or even, with city representatives on issues relating to their welfare.

• Project Llull (Carregal do Sal, Portugal) uses performance to initiate dialogues across cultural and religious boundaries. An international company (including members from Catalonia, Spain, Portugal, and England), Project Llull adapted a 13th century play about interfaith dialogue in order to spark similar conversations today (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2012).

• PLACE (France, Germany, Greece, UK) is designed “to turn the ‘migrant crisis’ into an opportunity for growth by favoring migrant-led innovation” (http://place.network). The process involves: bringing together migrants and locals to discuss their current challenges; setting them up in small groups to create products and services that resolve those challenges; and then actually put the results into practice.

• The Fabric of My Life (FABRIC) is a collaborative project co-funded by the EU from 2018-2022 involving major cultural institutions across Denmark, Greece, and Germany (Nosch, 2019). The aim is “to innovate and test new methods in the cultural sectors concerning migration history, to empower refugee women and to train cultural workers and design students.” To accomplish this aim, “FABRIC focuses on the role of textiles and clothing in the life and memory of older and new refugees, with the intention to highlight and communicate their life stories” (https://artextiles.org/en/content/fabric-my-life).

• An earlier, related project based only at the University of Copenhagen, THREAD (an acronym for Textile Hub for Refugee Empowerment, Employment and Entrepreneurship Advancement in Denmark), began from the assumption “that refugee and immigrant women are a valuable resource rather than a problem group” and “set out to explore whether textile culture and craft could be catalysts for improved refugee integration” (Malcolm-Davies & Nosch, 2018, p. 118). In the process, much ICD ensued between students, curators, and refugees with knowledge of specific traditions to share.
Another innovative approach is to take advantage of safe spaces that may be digital rather than physical locations. Galani et al. (2020), focus on the nexus of cultural heritage, dialogue, and digital practices. Some concrete examples (not only from the EU) follow.

- diverCities: A Global Collaboration Space for Intercultural Dialogue (sponsored by UNESCO) was a digital humanities prototype for using a website to promote ICD within and across major world cities (Ang & Pothen, 2009, discuss why it never moved beyond the experimental stage). At least partially succeeded by DIVERCITIES: Governing Urban Diversity, intended as a tool for “Creating social cohesion, social mobility and economic performance in today’s hyper-diversified cities” (https://www.urbandivercities.eu/about-divercities), and funded by FP7.

- Write 2 Unite (the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Spain), a UNICEF initiative started in 2017, brings together young refugees, migrants and locals, providing blogging and storytelling training, posting the resulting stories for a broader audience to access (https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/write-2-unite).

- NaTakallam pairs displaced Syrians with Arabic learners around the world for language practice over Skype (https://natakallam.com/about/natakallam.com). This complex project ensures that new speakers learn about the language and culture from native speakers while offering an income to displaced Syrians. In the process of language teaching and learning, ICD occurs. Using ICD as a by-product rather than the explicit goal of a project in this way may be the most successful design of all.

- Tuna Forum, in Romania, has organized a wide series of events (panels and discussion series, luncheons, dinner and talk meetings, movie and talk meetings, and essay and book summary contests, courses on intercultural relations and language lessons) as ways to bring together people from different cultural backgrounds (most often Romanians and Turks). Ecirli (2013) studied the results, concluding that the Forum did in fact encourage ICD.

In 2018 UNESCO developed an e-platform of digital resources documenting the various ways ICD is being encouraged around the world, especially outside of the EU, as part of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures mentioned earlier (https://en.unesco.org/intercultural-dialogue). The platform has the advantage of serving as a broad clearinghouse where anyone conducting relevant projects can post their own information so others can easily learn about them. In 2020, the Anna Lindh Foundation established the Intercultural Dialogue Resource Centre (https://www.an-lindhfoundation.org/intercultural-dialogue-hub) with similar goals and facilities, but different resources and a greater emphasis on the Mediterranean region.

ICD as a Research Topic

Despite its significance to diplomats and NGOs, including many concrete projects such as those just described, funded by
various national and supra-national groups mostly based in Europe, ‘intercultural dialogue’ rarely has been used as the technical term of choice by academics, let alone served as the primary object of research. I certainly do not wish to imply that there has not been research into a wide variety of related phenomena — or even ICD by another name. But, as Elsdon-Baker puts it, ICD is an area with "a lacuna of scholarly research relating to policy or practice based approaches" (2013, p. 32; see also Castiglioni, 2013). It is noteworthy that searching for publications using this exact phrase reveals a surprisingly small number. The exceptions most often take an indirect approach to the topic.

**Indirect Approaches**

What, then, are the cognate approaches used to date that contribute to our understanding of intercultural dialogue?

1. *Dialogue* generally has long been an accepted research topic, one already granted attention within communication, with Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin frequently referenced as forebears (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Barge, 2017; Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Hoover, 2011; Shotter, 2000; Stewart, 2014). Put forward as "a preferred form for human action" (as summarized by Carbaugh, 2013, p. 9), at times, the goal of communication has been assumed to be “authentic dialogue,” that is, not only conversation but rather “the mutual communion of souls” (Katriel, 2004, p. 1).

“*Dialogue* is the term used for a specific type of communication: occasions when participants, despite having their own perspectives, recognize the existence of other, different perspectives, and remain open to learning about them” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2016, p. 17; Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017c). Dialogue has also been studied taking linguistics as the entry point. For example, Koike and Blythe (2015) and Ponomarenko et al. (2017) approach dialogue from the point of view of language learning, and the ways in which new learners must adapt to a new community. In these examples, learning a new language is both a necessary requirement for holding dialogues with others, and a vehicle for demonstrating to students the value of ICD. Very occasionally dialogue has been the focus within intercultural communication, as with Weiming (2014). There has been a move to create ‘dialogue studies’ which would overlap with how dialogue has been approached from within communication but also bring in
additional disciplinary perspectives, as evidenced by the establishment of the Journal of Dialogue Studies in 2013.

2. Public dialogue has been a notable focus of research to date, especially by those taking a Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) approach (e.g., Herzig & Chasin, 2006; Pearce, 2008; Pearce et al., 2009; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Pearce & Pearce, 2001; Penman, 2014). But within public dialogue studies, even investigations of contexts where culture clearly plays a central role (e.g., Spano, 2001), do not often explicitly use the term ICD, and the focus is rarely on intercultural contexts. The most recent research combines public dialogue with deliberation, most often with a political context (e.g., Escobar, 2011).

3. There has been discussion of dialogue in cross-cultural perspective (such as Carbaugh, 2005; Carbaugh et al., 2006, 2011; Chen & Starosta, 2004; Wierzbicka, 2006), comparing what different cultures do or say as related to the concept and practice of dialogue, pointing out that assumptions about what dialogue entails do not necessarily translate across cultural boundaries. The most relevant exemplars in this tradition study cultural groups in conflict, analyzing interaction to discover the difficulties, even if they are studied separately (as when Katriel described dugri speech in her 1986 book, and then compared dugri speech among Israelis with musayara among Arabs in Griefat & Katriel, 1989). This research strand descends from Hymes’ original (1962) call for ethnographic documentation of cultural differences in interaction. As ethnography typically begins by documenting what a single cultural group takes for granted, cross-cultural studies have a long and distinguished history, but they are a better starting point than final result when the goal is to have participants from different cultures interact (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014b).

Even though some scholars use intercultural and cross-cultural to mean the same thing, they and related set of terms should be clearly sorted out. Intercultural communication requires interaction between members of different cultural groups. Intracultural communication occurs between members of the same culture. Cross-cultural communication involves a comparison between what members of different cultural groups do, or what they take for granted. International communication crosses national borders, whether through interaction or media (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017d).
4. There has been considerable use of the phrase *intergroup dialogue*, sometimes as a synonym for all of intercultural communication, other times more narrowly as a synonym for ICD (e.g., Atkinson, 2013; Bekerman, 2009; Bowen, 2014; Broome, 2013, 2016; Broome & Jakobsson Hatay, 2006; Broome et al, 2019; DeTurk, 2006, 2010; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Scott, 2016). Much of this research strand has its origin in the study of language and social psychology (Giles, 2012), as a result often examining cognition rather than behavior (thoughts rather than actions or words). The cognate term *intergroup relations* most often has been a focus within psychology (although there are exceptions, such as at Villanova University, where an IGR sequence is taught within communication under the sponsorship of the Multicultural Student Affairs office [http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/multiculturalaffairs/igr.html]).

5. There has been substantial research examining conflict, negotiation, mediation, etc., overlapping the study of ICD, again most often without using the phrase, even when the focus has been on intercultural contexts (e.g., Brownlie, 2017; Busch, 2019; Kellett & Matyók, 2016; Roy & Shaw, 2015; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Much work has examined intractable conflicts (Smith, 2014, 2016), specifically in the Middle East (including Abramovich, 2005; Ellis, 2015; Ellis & Maoz, 2002, 2007; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Zupnik, 2000), Northern Ireland (Hoover, 2011; Wilson & Stapleton, 2007), or Cyprus (Broome, 2005, 2015, 2017; Higgins, 2011). Some of it has focused specifically on techniques demonstrated to resolve conflicts, whether the term used is conflict management (Dai & Chen, 2017; Greco, 2018; Wang, 2015), conflict transformation (Balandina, 2010; Kellett & Matyók, 2016; Shailer, 2015), peacebuilding (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004; Heleta & Deardorff, 2017; Mutua, 2015; Opffer, 2015b; Penaskovic & Sahin, 2017), peacemaking (Hyslop & Jarrett, 2019; Melnik, 2019; Ron & Maoz, 2013), or peace education (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011; Salomon & Cairns, 2009; Warshel, 2018). Wilson (2014) presents a case study of a leadership-training organization teaching the facilitation of dialogue across difference which places the focus on holding dialogues with the parties respecting one another rather than on achieving consensus, concluding that tolerance “is a tool rather than an outcome” (p. 861).

6. Another indirect approach has been to examine intercultural competence or intercultural communication competence, emphasizing what participants need to know and/or do in order for ICD to be successful (Bennett, 2016; Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 2012; Kramsch, 2013; Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018; UNESCO, 2013). The first term is shorter, and more often used as a result, but the latter highlights the central role played by communication. Participants need to be able to talk and act in ways understood as meaningful by others participating in the same context. Learning a language requires knowing not only how to put grammatically correct sentences together, but also when to say what to whom. Context crucially influences how participants interpret language and behavior, but such subtleties are the hardest elements to learn. Since the same behaviors may convey different meanings to diverse cultural groups, intending one’s words or actions to be interpreted in one way cannot prevent
misunderstandings when they are understood in another. Relevant work has been produced within intercultural communication (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2014; Arasaratnam, & Doerfel, 2005, Chen & Starosta, 1996; Dai & Chen, 2014; Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Holmes, 2015; Holmes & O’Neill, 2012; Holmes et al., 2017; Witteborn, 2015), but there is much room for research into details of interaction still to come. Intercultural competence as a term sees frequent use within the same international organizations as ICD, and there are many relevant materials (e.g., UNESCO, 2013; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2016). This strand developed from Hymes’ work on communicative competence (Hymes, 1972, 1984; Lambert & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2012), and remains a common emphasis of language teachers, applied linguists, and English programs, especially those teaching English as a foreign language where intercultural contexts are assumed to be relevant (e.g., Byram, 2008; Byram et al., 2001; Corbett, 2014; Crosbie, 2014; Lochtman & Kappel, 2009). Barrett (2017), and Council of Europe (2013), link ICD to cultural competence specifically within an education setting. Houghton (2012) points out the need to place ICD “at the centre of foreign language education” (p. xi). International House (established in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Berkeley), designed to bring international graduate students into daily contact with their US counterparts, provides a good example of a living situation designed to encourage intercultural competence in an educational context (Ink, 2018; Winkin, 1982, 1983). Intercultural competence is an important first step, but really should not be the final goal: “Intercultural competence is passive, a matter of what someone knows. Intercultural dialogue is active, a matter of what someone does” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2016, pp. 7-8; Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017e).

7. Related terms are interculturalism (Bello, 2017; Busch & Möller-Kiero, 2016; Elias & Mansouri, 2020; Sarmento, 2014), cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2009; Gonçalves, 2015a; Hepple, 2015; Kögler, 2018; McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011; Sobre-Denton, 2014; Sobre-Denton & Bardhan, 2013), multiculturalism (Bloom, 2013b; Gonçalves, 2015b; Golovátina-Mora & Mora, 2014), interculturality (Burnard et al., 2018; Dervin, 2014), and third-culture building (Casmir, 1993, 1999; Matoba, 2011). Each of these terms has, at different times, been used to argue for moving beyond co-existence of different cultures towards dialogue between cultures (Stokke &
Third-culture kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) and the later, broader term, cross-cultural kids (Van Reken, 2019) have the advantage of looking to the next generation for leadership:

TCKs are particularly adept at intercultural dialogues since they have experienced so many firsthand. They are frequently proposed as model future world citizens, being multilingual, multiculturally competent, taking a global worldview for granted, and typically flexible, adaptable, and resilient. (Lijadi, 2014, p. 1)

Essentially, the underlying assumption for each of these concepts is that in a multicultural, cosmopolitan, intercultural world, what we need to survive is intercultural dialogue.

8. John Gumperz studied examples of ICD (at least as early as Gumperz, 1978), calling his approach interactional sociolinguistics. His work on contextualization cues supports ICD research, and his students use ethnographic and linguistic methods to document intercultural interactions (Gordon, 2014; Gumperz, 1982, 1992). Much of the work pioneered by Gumperz emphasizes miscommunication – the difficulties caused by cultural differences in assumptions about communication, which might be viewed as the inverse of ICD, since it shows what happens when things go wrong, when participants do not listen to one another (Bailey, 1997; Chick, 1985; Gumperz & Roberts, 1991; Hinnenkamp, 1999; Jacque-met, 2011; Linell, 1996; Zheng, 2016). This leads to research on intercultural pragmatics (see Kecskes, 2014 for a basic introduction, or any article in the journal of that name), cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Kecskes, 2017; Wierzbicka, 2003), cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007; Scollo & Milburn, 2019), and, more broadly linguistic research emphasizing discourse within an intercultural context (as in Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

9. Pöllmann (2013, 2014, 2016, 2017) expands Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital to propose consideration of intercultural capital. Essentially this expands beyond intercultural proficiencies (the typical list of skills, competencies, sensitivities required for intercultural competence) to include more subtle elements, such as “their relative exchange value and the circumstances under which they are more or less likely to be realized” (Pöllmann, 2013, p. 2). Like other forms of cultural capital, intercultural capital is symbolic and so invisible (like knowledge) rather than concrete (like a house). Pöllmann operationalizes intercultural capital as “a combination of the number of spoken foreign languages…intercultural friendships…and experience of living abroad” (p. 4), though he suggests the exact factors may vary by context. This means that those who are bilingual are especially valuable in multilingual groups; those with experience working internationally can quickly find their footing when sent to still another country for business. Thus, such individuals should find their skills and experiences valued, and should be much in demand, whether as employees, colleagues, or friends. The implications of intercultural capital are enormous, as they suggest that those in the third world who are bi- or multilingual have something of great value that many in the first world do not have, and
traditionally have not valued enough to spend time developing.

10. *Intercultural communication* has a long tradition of studying what happens when participants make different cultural assumptions, but often the methodologies chosen (surveys, questionnaires, interviews) do not examine what actually occurs in interaction (focusing instead on what people say occurs), and/or participants interact without the requirements of dialogue (that is, without privileging attention to learning about the Other, focusing just on how to convey their own message to a cultural Other). Frame (2014) suggests use of the term "culture-interactional approach" (p. 6) in order to emphasize the micro level (interaction) over the macro level (culture). Chick (1985) provides a good example of attending to intercultural interaction, but the example studied is not dialogue. Drzewiecka (2003) uses the term ICD, but examines the role played by collective memories in responses to a documentary film, rather than direct interaction. For other studies of film and ICD, Björk et al. (2017) provide a concrete example of how ICD can be encouraged through teaching with film in South Africa; Evans (2018) analyzes ICD within the films of Fatih Akin for a German-Turkish perspective. DeTurk (2011) attends to dialogue, but also does not examine interactions, relying upon participant interviews instead. However, her helpful suggestion that ICD “represents a distilled version of intercultural communication” (p. 54, my emphasis), provides excellent justification for intercultural communication scholars to attend more directly to ICD.

The connections between intercultural communication, intercultural competence, and intercultural dialogue, may seem obvious, but they are worth sorting out. *Intercultural communication* simply requires interaction between members of different cultures; that interaction may be negative rather than positive, or it may fail entirely. *Intercultural competence* requires that participants know something about how to interact with members of different cultures, which makes them more likely to achieve some level of success. And *intercultural dialogue* requires a concerted attempt to understand members of a different culture, that is, what makes sense to someone who has very different assumptions (Arasaratnam, 2014; Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017f; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014a, 2014c; 2016).
11. There have been a few efforts intended to move dialogue to the center of teaching intercultural communication. Heisey (2011) proposes increased dialogue between members of different cultural groups as part of teaching intercultural communication (arguing as well for increased intercultural experiences among those teaching intercultural communication, a long overdue suggestion). Kanata and Martin (2007) suggest using online dialogues as a pedagogical tool in teaching intercultural communication. However, arguing on behalf of ICD as a valued good is still not the same as studying the practice of ICD.

12. Jackson (2012) concludes her introduction to a handbook on language and intercultural communication by saying that the authors all “share an interest in intercultural communication dialogue” (p. 13) – but note that dialogue has not yet made it into the title of this or the many other introductory texts on language and intercultural communication. The only chapters in Jackson’s handbook to directly address ICD even briefly are Byram (2012), best known for developing the autobiography of intercultural encounters circulated by the Council of Europe as a tool to promote ICD (https://www.coe.int/en/web/autobiography-intercultural-encounters), and Holmes (2012), who lists ICD as a “future direction” for research (p. 479). Oddly, ‘language and intercultural communication’ shares little history in common with ‘intercultural communication’ since the former term is used in linguistics, and the latter in communication. This has led to very different research emphases, as Hua (2020) points out: “Instead of taking culture as ‘being’ and as the starting point, the discourse perspective enables the researcher to explore how people ‘do’ culture discursively through interactions and negotiations” (p. 4). A related strand of research, often by sociolinguistics, has considered translation, focusing on the role of translator as mediator and coordinator of intercultural interactions (Büchler, 2018; Davidson, 2000; Wadensjö, 1995, 1998). Interpretation is similar to translation, but even more urgent and immediate as it requires translation in real time (Mark, 2017; Monaghan, 2017; Parks, 2017).

13. There also has been research investigating intercultural relationships of various sorts (Karis & Killian, 2009; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002; Sandel, 2011). Migliorini and Rania (2017) suggest specific techniques for use with communities facing intercultural challenges to make intercultural relationships visible to group members. Wiruchnipawan and Chua (2018) examine the impact of such relationships on creativity, finding, as others have previously shown, that cultural diversity leads to greater creativity.

14. Other applied topics include the impact of differing cultural assumptions in health care (Ho, 2006; Ho et al., 2015; Orbe, 2004; Pergert & Tiselius, 2020), or the impact of diverse cultures in organizations (Cheng, 2008; Covarrubias, 2002; Kristjánsdóttir & Christiansen, 2017; Kristjánsdóttir & Martin, 2010).

While all of these approaches are intercultural, and presumably require, or at least might benefit from, dialogue between participants, ICD again typically has not been the explicit focus of study, so much work remains. The different approaches to intercultural dialogue might be described as a set of blind men studying individual aspects of the elephant, never realizing there is an
entire beast. Those who have stepped back to see the entire animal deserve special attention (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2020b).

Direct Approaches

Witteborn has it right: “To maintain the idea of intercultural dialogue as conceptually and analytically viable, one can ask what is inter and what is cultural about dialogue” (2011, p. 122, emphasis in original). Thus, the question becomes: what research has emphasized all three elements simultaneously, and explicitly?

1. The single largest subject investigated to date has been interfaith dialogue (e.g., Abu-Nimer et al., 2007; Keaten & Soukoup, 2009; Orton, 2016; Peleg, 2019; Smock, 2002; Timmerman & Segaert, 2007; Tsuji, 2015; Williams et al., 2019), also called interreligious dialogue (as with the UNITWIN Network for Inter-Religious Dialogue and Intercultural Understanding, an organization made up of UNESCO Chairs; see Çetinkaya, 2020, for a brief explanation of the distinction between the terms). Unfortunately, actual interfaith dialogues are less often examined than might be useful: there seem to be more arguments for this being a good thing than there are practical examples matched to analyses of what works and what does not.

2. The same is true for analyses of the impact of study abroad experiences (U. S. Department of Education, 2010; Gürüz, 2011; Hепple et al., 2017; Howard, 2019; Institute of International Education, 2010, 2012; Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Koester, 1985; Kuh, 2008) or international service-learning projects (Dev-Turk, 2017; Mutua, 2017; Souza, 2019), which also often use ICD as a tool to ensure success. Given the substantial push within the EU for mobility over the past few years, the fact that so much of the research on this topic comes out of Europe should be no surprise (Byram & Feng, 2006; Dervin, 2009; Dervin & Dirba, 2008). Tarp (2015) provides an example of what can be learned by studying students in an International Baccalaureate program, specifically with a focus on Denmark in this case, and how they experience ICD.

3. There has been far more work examining ICD as a general, philosophical approach or theoretically (as with Aalto & Reuter, 2006; Demenchonok, 2014; Seibt & Garsdal, 2014; Flynn, 2014; Haslett, 2017; Healy, 2013; Holmes et al., 2017; Keir, 2017; Keller, 2012; Lee, 2016; Vidmar-Horvat, 2012) and fewer concrete studies of ICD as a form of interaction. Many of the case studies in Haydari & Holmes, 2015, were explicitly intended to fill this gap.

4. One of the more interesting approaches is historical, looking back to past successes, as when convivencia is proposed as a model for modern-day intercultural interactions.
Convivencia is the term used to describe the shared co-existence of three cultures in medieval Spain, where Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities lived side by side (de Wit, 2017; Habti, 2011; Wolf, 2009, 2017). Chuse (2018) examines a modern-day example of musical collaborations between Spanish and North African musicians, some of which are explicitly called “dialogues between cultures” (p. 86). Nieto and Bickmore (2016) teach convivencia as a tool for peace-building in Mexico.

5. One recent move argues for taking a critical approach and using action research to resolve the difficulties of establishing ICD, as with Indigenous peoples in Latin America (Pavan et al., 2015). In this case, the analysis provided is a fairly informal one, based on utterances by Brazilian Indian students in a classroom context. Staying within the educational context, Riitaoja and Dervin pose the following questions as essential when studying ICD:

Who is going to learn about whom, and whose knowledge is to be learnt?
Does the Other have an opportunity to be seen and heard as a subject or relegated to a subaltern position?
Are knowledge and understanding about her constructed with her and in her own terms?
Will a religious ‘subaltern’ ever be equal to the majority in schools? (Riitaoja & Dervin, 2014, p. 87)

6. Among the few studies to match explicit use of the term ICD to a focus on actual behavior, Baraldi (2010a) analyzes Children’s International Summer Villages (CISV), an organization designed to increase ICD among adolescents. Using videotapes, interviews and questionnaires, Baraldi’s team examined “the main features of speakers’ actions which either promote or prevent interlocutors’ active participation, understanding and expression, and the main features of decision-making and conflict management in interaction” (Baraldi, 2010b, p. 1). Briefly, they emphasized “dialogic empowering relationships based on specific dialogue actions . . . such as promotional questions, continuers, echoes, systematic appreciations, transformative formulations, and suggestive narratives” (Baraldi, 2010c, p. 241). This research sets a good model for further investigation by others.

7. Similarly, Gobbo (2011, 2012) used ethnographic research to investigate classroom interaction after teachers attended a training session on working with Roma pupils and their parents in Turin. The results were shared with the teachers, who themselves then became ethnographers of their own schools. Gobbo concludes:

. . . ethnographic research reminds all who engage with diversity that they, in fact, apprehend it by engaging with diverse people, in diverse circumstances and contexts, eventually realizing that such an intellectual and affective practice has profoundly touched them and enhanced their potential for thinking critically and creatively, and envisaging alternative ways of building a sense of membership and social cohesion. (Gobbo, 2011, p. 40)

Her point speaks directly to all those who study language and social interaction,
especially scholars choosing ethnography as one of their research methods.

8. In her study of ethnic newspapers, Co-perías-Aguilar (2015, 2017) proposes a particularly useful theoretical concept: double intercultural dialogue. She intended this to refer to the way in which the Spanish language press first brings together different Hispanic groups into a single panethnic community, regardless of country of origin, and then to bring them into discussion with non-Hispanic communities (for example, through the use of bilingual publications accessible to non-Spanish speakers). Earlier use of this term by Ruth (2003) refers to transdisciplinary and intercultural as the two types of ICD (a suggestion also made by Mangano, 2015, 2017, 2018). Both uses should be more often discussed and applied.

9. Equally important is to expand beyond considering even two types of dialogue simultaneously: the different chapters in Bodo et al. (2009) describe yet more types of ICD that museums in their test projects designed: between museum employees in different countries; museum staff and their communities; members of different groups in those communities (especially between old-timers and newcomers, but also between those interested in popular culture vs. high culture); a visitor and an object in the collection; visitors and curators or docents; museum directors and city officials; museum operators, teachers, and parents; locally-born vs. foreign-born students; and even, when exhibitions resulted in digital presentations for larger audiences, between the museum and the rest of the world. Introducing this sort of levels of complexity seems a counter-intuitive move, because ICD between only two people can be difficult to manage well, so adding so many others seems impossible, but there may be fewer disadvantages than expected in opening up to more (as, for example, when parallels in what works can be found more readily across these different pairings). At the very least, it is worth consideration.

10. Another helpful theoretical concept might be an expansion of Gao’s 1995 “paradox of intercultural communication” (published in Chinese, but discussed in English in Gao, 2017). She noticed that the generalizations produced by those who discuss intercultural differences can easily turn into stereotypes, which then interfere with mutual understanding. This might be updated by suggesting that spending too much time explaining why ICD is important and necessary could actually interfere with successfully managing actual dialogues, and so is an argument for moving from discussion to practice.

11. Crosbie (2018) studied a specific ICD effort (BlueFire in inner city Dublin) aimed at using the arts and street entertainment to integrate new immigrants into a local community, on the assumption that using the arts “offers a vehicle and mode for transcending difference, is creative, and helps effect social change through new ways of looking at the world” (p. 203). Part of what makes this work is the effort spent by young people cooperating in advance of the event, in preparing for the festival. She concludes that ICD, when successful, introduces “equity of voice and agency of all participants” (p. 212), an insight that would be useful if applied to future studies by others.
12. Even though most of the activity has been in Europe, there has been some movement within communication in the USA directly addressing ICD. In July 2009, the National Communication Association Summer Conference on Intercultural Dialogue was held at Maltepe University, in Istanbul, Turkey (the uncommon design of that event is described in Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015b). One explicit goal was to create a cohesive group of researchers who could spark additional studies and further meetings. The first result was the establishment of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue in 2010 as a project of the Council of Communication Associations (http://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org). The Center approaches ICD from two levels: encouraging research on the topic, but also bringing international scholars and practitioners together in shared dialogue about their work. The Center’s website now serves as a clearinghouse for information on ICD, including researcher profiles, publication opportunities, and international conferences (or webinars, in the days of pandemic).

A special issue of the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication (Ganesh & Holmes, 2011) and a volume of case studies, (Haydari & Holmes, 2015), many of which began as presentations at the conference, are also available. Discussing this new emphasis (and specifically mentioning both this special issue and the Center as examples), Broome and Collier (2012) argue for the critical role of ICD in peacemaking. ICD was also used as a conference theme for the International Association of Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) in 2012 (Holmes, 2014), and by the Roundtable on Intercultural Dialogue in Asia in 2014, co-sponsored by the Center for Intercultural Dialogue and the University of Macau (as described, and shown through a short video, at https://centerforintercultural-dialogue.org/2014/04/09/roundtable-on-intercultural-dialogue-in-asia-macau).

When conducting research on intercultural dialogue, multiple disciplines should be integrated into a cohesive whole (interdisciplinarity) at best and, at the least, serve as an interconnected web (multidisciplinarity). At the very least, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, international relations, and communication all have relevance. The Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (2014), in their summary of discussions at a specific training workshop, has suggested that interdisciplinarity is just as relevant to the study of ICD as transculturality, and their argument makes a lot of sense, even though this is not a position commonly taken. Others have occasionally supported the idea, using the terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary (Mangano, 2018; Tawil & Baeumer, 2018; Wagner et al., 2018). As has been the case with so many other topics, multi-, inter-, and/or transdisciplinary investigations should be especially productive, and for much the same reason that cultural diversity is especially productive – divergent approaches expand our understanding of what is possible.

Conclusion and Next Steps

While many people have recognized the significance of ICD, and even more have begun to use the term, there have been relatively few attempts to study specific examples of actual practice: essential elements of ICD, how it works, how to teach people to do it, etc. Xu tells us: “Intercultural dialogue and relation, rather than the ontological difference
between cultures, should be the focus of intercultural communication research” (2013, p. 385). I agree completely: it is long past the time that intercultural dialogue should be accepted as a central topic, if not the central topic, within intercultural communication. Clearly, however, this has not yet happened. As Tuna suggests “the proclamation of more ICD per se does not make any difference” (2016, p. 2). It is also long past time to stop proclaiming and start conducting research. The question becomes: What needs to happen next, to get us from the current state of affairs, where intercultural dialogue is more often mentioned than studied, to a future where intercultural dialogue becomes the focus of investigation?

One answer is that communication scholars need to play a more central role in ICD studies, and ICD needs to become more often a central topic in communication, especially intercultural communication. After all, if communication is central to ICD, why wouldn’t communication researchers want to study it? At the point when bioethicists have already started a book series on Intercultural Dialogue in Bioethics (https://www.worldscientific.com/series/idb), it is obvious that those of us who study communication in the US have been pretty slow to notice and adopt the term. We have begun to take many relevant steps: communication researchers already know, for example, that culture is no longer co-terminus with the boundaries of nation-states (if it ever was), despite the fact that much of the work on ICD still assumes international interactions as the obvious focus.

Specifically, what would we study? Given its frequent mention as essential to world peace, new contexts encouraging dialogue across cultural boundaries are steadily being constructed to open the topic beyond formal diplomatic events. As described in prior pages, many libraries and museums have begun to reshape their role as providing “an intercultural meeting point” (Morral, 2007, p. 207) because “Exhibitions are places of social representation and cultural dialogue” (Network of European Museum Organisations, 2016, p. 9; see also Bodo, 2012; Goodnow & Akman, 2008; Lagerkvist, 2006; Simansone, 2013). New here is the assumption that outreach to diverse members of the community is useful and appropriate since:

Their contribution of cultural expertise – e.g. special knowledge about objects and their context, linguistic aspects, and knowledge about certain techniques or rituals – enriches the museum experience for everyone . . . Rather than focusing on communicating specific content, the emphasis is on facilitating a dialogue between visitors with their individual expectations and what is being presented in the museum. (Network of European Museum Organisations, 2016, p. 13).

And there has been at least a little work on other public contexts, as when McDermott, Craith, and Strani (2015) examined public performances (mostly of traditional music) during a year-long festival in Derry/London-derry as an explicit site of ICD.

It is particularly important to look at museums and similar contexts outside the EU, given that these have been less often studied. Henry (2018) examines “Talking Difference”
at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, an exhibit which facilitated dialogue between participants through digital media.

Tourism is now being used as a tool to promote ICD, as in LaFever (2011) or Vidal-Casellas et al. (2019). Carbone (2017) documents how this works, largely as a result of providing “the opportunity to meet different communities and cultures” (p. 62). However, he also cautions that it requires “an explicit, multilevel engagement in the practice of cultural diplomacy” (2017, p. 69), so tourism in and of itself does not have the same effect. A related research strand is cultural mapping, which involves identifying the cultural aspects of communities (Crawhall, 2009; Duxbury, 2015).

Others have phrased ICD as a question of establishing “safe” or “open” spaces in which to explore intercultural differences (UNESCO, 2013), or have emphasized formal education as a good location for lessons on intercultural competence and dialogue (Poglia et al., 2009), especially as related to media literacy (Carlsson et al., 2008). Popular activities such as music (Balandina, 2010; Burnard et al., 2018) and sport (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010) have been put forward as obvious vehicles to use in bringing about ICD, especially between otherwise competing groups. Such contexts will likely provide excellent new research topics for scholars in the future, especially those with an interest in applied research, and especially those outside the already much studied EU. Ganesh and Holmes (2011) position ICD “as a predominantly ethical issue” (p. 84), and the topic should have great appeal to those with interests in both social harmony and a wide variety of social justice issues (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2017g; Sorrells, 2015).

Partnering with civil society organizations using ICD to address real world problems, possibly through uncommon techniques, such as participatory action research, as Almeida (1999) did in Mexico, or as Sergi (2014) did in the UK, would be one direction to go. ICD also fits nicely with “practical theory” as transformative practice (Barge, 2001; Craig & Barge, 2009; Craig & Tracy, 2020; Cronen, 1995; Penman, 2000).

One especially interesting trend investigates the use of technology and social media to encourage ICD, especially for populations otherwise unable to easily connect physically, whether due to geographic distance (Garcia & Ouis, 2016; Schneider & von der Emde,
2006; Shuter, 2012) or past conflicts (Hasler & Amichai-Hamburger, 2013; Mor et al., 2016). Frequently virtual exchanges are established between students based in different countries (Bali, 2014; Develotte & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015; Helm & Acconcia, 2019; O’Dowd, 2011). Sometimes labeled Exchange 2.0, digitally facilitated international conversations within an educational context have been proposed as a quick and cheap substitute for international study experiences involving actual travel when that proves difficult (O’Dowd & Lewis, 2016). Digital connection is better than no international experience at all, but nowhere near as good as the sort of face-to-face contact that physical travel permits. Virtual exchanges may be supported by international organizations (such as Soliya, which partners with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations) or by an individual university (as with East Carolina University’s Global Virtual Exchange). A particularly ambitious example placed large screens in public spaces in Australia and South Korea, allowing direct interaction between populations not typically in dialogue, and analyzing the results (Yue & Jung, 2011).

Bozdağ (2015) expands this to study the ways diasporas use online discussion forums for ICD. At a theoretical level, Pfister and Soliz (2011) point out that what has been going on could be explained as a first shift from one-to-many communication (as with television), to few-to-few (as with Soliya and other programs bringing individuals into contact with distant Others), and then a second shift to many-to-many (as when social media permit anyone to publish information which then becomes accessible to anyone else having Internet access).

A second answer is that we need common vocabulary for analysis of ICD. Accepting the need for holding intercultural dialogues implies developing common terms for describing and managing interactions across cultural groups. This is a question of metadiscourse or metacommunication, focusing on the vocabulary itself prior to engaging in dialogue (Buttny, 2014 on the former; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2014d, 2014e on the latter). This will require a grand synthesis of research by scholars taking different approaches that currently address ICD indirectly, and an active program of research into concrete cases. An obvious first step to preparing a grand synthesis would bring together those who study aspects of ICD using other technical vocabulary to name their subject. Whether their term of choice is intercultural communication or public dialogue, intergroup relations or intercultural competence, a wide range of scholars in conversation could determine what they have already covered, and what they might jointly contribute in the future to our understanding of ICD.

Only after we have sorted out how the pieces of what we have already learned fit together into a coherent whole can we know what work remains. Once cooperation across competing academic disciplines (and subdisciplines) has been assured, researchers could then begin investigating some of the multiple efforts to bring about ICD that have already been funded, as described earlier. After scholars have paid serious attention to analyzing their projects, we can then reasonably argue that the practitioners should listen to the theoretical infrastructure we can provide, which is currently missing from their efforts to bring about ICD.
Since ICD occurs most often through face-to-face interaction and during intercultural encounters, far more studies of actual interactions between real people are needed. And since ICD can also occur through mediated intercultural encounters, larger numbers of studies of those will be required as well. Anderson and Corbett (2013) provide a start at describing how virtual spaces can permit or encourage intercultural competence, but far more research will improve our understanding of what works, and in what ways, and what does not. Herrlitz and Maier (2005) provide a collection of examples of how dialogue (and metacommunication about dialogue) occurs in multicultural schools across Europe.

A third answer is that ICD must be studied outside Europe more often. Dimitrovova (2010) begins this task through an analysis of the European Neighborhood Policy, looking at constructions of the border between the EU and its geographic neighbors. Granted the EU is where the term has found its strongest supporters to date, but if ICD is useful there, it should be useful elsewhere as well. As Asante (2014a, 2014b) and Miike (2010, 2014) have shown, intercultural communication as studied in the US typically has a Eurocentric bias; they ask: what would change given an Afrocentric or Asiacentric bias? The Roundtable on Intercultural Dialogue in Asia, held at the University of Macau in 2014, contributed to that conversation.

Globalization, including especially the variety of new media, has brought a wider range of cultures into closer contact with one another more often than in any prior generation (Ganesh & Stohl, 2014). Cultural diversity and intercultural contact have become facts of modern life; as a result, competence in holding intercultural dialogues has become an essential skill for us all. Clearly, we must learn to share this planet together in peace, and if ICD can be used as a tool in that effort, the topic certainly merits attention. It is through ICD that members of different groups learn about one another: the exchange of basic information often serving as an essential first step. Learning about cultural Others turns out to be an unending task: there are always more new people to meet, and more to learn. Increasingly different groups co-exist in close proximity and must learn to understand and negotiate their assumptions, words, and actions.

One final caveat: studies of ICD need balance. Balance in terms of the event: participants’ each learn something about the Other, considering what is given and what is received. Balance in terms of the analysis: in the theoretical approaches used as resources. Balance in terms of the results: contributing to practice, as well as theory. Talking about ICD in geographic locations or disciplines where this is not yet the topic of discussion are further ways to bring balance to the subject.

As Tsuji writes, ICD is “a miracle begging for analysis” (2015, p. 53). Specific examples of this miracle deserve a lot more study than has yet been given to the general topic of ICD. We need to know far more “about the forms of life which foster rapprochement, dialogue and cohesion” (Saillant, 2017, p. 18), and to assume that “Difference is not merely a problem to be solved, but rather a forum for practices, interpretations, negotiations, frictions, enrichment and creative bridging” (p. 24).
Staying at the theoretical level, focusing on knowledge alone, is insufficient. Instead, we must first acknowledge, as several of the chapters in Mansouri (2017) argue, that ICD is not only about theory, but also about skills, behaviors, actions, and interactions with others (or, better, Others).

Finally, we must choose to study specific moments of actual intercultural dialogue between actual people, and sort out what works, and what does not, and then share that information widely.

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Notes

1 An early version of this paper was presented at the Roundtable on Intercultural Dialogue in Asia, University of Macau, Macau, China, March 28-30, 2014. A related but much shorter version was published as Leeds-Hurwitz (2015a). Photograph of author on page 1 by Jeff Cohn. Layout, design, and all posters by Linda J. de Wit.

2 This fits nicely with what Elias and Mansouri (2020) found in their review of literature.

3 This was during a Skype conversation with me, April 25, 2017.

4 All posters included as illustrations here are available in larger, printable format on the Center for Intercultural Dialogue’s website – see References for complete citations and links to all those included in this document.

5 There have been critiques of ICD as a goal (Aman, 2012; Näss, 2010; Phipps, 2014), descriptions of the ways in which ICD is virtually impossible (Harries, 2008; James, 1999), arguments that the rhetoric of ICD is working better than the reality (Swiebel, 2008), and even suggestions that dialogue might not always be as appropriate a technique as it is thought to be (Burbules, 2006; Igbino, 2012; Jones, 1999), though these caveats are rarer than one might anticipate.

6 Strathern’s (2012) wonderful discussion of balance and imbalance when considering an altogether different topic has helped me recognize the significance of balance here.

7 Adapting a quote from Trouillot (2002, p. 189), which originally argued that creolization was the miracle begging for analysis.