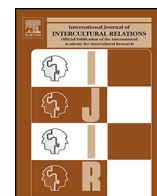




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## Editorial

## Intercultural competence: Looking back and looking ahead



About a decade after the publication of the 1989 intercultural communication competence special issue of IJIR, I recall reading it with great interest as a graduate student. The issue featured articles by researchers whom I had come to know as giants in the discipline. While I had not met any of them at that time, I had avidly engaged with their ideas. In fact some of those ideas were instrumental in shaping my doctoral research. Little did I realise then that I would have the honour of co-editing the next special issue in ICC (with Darla K. Deardorff), some twenty-five years since the publication of the first one. Before I delve further into introducing this special issue, my co-editor and I must extend our sincere thanks not only to the contributors who made this issue possible, but also to the scholars who offered their time and expertise in reviewing the papers in this issue.

While the 1989 special issue was on intercultural *communication* competence featuring articles by some of the foremost experts in intercultural communication, the current special issue is best labelled intercultural competence, as it features articles that approach ICC from multiple disciplines, not necessarily focusing on the communication aspect of intercultural competence.

In my opinion, the current issue is simultaneously about looking back at where we have been and looking ahead to where we should go in ICC research. We had invited the contributors from the 1989 special issue to reflect on the past twenty-five years. All contactable authors enthusiastically agreed to contribute to the current issue. These invited contributors include Judith Martin, who wrote the foreword for the 1989 special issue and co-authored an article with Mitchell Hammer; Brent Ruben; Brian Spitzberg; Mary Jane Collier; Jolene Koester, whose 1989 article was co-authored with Margaret Olebe (her present article is co-authored with Myron Lustig); Mitchell Hammer, who had two co-authored articles in the 1989 issue, one with Judith Martin and one with Richard Wiseman and Hiroko Nishida; Devorah Liberman, whose 1989 article was co-authored with Norman Dinges (her current article is co-authored with Glenn Gamst), and Daniel Kealey. These scholars represent some of the forerunners of research in ICC whose work has been foundational to the research that has followed. While not one of the contributors to the 1989 special issue, the current issue also features a full-length original article by another key scholar in intercultural communication, Young Yun Kim.

The articles in this issue are written by researchers from a variety of disciplines, such as psychology, communication, and education, to name a few; from different parts of the world, and from different methodological perspectives.

Chi and Suthers make a case for studying ICC in a broader contextual manner rather than focusing on it as an individual attribute. They argue that ICC can be co-created by members of a community. Defining ICC as, “the ability to develop meaningful intercultural relations with host and other nationals,” the authors use social network analysis to measure ICC in the context of acculturation. The authors challenge future researchers to consider how changes in social context could affect one’s ICC, thus making a case for looking at measures of ICC that are not solely individual-based.

Based on previous findings that optimal learning from travel abroad experiences occurs through systematic reflection and education, Jackson presents a course that she has developed specifically for the purpose of facilitating students to get the most from their international experiences. Students are required to have current or recent international experiences in order to be eligible for enrolment in this course. With the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and qualitative responses, Jackson demonstrates the effectiveness of this course in facilitating intercultural competence through critical reflection of international experiences.

Using another classroom-based approach, Wang and Kulich demonstrate that involving students in purposeful and reflective qualitative interactions with people from other cultures facilitates the development of ICC. Wang and Kulich also use

IDI and qualitative responses in their investigation of three research questions, and identify ten intercultural attributes from their data.

Miller and Tucker explore the relationship between critical thinking and ICC and investigate the aspects of ICC that are most challenging for participants based in the US military service. The authors work with a definition of intercultural competence as, “the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively act in a culturally complex environment to achieve the desired effect – without necessarily having had prior exposure to a particular group, region, or language.”

Also involving military participants, Rasmussen and Sieck’s study identifies nine culture-general competencies, namely cultural sensemaking, suspending/withholding judgment, perspective taking, cultural knowledge, language proficiency, self-presentation, emotion regulation/affect/self-efficacy, cultural learning, and understanding self. The authors suggest that intensive exposure to different cultures facilitates the development of reasoning and learning strategies that are transferable to new cultural contexts.

Garnering responses from intercultural practitioners and scholars, Nam, Weaver, and delMas venture to discover major ethical concerns of persons involved in the practice and scholarship of intercultural relations. Despite differences of opinion between scholars and practitioners, the authors communicate general consensus that there should be a set standard of ethical practice in intercultural relations. The authors identify this study as one of the first in the efforts toward broadly addressing ethical concerns in intercultural relations.

Kim presents a new theoretical approach to understanding ICC. Introducing the concept of synchrony as a “state of symmetric or complementary nonverbal configurations and rhythms in face-to-face interactions,” Kim proposes that one’s ability to foster synchrony is a basic dimension of ICC, and presents four culture-general theorems for the reader’s consideration.

These original articles, in addition to the invited reflections from some of the contributors to the 1989 special issue, make this current issue rich with ideas and questions for our consideration as we step into the next twenty-five years of research in ICC. The reflections from the invited authors include their perspectives on, “Where to from here?” Instead of repeating them, let me conclude with a few thoughts of my own.

As others have observed, our understanding of “intercultural” needs to be a subject of continual study. At the individual level, there are increasing numbers of people whose identity and values are shaped by multiple cultural influences. At the relational/contextual level, global mobility and technological innovations have created an environment in which the means of communication and the dynamics of communication are fluid. And this in turn calls for continual study of our understanding of “competence.” My co-editor, Darla K. Deardorff, raises specific questions that merit reflection and action. I believe that there are culture-general understandings of genuine communication that are worth exploring. We may label this as “competence” or something else, yet the desire to identify a (possibly replicable) recipe for this is one of the motivating factors in ICC research, though by no means the only one. Going forward, I believe our understanding of ICC will be vastly enriched by interdisciplinary collaborative research. While I am acutely cognizant of the political, perceptual, and pragmatic factors that often influence social dynamics, I remain hopeful that our research in ICC will also be influential, facilitating the cultivation of societies that are compassionate toward, and interested in, the “other.”

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