

Intercultural communication bridges the gap between

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



As mankind marches inexorably towards a future where he is more a creature than a creator, he is desperately seeking ways to find a mean or method to steer a ship that seems forever bound towards rocky shores. It has been the bane of the human race that they have been able to create technological wonders that have transformed the planet, yet they seem unable to find ways to coexist in a necessary harmony that would allow one and all to have a sustainable existence.

The specter of insularity, like a hydra headed monster seems to be forever among us, destroying the human community at the most crucial times of its development, even as it tries to stretch a hand out to hold on to a reason that says we are not alone; therefore this world is not for one of us but for all of us. Now that we have reached that future where even the most myopic of nations have begun to realize that their survival could depend on those who were once perhaps their worst enemies. Mankind has entered into a new paradigm where his choices seemed to have already been predetermined by the circumstances of his arrival.

Cooperation is no longer a strategy; it has now become a deadly necessity where the odds against survival rise significantly if one dares to try to go it alone. In this global village, nations are learning some hard lessons; that the things that they once cherished and held so dear must now be put aside in the interest of continued existence. Words like; borders, sovereignty, and even nationality have now lost a lot of their former meaning as the pace of change dictates that new instruments be found to access a future that will accept no half measures.

Hence we have come to that place where nations must learn, one and all, to talk the same language or be eventually be destroyed by economic forces that none can withstand alone. Thus we enter into the era of ICC which has become the necessary rudder to steer the wayward ship of mankind. Through this vehicle and this vehicle alone can any nation hope to have a sustainable existence as a globally interconnected world demands that we understand one another. But what is this thing called ICC and what are the rules of this new game?

As we enter into this voyage of discovery it becomes necessary that we look at its roots and its future because ICC is the bridge between the gap of global performance and national interests.

Research questions a) What is intercultural communication? Hinchcliff-Pelias and Greer (2004) give us a very simple definition when they tell us that " ICC involves the interaction of persons from cultural communities that are different. " With this simple statement they encompass all the elements that ICC is composed of which are; communication, culture and interaction.

But bringing these elements together does mean that the interaction will be positive or even helpful to either party, because without an added desire to want to communicate for a reason that is beneficial to both parties, communication will fail at the very outset. The simple statement above does not mirror the difficulties or complexities of true ICC which according to Chen and Starosta (2003) demands that both parties not only understand each others' culture but have a respect and appreciation for the others' point of view.

ICC which had its genesis in the studies of its founder E. T. Hall was a paradigmatic orientation of human behavior that reversed the natural trend towards cultural ethnocentrism. Hall was able to recognize that before true interaction could take place between peoples of different cultures that there had to be a measure of genuine understanding of each others cultural perspectives. ICC which is composed of two basic components - communication and culture - is best understood when one has a sound grasp of these features.

The communication processes in ICC is all about understanding the symbolic creations (speech - both verbal and non-verbal) which different cultures use to define their social existence, as delineated by Chen and Starosta (p. 300, 2003) when they tell us that " language and culture are interdependent. " Thus because culture is the defining focus of a people and is by nature ethnocentric; their communicative experience is therefore bound by this singleness of view. Having understood the major principles that govern the functioning of ICC, e can now go back to that simple statement that was made previously and understand that ICC is learning to communicate so that both parties of different cultures understand and appreciate each others' point of view by actively assessing what is said and what is meant through each others' cultural perspective. Why intercultural communication? The rapid emergence of ICC tells us that it had been produced by an urgent international need.

This happened because of the rapid growth of populations and the now inescapable necessity for communal interaction as the famous saying by

Ernest Hemingway indicates that, " No man is an island. This need to interact and communicate is noted by Chen and Starosta (p. 185, 2003) who postulate that the older ways of existing have been subsumed by the present reality of " seeing things through the eyes of others and adding the knowledge of others to our personal repertoire. " They point out that four emerging global trends have made ICC the virtual status quo modern day progress: (1) technological development, (2) globalization of the economy, (3) widespread population migration, and (4) the development of multiculturalism.

The study of ICC and its implications for the future has now become a pressing reality as nations struggle to come to grips with the new phenomena of global interdependence. There is an urgent need to find answers to questions that have never been asked before, such as; what are the necessary tools that will help people change their long held view points, and to begin to assimilate this new paradigm of an interconnected world?

These are questions that can only be answered by an examination of ICC and its ability to provide solutions for the age old problems of international relations. How does education affect the study and application of intercultural communication? As the world moves towards that envisioned ideal of becoming a global village, one of the vehicles that will be of critical importance to the study and promotion of ICC as it emerges as a new force in the affairs of mankind is the education system.

Drastic changes will have to be made to previous norms and standards which will now be made irrelevant by the unstoppable juggernaut of change. Chen

and Starosta (p. 299, 2003) explains this new reality by telling us that, “ colleges and universities, as the institutes of higher education, must endeavor to provide an environment in which students can learn the skills for effectively communicating with people of diverse cultures. ” They tell us that new educational processes must be able to adjust to a reality of merging cultures.

They point out that ethno relativism (a globally cultured way of understanding things) will be the new standard for academics who will be forced to leave old mindsets behind to seek new truths which will inform their understanding and not produce differences. Hinchcliff-Pelias and Greer (2004) investigated the importance of ICC in international education and concluded that international students face serious challenges because of negative experiences that they have had in the host countries. This had led students to be less receptive to the notion that ICC can become a bridge between cultures.

The students delineated the extreme emotional difficulties that they had in dealing with people who are basically ethnocentric and completely unaware of their behavior, causing some of them to leave their programs and adversely affect the mental health of others, as they became very solitary and refused to continue to have interactions with their hosts.. Hinchcliff-Pelias and Greer (2004) was able to point out several ways in which the students could overcome these obstacles, the chief of which was developing cultural empathy.

They emphasized that international students must understand that the trauma that they pass through will be well worth their while later on as they will be better able to function in an international community. Esber (2007) explains the new imperative in this field when she tells us that: Since intercultural communication is becoming a part of lives in a multicultural society, the principles and practices of the field of intercultural communication should become part of the educational process and should be included as a major component in the field of multicultural education.

She tells us that educators must begin to see the value of ICC as a tool in disseminating knowledge and understanding in various related fields because of its multicultural properties which allows people of different backgrounds to be able to understand each other; for example being able to relate subject matter to both Japanese and Americans students in such a way that one is able to value peoples of both high and low context cultures as defined by E. T. Hall. Esber (2007) emphasizes the “ importance of the role of intercultural communication and the development of intercultural communicative competence in the process of education and schooling. ” She tells us that multicultural societies will depend heavily upon this tool because it ultimately addresses most of their educational needs. She adds that because of its utility it should be used to train the teachers and administrators of the future.

She delineates several qualities that the teacher of the future must have to be effective because of the now irreversible trend towards multiculturalism:

1. An understanding of the vital role that intercultural communication plays in the culturally diverse classroom 2. An awareness of their own cultural perspective and the extent to which cultural assumptions underlie their values, attitudes, and behaviours 3. An awareness of the process of intercultural communication and the ability to translate this awareness into meaningful and effective communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds 4. An understanding, appreciation, and respect for cultural diversity in human life 5. The ability to deal with the ambiguity that occurs in the process of building shared meanings as well as the ability to respond to miscommunication 6. A sensitivity towards the feelings of others and the ability to respond to these feelings 7. An understanding of the relationship between language, meaning, and cultural perceptions 8. An understanding of the relationship between culture and cognitive style as manifested in diverse ways of knowing, logical reasoning styles, and learning styles 9. An understanding that variation is a natural occurrence among people in social groups. 10. An understanding that there are multiple cultural realities throughout the world 11. The ability to reach across difference with respect, care, and love in the art of teaching.