

Week 1 Introduction to the course

Human beings are drawn close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart.

Confucius, Chinese thinker and philosopher, 551-479BC

Course introduction

A warm welcome to COMU7311! This course introduces you to advanced theories in intercultural communication, and skills for applying the knowledge in professional practices. It equips you with the capacity to critically evaluate the key role communication plays in developing intercultural relations and in resolving intercultural conflicts. It also enables you to engage sensitively, confidently and appropriately with individuals, groups, and communities in local, national and international communication environments. I strongly encourage your active participation in the course!

Learning objectives

After this lecture, you should be able to:

- Have a good understanding of the course structure and requirements.
- Recognise the importance of knowledge of intercultural communication.



Required reading

Savva, M. (2017). The personal struggles of 'national' educators working in 'international' schools: an intercultural perspective. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 15(5), 576-589.

[Available on Blackboard]

Reflecting on the reading

This paper reports how personal struggles associated with the overseas setting caused changes in the intercultural perspective of 30 Anglophone educators who work in international schools. The researchers adopted a social constructivist framework for the study. They conducted interviews with the 30 educators and used the data to build a collective narrative shared by educators. Findings revealed that although prolonged exposure to new cultural norms resulted in changes in intercultural perspective, these changes were not related to traditional notions of cultural immersion. Rather, they were related to the educators' inability to integrate into the host cultures. The obstacles those educators experienced included a lack of language proficiency of the host country, differences in values and practices and discriminatory practices based on national and race affiliation. This article makes an interesting and insightful reading, particularly for those of you who might consider working overseas in the future.



Critical thinking...

- In what ways has our world become more unified as a result of globalisation?
- In what ways has our world become more diversified as a result of globalisation?

Living in an interconnected world

Our early ancestors lived in small villages; most of them rarely ventured far from their own communities. They lived and died close to where they were born and much of their information sharing was done through face-to-face communication with others who were much like themselves. Today, Marshall McLuhan's vision of a "global village" is no longer considered an abstract idea but a reality. We can exchange ideas as easily and as quickly with people across the world; we encounter people from different cultures in business, at school, in public places, in neighbourhoods and in cyberspace. The increased intercultural encounters bring opportunities of understanding between peoples as well as possibilities of misunderstanding. The increased intercultural encounters also lead people to think and ask the question, "who I am" or "who we are" – our identities.



Critical thinking...

- Do we actually partake a more unified or diversified world because communication technologies bring us closer?
- What are the biggest differences? What remains the same?

Challenges we face in a global society

All over the world, nations are trying to come to terms with the growing diversity of their populations. In the wake of attempting to fully maximise the benefits of cultural diversity, there has also been an accompanying awareness of some potential threats to our cultural uniqueness. Globally, host nationals have expressed concerns over the threat ethnic cultures might pose on the mainstream cultural values, the political and economic power structure and the distribution of employment opportunities. Many countries have implemented laws to restrict immigration. For example, the so called "Trump wall" between the U.S and Mexican border has been an ongoing debate. Ethnic groups, on the other hand, have long been forming associations to maintain their ethnic cultural heritage and promote the survival of their languages in the host country. The challenge we face is how to reap the benefits of cultural diversity and reduce intercultural tensions.



Critical thinking...

- Do you know any ethnic community associations in Brisbane or in your country? What are their functions?

Importance of knowledge and skills in intercultural communication

The key to build understanding between groups and nations is effective communication. The study of intercultural communication helps us develop knowledge of other cultures as well as discover more about our own culture. It enables you to better appreciate diversity among people and makes you a more competent communicator in diverse cultural contexts. However, such knowledge and skills do not come naturally; they have to be acquired through conscious learning.

The cultural collage exercise

This exercise prepares you for the first assignment (My culture and my people). Understanding yourself and your own culture is a starting point for you to appreciate similarities and differences between cultures and groups.



Your cultural collage visually tells others who you are. You may use this collage to put together information that depicts you as an individual and also as a member of a community, group, family, or profession. You may include information of your country, city, travels, food, hobbies, interests, values, worldviews, etc. This collage will let other people know how/where you situate yourself in the world. The purpose of this exercise is for you to reflect on your own culture and identity. This will help you to understand other cultures as well as the relationship among culture, communication and identities.

Next week

Week 2's lecture will focus on exploring culture, its characteristics, and how it influences our thinking, doing, and being.