

# Intercultural Communication

*Building a Global Community*

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## Foreword

The authors of this book have embraced a challenging but very important task of providing insights into intercultural communication in ways that honour powerful and deeply held views from multiple cultures. Each of the three authors celebrate in these pages the struggles they have encountered in their own developmental journey, and the message of this work is stronger for it.

The book rightly points to the growing realization that freely-available education for all opens doors to new ways of seeing and being in the world. Correctly, the authors describe how earlier generations valued education, realizing its salience as a means by which social conditions could be improved and familial aspirations might be met. However, Patel, Li and Sooknanan also rightly show how education is more than about just opening the door to better jobs and income. These are important but, in a rapidly globalizing world, not enough. Also essential is education that creates an improved person, one more sophisticated in their understanding of self and of others and with enhanced insights into what it takes to create and maintain a just and prosperous new globalized world.

This work also rightly draws attention to the tensions that inevitably accompany the interplay of cultures. The news media loves to spin intercultural meeting points as necessarily being conflict-ridden, typically employing phrases such as 'the clash of cultures'. In this way the media ignores the wealth of new perspectives that might readily emerge from fresh engagement with new cultural ways of seeing. Sometimes people say that 'no news is good news' but the media evidently prefers the view that 'good news is no news'. Much more productively, though, Patel, Li

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and Sooknanan, building upon their own deep intercultural experience, show us how to be open to fresh ways of seeing the world; and this is one of the enormous benefits of an enhanced intercultural communication.

Of special value within this book is its attention to the salience of religion and allied aspects of the sacred as the basis for cultural values and beliefs. In recent generations the West has become increasingly secular, but educators and writers from the West in particular, need to be much more open than formerly to understanding the way in which what is understood as the sacred in many other societies, in fact, underpins culture and then, in turn, informs intercultural communication.

The authors allude to 'the great cultural journey' that they have made in their own experience, which of course has led to this book. Equally true though is that in one way or another, nearly every citizen of this planet is also now undertaking his or her own version of a great cultural journey, as social communication media of numerous emerging kinds, especially mobile phones in developing societies, inexorably infiltrate nearly every society. In previous generations, only the wealthy with time on their hands and an urge to travel could regard themselves as citizens of the world. These days, however, in a sense (like it or not) everyone is starting to attain this status. This book opens the door to the status of a global citizen. In a practical sense, it shows us as readers how to undertake that critical self-reflection which in turn leads us to a better appreciation of and insights into the diversity and cultural wealth possessed by communities worldwide.

Often researchers and commentators rightly talk about the value of indigenous knowledge in societies that are newly encountering the impact of the West, and they describe the importance of honouring such indigenous knowledge. However, the role of true intercultural education, as in this book, should not really be just about putting a barrier fence around indigenous knowledge to protect it as if it is a kind of rare and endangered species. Instead, the larger task of intercultural education is to issue a wake-up call to Western societies and open them (us) to an improved understanding of how the West will benefit from a new understanding, founded on humility and openness, to how we can obtain powerful insights into the historical legacies, practical spirituality, and everyday value systems from which we ourselves might also be enhanced.

## Foreword

You will find argued here the crucial global need for the everyday practice of social justice, along with practice of the critical virtues of patience, tolerance and good faith. These are more than a statement of aspiration: they underpin how we are to relate to others in a global basis, in what is now an essential effort to build a global community in which the dignity of all is valued. As Patel, Li and Sooknanan claim, only when each of us understands how to ground ourselves within our own traditions of family, spirituality and history, can we properly respond and do justice to others whom we encounter in our rapidly-emerging new global environment.

Finally, Patel, Li and Sooknanan offer us their very insightful thought that 'often our voices are one and yet they are unique all at the same time'. Perhaps this is one of the deep and enduring paradoxes at the heart of intercultural communication and one of the special gifts of this book. Each of us needs to be proud of our uniqueness, celebrate our diversity, but, as well, open ourselves to learn from others and then, via intercultural communication, find commonality on how to create a prosperous but sustainable global society. I congratulate the authors of this book for their important contribution to this goal.

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