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Editorial: Crossing Boundaries and Creating Possibilities in Intercultural Communication Education



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We are now living in turbulent times characterized by political instability and a trend towards ideological polarization. Amidst such a trend, and surrounded by ideologically loaded and conflicting information on a daily basis, the question of how to turn away from polarization and recreate the conditions for meaningful dialogue across philosophical, political, cultural, and linguistic divides is particularly challenging. Concerns are particularly acute for those working in areas of education dedicated to the promotion of intercultural understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Intercultural Communication Education has been established in order to serve as a platform for disseminating academic work that deals directly with the issue of how intercultural education should be theoretically imagined and practically implemented against the unique challenges of the present day.

As Editor-in-Chief, my aim is to showcase innovative work rooted in diverse national and international contexts, which involves interaction in multiple languages, and which represents and challenges a variety of ideological perspectives on interculturality and education. For this reason, the journal is seeking submissions from intercultural educators who work in a multiplicity of contexts, such as corporate intercultural training, language education, refugee support, higher education, and more. At a practical level, how are intercultural education packages put together in order to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders? What kinds of context-specific challenges emerge in the implementation of intercultural education? Submissions that illustrate the challenges and successes of intercultural education from an insider viewpoint play an important role in generating discussions and developing practice across contexts.

At the same time, there are tough theoretical questions that penetrate the core of intercultural education. Notions such as “culture” and “intercultural” are perpetually contested (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013), and it is crucial to the development of the field that we shine a light on the various ways that these notions are conceptualized and operationalized within educational contexts around the world. What theoretical understandings of “culture” inform our educational decision-making? Who do we claim to

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represent when we use this notion? What are the implications of the ways we represent culture(s) through our classroom discourses and educational materials? Moreover, how are intercultural educators to make sense of the proliferation of intercultural terminology linked to the learning dimension, such as “intercultural competence,” “intercultural understanding,” “intercultural awareness,” “cultural intelligence,” etc.? At a more practical level, how do we promote and assess intercultural learning without encouraging stereotypes? How do we make the most of learners’ own cultural knowledge without pigeonholing them? Such questions are extraordinarily difficult, yet if we are to make progress as a field, we need to address them specifically and clearly in a theoretically nuanced way, drawing on empirical data from concrete educational contexts.

In addition to work that is overtly educationally oriented, the journal also seeks to present work that looks at the links between language, culture, and communication in new ways, particularly in languages other than English. The field of intercultural education is often reliant on models of language and culture that have been critiqued for several decades, and is important to harness the potential of exciting interdisciplinary work to consider new ways of packaging educational content for intercultural learning. The journal specifically welcomes work that looks at the (inter)cultural dimensions of language use from the perspective of cultural linguistics, cross-cultural psychology, moral psychology, intercultural pragmatics, evolutionary linguistics, anthropological linguistics, critical intercultural studies, and more.

By presenting work which crosses disciplinary boundaries and which is sourced from diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, this journal hopes to make a variety of perspectives widely accessible and therefore generate new discussion and exploration of new theoretical and pedagogical possibilities in intercultural education.

In This Issue

This inaugural issue features three articles which address the links between interculturality and education in different ways.

The first article by Adrian Holliday addresses principles for intercultural education. Whilst traditional approaches to intercultural education are frequently oriented towards developing knowledge of national cultures and the ways that “differences” between “us and them” may become problematic, in this article, Holliday argues for the importance of grounding intercultural education in learners’ own personal cultural trajectories and developing their capacity for critically exploring the impact of social positioning on how culture is perceived and spoken about. This is fleshed out in terms of four theoretical principles based on post-modern and constructivist perspectives on culture that can inform pedagogical design. Central to pedagogical implementation is the intercultural educator’s willingness and ability to explore the nature of small culture experience with students and consider how “threads” of experience drawn from participation in diverse small cultures can open up new ways of approaching the intercultural.

The second article by Yongjian Li and Fred Dervin raises critical questions around how the notion of democracy is understood in recent work by the Council of Europe which links interculturality and democratic competences, pointing to the dangers of taking a Eurocentric notion of democracy for granted. As one example, they point out that discourses on democracy produced in the West frequently position China as problematic “other,” yet the authors argue that notions and values congruent with democratic thinking are indeed strategically embedded within Chinese basic education. The authors present an analysis of textbook extracts to locate democratic thinking, arguing that such endeavors are important for intercultural scholars in order to problematize what is meant by democracy and explore

similarities and differences interculturally.

The third article by Si-Chun Song, Zohreh R. Eslami, and Kim Blanca Galindo deals with how culture influences the perception of a public apology (Netflix apology), comparing Chinese and U.S. students. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data shows how those involved in the study interpreted the sincerity of the apology with reference to verbal and non-verbal features, revealing cross-cultural differences in the perception of the non-verbal domain. This study shows how reflection on such incidents can be used to reveal culturally informed perceptions of participants, and therefore has implications for the use of evaluative tasks in language and intercultural education.

References

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Troy McConachy (PhD, University of South Australia) is Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics at University of Warwick, UK. His research lies at the intersections of applied linguistics, intercultural communication, and education, specifically looking at the development of intercultural capabilities within language learning, internationalisation of higher education, intercultural pragmatics, and discursive representations of interculturality. In addition to various book chapters and journal articles, he has recently published the monograph *Developing Intercultural Perspectives on Language Use: Exploring Pragmatics and Culture in Foreign Language Learning* (Multilingual Matters).