

Intercultural Dialogue: Connecting with Empathy Across Difference

2025 SAIS Annual Conference

Sarasota

Melissa Brown, Director of Professional
Development and Intercultural Programs





The **Institute for Global Learning (formerly GEBG) connects educators with the community and resources they need to engage their students with the world, in the classroom and well beyond.**

What We Offer:

- Professional Learning
- Research and Resources
- Student Programming
- Collaborative Community

Areas of Focus:

- Global Perspectives and Issues across the Curriculum
- Intercultural Dialogue
- Students as Engaged Global Citizens
- Climate Education
- Off-Campus and Experiential Learning

www.globallearning.org

OVERVIEW



Part One

Setting Purpose: Why are we here?



Part Two

Clarifying Language: Culture, identity, and intercultural competence



Part Three

Building Muscles: What is Intercultural Dialogue and How does it differ from other forms of discourse?



Part Four

Diving in: Engaging in Intercultural Dialogue

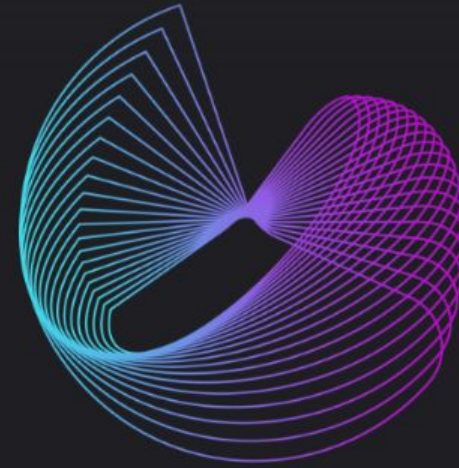
Setting Purpose: Why are we here?



MEGATRENDS.

THE MEGATRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY.

World in 2050 focuses on identifying challenges and solutions on the following five research clusters, each representing a megatrend that will be transformative for our long-term future.



EXPONENTIAL TECHNOLOGIES RESHAPING THE WORLD.

Data ownership and
Privacy; Blockchain;
Cryptocurrency; AI,
Machine Learning.



CLIMATE CHANGE DISRUPTING OUR LIVES

Clean Energy
Innovation; National &
Corporate Strategies;
Access to Energy.



THE FUTURE WORKPLACE CARES MORE ABOUT SKILLS

The Skills Economy;
Social & Emotional
Learning; Skills
Passport; Credentialing.



SOCIETAL DISTRUST, FRAGMENTATION ARE SURGING

Misinformation, Fake
News, Distrust Across
Social Groups and Toward
Leadership & Institutions.



GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS ARE AT THEIR WEAKEST

The Weakening of
Democracy and the
Rule of Law. Rising
Inequality.

DEI Initiatives

Brandon University
students and instructors
take a stand against U.S.
DEI push back

Freedom of Speech and Censorship

*University Free Speech
Conflicts Rise Amid Calls
to Cancel Speakers*

Identity and Gender Rights

*Georgian Parliament
Approves
Anti-LGBTQ+ Law
Despite President's
Refusal to Sign*

Political Polarization and Nationalism

*Brexit Still Britain's
Most Polarising
Issue*

Economic Inequality and Social Justice

*Income Inequality
Worsens Amid
Global Inflation
Crisis*

Technology and Ethics

*AI Surveillance
Sparks Ethics
Debate Over
Privacy*

Climate Change and Environmental Policy

Florence and Pisa on
alert as flooding hits
Italy

Merit vs. Representation

**News for the powerful and
privileged: how
misrepresentation and
underrepresentation of
disadvantaged communities
undermine their trust in news**

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Ontario measles cases
more than double over
last 2 weeks, 31
hospitalizations reported



The Brain Science of Outrage: What Teachers Need to Know

“Humans evolved to think, learn, and problem-solve with other people, not alone, but emerging brain research suggests that stress and anxiety, isolation, and information overload in the modern world—from pandemic distancing to social media and screen addictions—are making it more difficult for our brains to cope with even mildly uncomfortable conversations.”

By Sarah Sparks, EdWeek, August 26, 2024



So, how can we prepare student to connect, communicate, and collaborate across difference?

What are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they will need
to develop?

To thrive, students will need to...

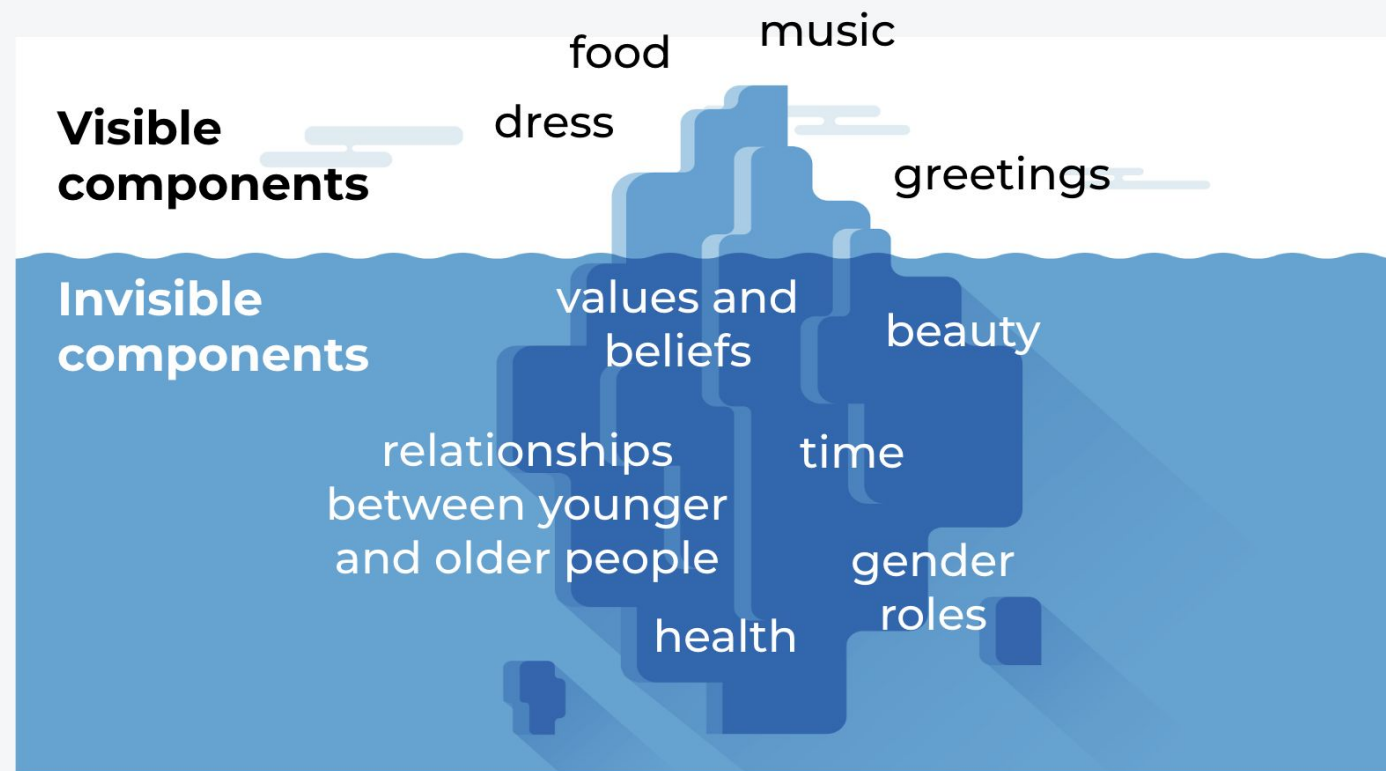
- see themselves as **members of the global community** and recognize that the challenges the world faces are **interdependent** and that **our choices and actions may have repercussions** for people and communities locally and globally.
- engage in **open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures** and take an **active role in working with others** to make the world a more just, peaceful, inclusive, secure and sustainable place.

Clarifying Language: Culture, Identity and Intercultural Competence

What can make connecting,
communicating and collaborating
across difference so challenging?



Culture and Identity

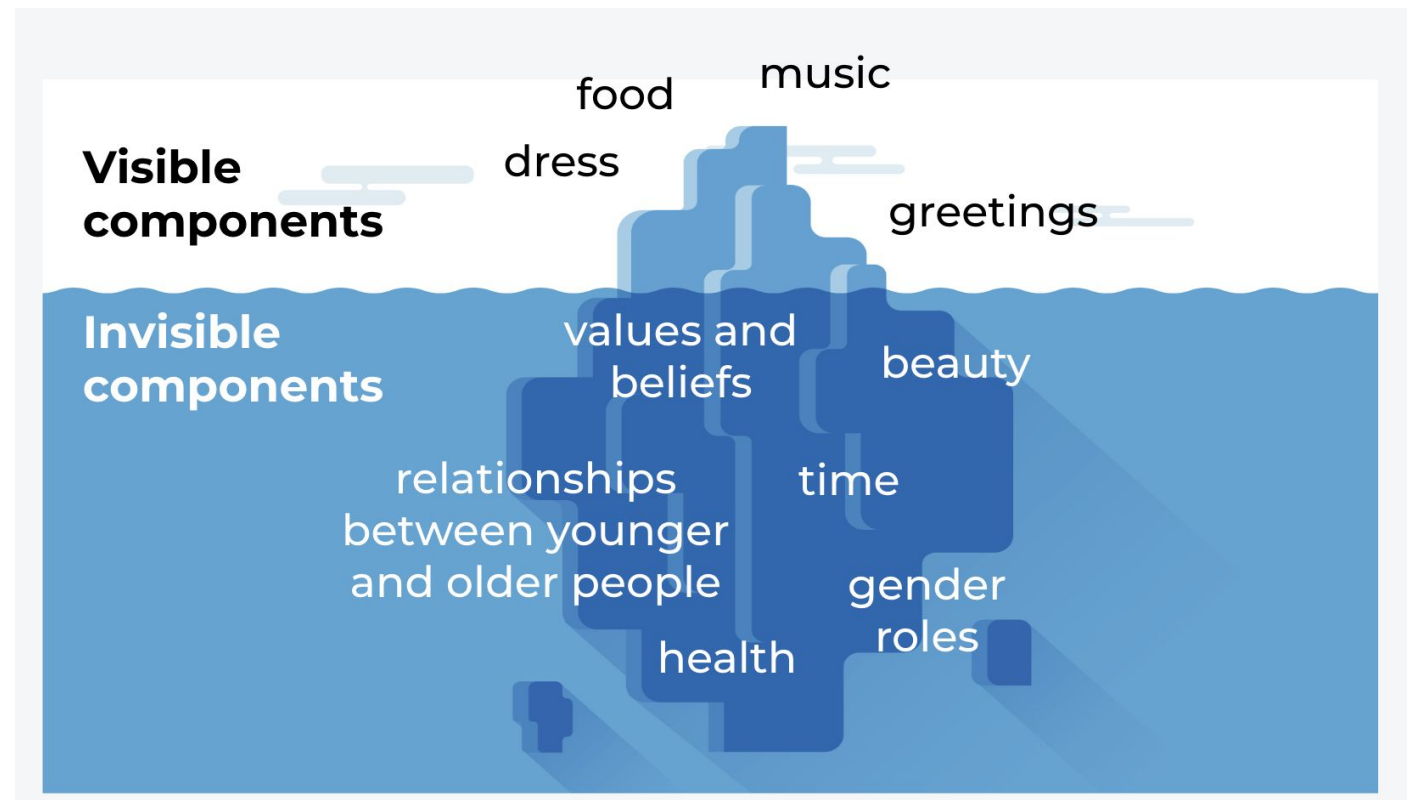


What is Culture? Why does it Matter?

Culture is the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Culture is...

- rooted in socialization.
- learned.
- a means to fulfill desires and needs.
- the result of collective, historical patterns, values, manners, ideas, and ways of ordering society.
- always changing and evolving.



Dimensions of Identity



Dominant and Non-dominant Identities are...

- shaped by culture at a societal level (not at an individual level)
- socially constructed and given meaning through social processes and interactions.
- not inherent or biologically determined.
- Ascribed and avowed

Through socialization...

- we learn characteristics and expectations associated with social groups that influence life experiences and opportunities.

The degree to which we are aware of our identifiers also known as salience, and the intensity with which we avow them changes based on context.



Categories of Human Activity Addressed by Culture

- Religious beliefs
- Leadership
- Justice, punishment and appropriate conduct
- Acculturation
- Economic organization
- Rites of passage, rituals, and ceremonies
- Expression
- Food preferences and rules of consumption
- Non-verbal communication

- Concept of human's place in the world
- Core values
- Beauty, love, truth, friendship, and loyalty
- Modesty
- Time
- Individual vs. collective
- Privilege and responsibility
- Personal space and privacy
- Gender strengths, duties, and roles



Stereotypes vs. Generalizations

Cultural Generalizations:

- describe cultural reactions, attitudes, and behaviors in a general way.
- describe predominant tendencies in a cultural group
- are flexible and respond to new information.
- No generalization will apply to everyone in the group.

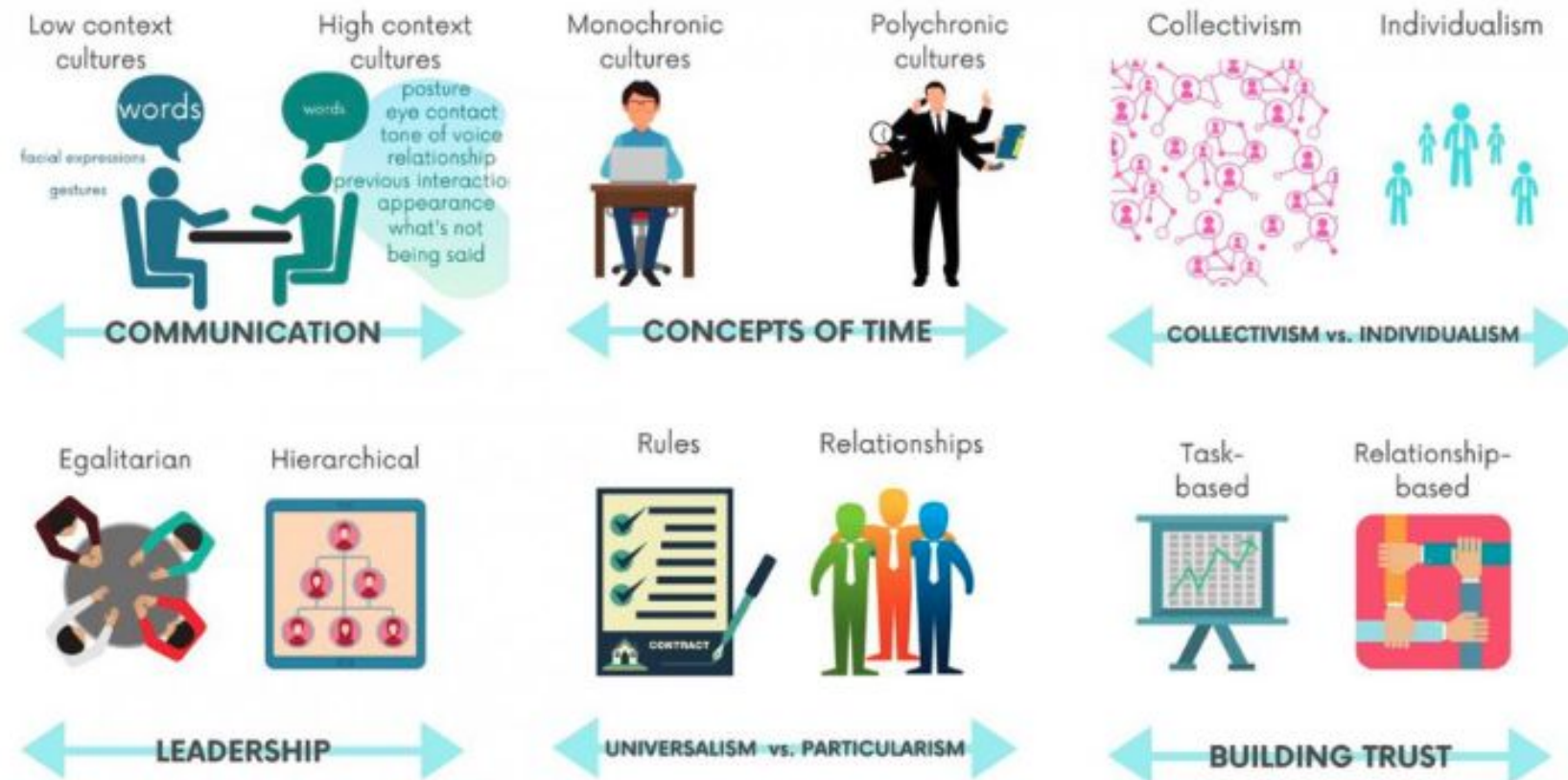
Personality, experience, and context shape how people make meaning, think, and act. Culture is constantly changing and evolving!

Stereotypes:

- characterize groups unfairly, collectively, and often negatively, based on experience with only a few
- infused with emotion
- are incomplete, rigid, and do not respond to new information.



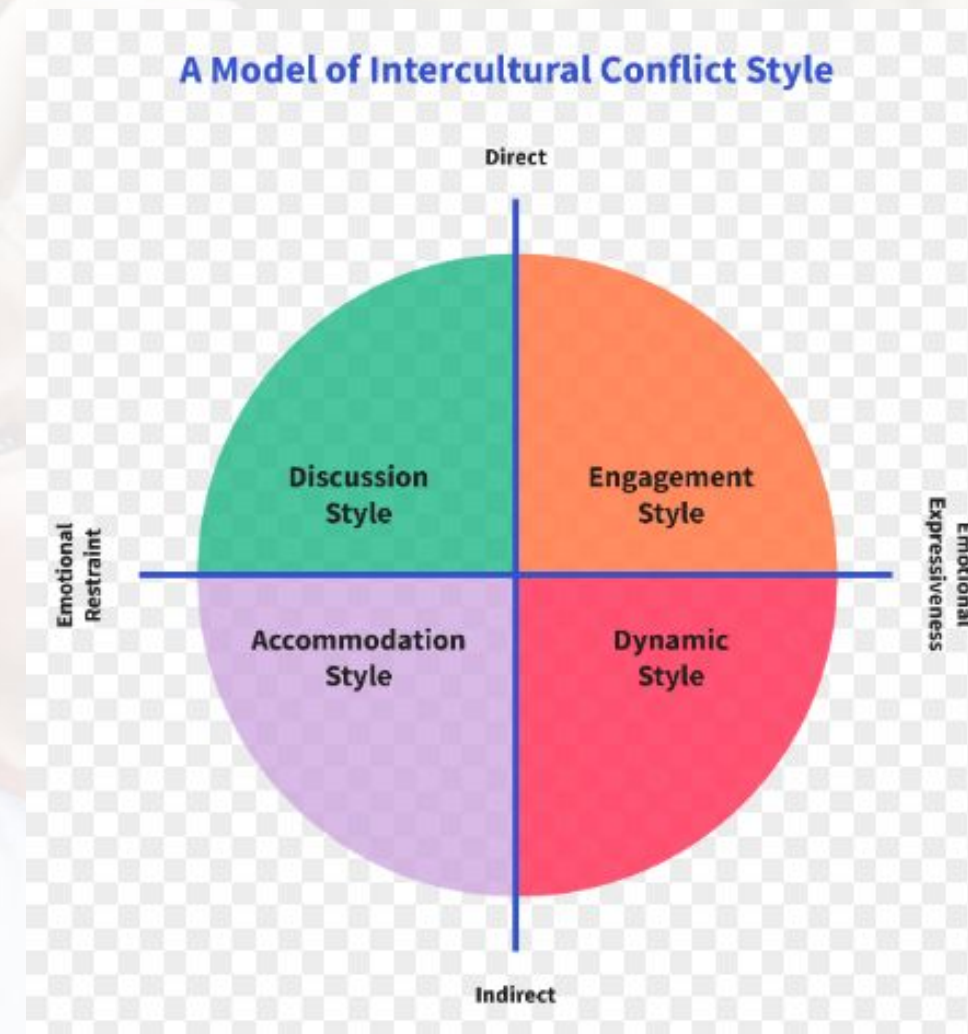
Cultural Value Dimensions



Reference List: Chameleon Coaching. (n.d.). *Six essential cultural dimensions that will change how you view the world*. Retrieved March 13, 2025, from <https://chameleon-coaching.com/en/six-essential-cultural-dimensions-that-will-change-how-you-view-the-world/>

Conflict Styles

X axis- How we express emotions around conflict
Y axis- How we discuss conflict



Hammer, M. R. (2005). The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory: A conceptual framework and measure of intercultural conflict resolution approaches. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 675–695. <https://icsinventory.com/media/files/pdfs/ICS%20Validation%202005.pdf>



How can we cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to ...

engage in **open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures** and take an **active role in working with others** to make the world a more just, peaceful, inclusive, secure and sustainable place.

Intercultural Competence

Kathryn Sorrells, PH.D. defines intercultural competence as a process of critical, reflective thinking and acting that allows us to navigate complex and challenging intercultural situations.

INTERCULTURAL PRAXIS MODEL KATHRYN SORRELLS, PH.D.

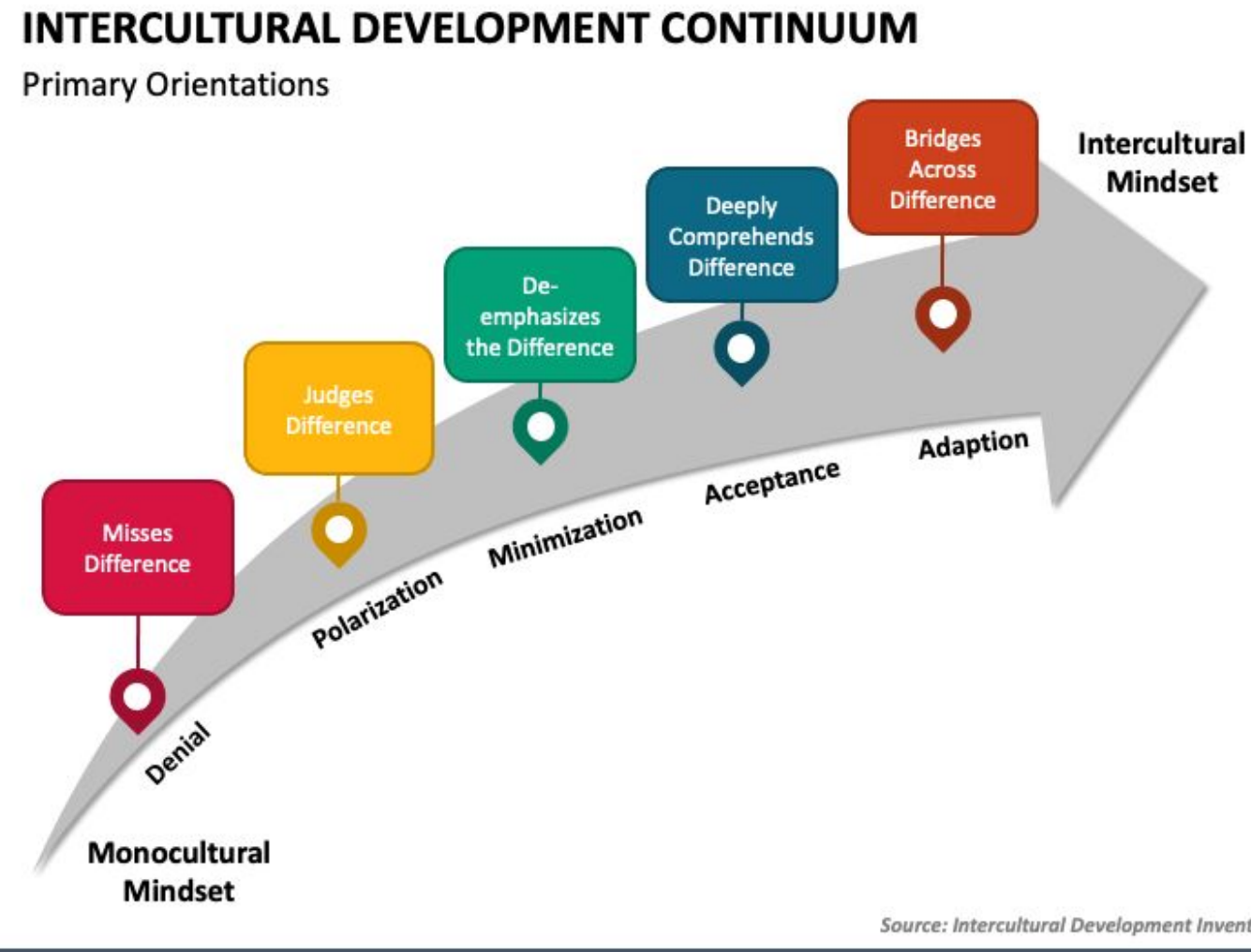


Bridging Differences: Intercultural Competence

Mitchell R. Hammer, PhD, defines intercultural competence as "the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities".

Monocultural Mindsets

- view one's own culture as the standard. Does not recognize or value the perspectives and practices of other cultures.
- resist change focusing on similarity and minimizing cultural differences.



Intercultural/Global Mindset

- recognizes, respects, and seeks to understand and adapt to cultural differences.
- actively engages with diverse cultures, showing openness and flexibility, and works toward fostering mutual understanding and collaboration



Turn and Talk

How does your school support students and colleagues to:

- Engage across difference (culture/perspective)
- Engage with complex issues
- Encourage nuanced thinking

Share an example with your table of a time that went well and a time that didn't go so well.

What is dialogue?

... and how does it differ from other forms of discourse?



What's Dialogue *(and what it's not)*

Debate

a contest that utilizes factual evidence to prove that one perspective is better or more correct than others

Discussion

an evidence-based examination or a methodical dissection of a concept or topic

Conversation

a sharing of ideas whose ultimate goal is to surface shared understandings and foster agreement

Dialogue

an exchange of perspectives and experiences that requires participants to actively listening in order to foster cognitive empathy

**What does our research
on intercultural dialogue
say?**



Understanding Any Impact of Low-Commitment Virtual Dialogues with Students

2020-2023 Research Study

Dr. Clare Sisisky

Klingenstein Center, Columbia University



Research Question 1:

What, if any, were the skills related to intercultural communication and perspective taking that students self-reported practicing in low-commitment virtual dialogues?

Research Question 2:

What, if anything, did students report as meaningful to them during these dialogues?

2020-2023 Research Study

Dr. Clare Sisisky

Klingenstein Center, Columbia University



E.E. Ford Grant and Global Student Dialogues Program

Leading Partner Schools (23)

- Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, PA
- Appleby College, ON
- BB&N, MA
- Brewster Academy, NH
- Castilleja School, CA
- Columbus School for Girls, OH
- Flintridge Prep, CA
- Friends Seminary, NY
- Groton, MA
- Holton Arms School, MD
- Holy Innocents' Episcopal School, GA
- Lower Canada College, QC
- McDonogh School, MD
- Miami Country Day, FL
- Pace Academy, GA
- Palmer Trinity School, FL
- Polytechnic School, CA
- Providence Day, NC
- Rye Country Day School, NY
- St Andrew's Episcopal School, MS
- St Mary's Episcopal School, TN
- St. Mark's School, MA
- Trinity School NYC, NY

Competencies practiced and honed through Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural Communication

- I adapt the way that I speak in order to respond to my specific audience.
- I actively listen to try to understand, not respond.
- I respond directly to a statement to build collective, nuanced understanding.
- I balance speaking with giving others a chance to contribute.
- I find both verbal and nonverbal ways of showing a speaker that I am listening.

Perspective Taking

- I share my own unique perspective, based on my identities and experiences.
- I ask questions about a peer's perspective to better understand it.
- I seek clarification when others share something I don't understand.
- I reflect on how my perspective is both similar and different to that of others.
- I desire to think about a topic in new and more nuanced ways.



Dialogue ...

- emphasizes intercultural communication and perspective taking.
- encourages nuanced thinking
- fosters cognitive empathy.
- balances individual thought and identity with shared practices and beliefs
- acknowledge the importance of emotional intelligence



Dialogue ...

*deemphasizes content
knowledge*

and

*emphasizes **self-knowledge,**
intercultural communication,
and **perspective-taking.***



Dialogue 101



Anatomy of a Dialogue

- **Pre-Dialogue:** Topic, norms, prompts
- **Dialogue:** Introductions, orientation
- **Post-Dialogue:** Debrief



Structure

Who: Faculty and Administration

Time: 15 minutes

Goals:

- Share perspectives and experiences
- Listen to understand
- Leave knowing more about the perspectives and experiences in the room than when before you joined the dialogue



Framing the Topic

Framing the Topic

What are we talking about, and why does it matter?

- What is the topic we will be addressing?
- What makes this topic important to dialogue about?
- How is the topic relevant to you/our school/community?
- Why is the topic important to engage with this topic in local, national, and/or international contexts?
- What might partner or collaborate with others to take action regarding this topic?



Framing

Frame: Bridging Differences: Navigating Challenging Conversations

As educators, we play a crucial role in guiding students to engage in meaningful conversations across differences. Yet, addressing challenging topics—whether in our classrooms or in our own lives—can feel complex, personal, and sometimes uncertain.

In this dialogue, we will reflect on our own experiences with complex topics, exploring what has shaped our ability to engage, and hold space for multiple perspectives.



Dialogue Prompts

Consider 1-3 from each category

Introductory & Exploratory Prompts <i>In general, consider opening prompts that begin with "how", "why", "in what way(s)", or "to what extent"</i>	Perspective-Sharing Prompts <i>In general, inquire about different points of view and perspectives about the topic</i>	Probing Prompts <i>In general, encourage thinking about effects of the issue or topic, or learning from personal experiences</i>
<i>What do you know, and what have you experienced/witnessed? What don't you know? What are you curious about?</i>	<i>What do you think, and how do you feel?</i>	<i>What could be done, and how can we plug in?</i>



Prompts

- Share a time when you engaged in a complex exchange across differences—whether in your personal life or as an educator. How did you feel? What made it challenging? What did you do? Why?
- What messages—spoken or unspoken—did you receive growing up about engaging with topics that might feel sensitive or contentious? How do those messages influence you now?
- What does it take for you to really listen to someone whose views are different from yours? How do you stay open in those moments?
- What are some topics about which you cannot engage? Why?



Norms

- Enter dialogue with humility.
- Speak from the I perspective.
- Take responsibility for words and actions.
- Recognize and honor of the multiple dimensions of identity.
- Balance contributing with listening.
- Listen to understand.
- Honor the pauses.
- Ask questions that get to the “why”.



Debrief: Whip Around

- What did you see, notice, wonder during today's dialogue?
- What is one word that describes how you're feeling after this dialogue?
- What's one thing that you heard that resonated with you or shifted the way you think about navigating difficult topics?
- What's a question you're still sitting with?
- Share something else.



Post Dialogue: Debriefing

Deepens Understanding

Debriefing helps participants unpack the dialogue, explore perspectives more fully, and move beyond surface-level conversation.

Processes Emotions

It provides a safe space to reflect on emotions, confront biases, and share discomfort or questions that surfaced during the dialogue.

Fosters Empathy

Debriefing builds empathy by encouraging reflection on others' experiences, deepening intercultural understanding and connection.



Post Dialogue: Debriefing

- **Encourages Self-Awareness**

Debriefing invites reflection on personal biases, assumptions, and blind spots.

- **Highlights Diverse Perspectives**

It creates space for participants to share unique experiences and enrich the group's understanding.

- **Clarifies Misunderstandings**

Debriefing helps clear up confusion caused by different communication styles or cultural norms.



Diving in! Sample Dialogue



Structure

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Time: 15 minutes

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Prompts

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Tips for Successful Dialogue

- *Build competencies early and consistently.*
- *Design to center student voice and needs.*
- *Scale the complexity/polarization of the topics over time.*
- *Consider the context (class/activity, optional/required).*
- *Know your own community.*



A background image showing a group of children playing outdoors. In the foreground, a young child with light hair is looking up, holding a white paper airplane. Other children are visible in the background, also playing with paper airplanes. The scene is bright and sunny.

Reflection and Take-Aways

How, where, when might dialogue be helpful at your school or in your area of responsibility?

Who might you be able to partner with to implement dialogue into your area of responsibility?

What are some questions that are circling for you regarding intercultural dialogue?

Institute for Global Learning Resources

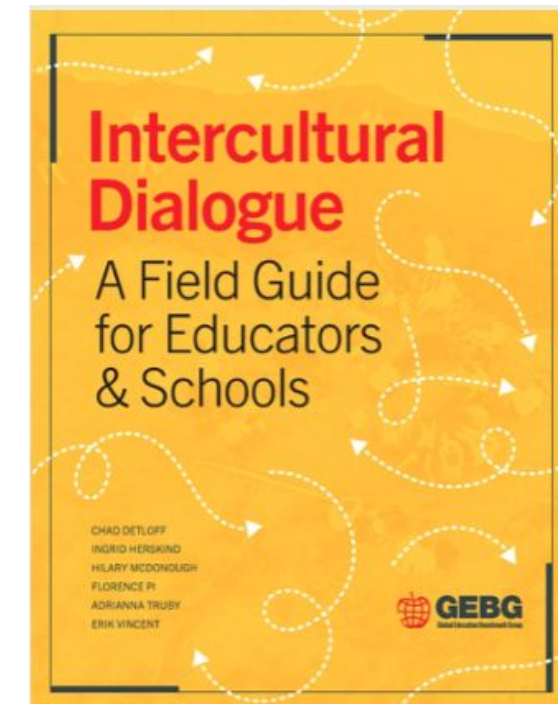
[Custom Intercultural Dialogue Work with Educators and Students](#)

[Global Competence Certificate for Educators in Partnership with AFS](#)

[Global Competence Certificate for Students in Partnership with AFS](#)

[Virtual Student Dialogues](#)

[Intercultural Dialogue Field Guide](#)



THANK YOU!

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