

# Griffin, Brenda, ed., *Intercultural Communication: Strategies, Challenges and Research*

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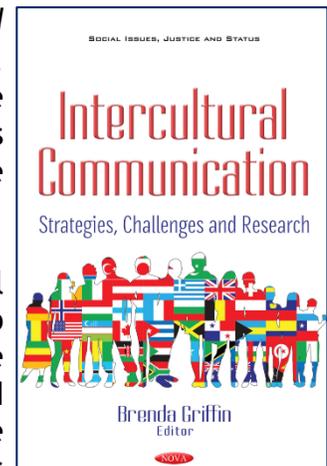
*Reviewed by Dr. George F. Simons at [diversophy.com](http://diversophy.com)*

*Intercultural Communication: Strategies, Challenges and Research* is an interesting collection of five, at first sight, seemingly disparate essays focused on different areas of the world as well as on socially distinct groups. These studies become linked only by the expanding how one frames the theme of intercultural communication.

The first essay addresses teacher education for multicultural learning environments. It records the researchers' efforts to explore the reframing of basic childhood education stressing the importance of play particularly in the preschool curriculum and environment. Long-term experimentation and assessment are reported. This leads to a highly technical description of studies about attempts to change specific environments and measure the results of increased play in terms of learning on the part of preschool and incipient primary school children. The nonprofessional reader will probably be disappointed in the fact that the play activities are not described in much detail, as it would be interesting to imagine and picture what the children were actually doing and how it differed from what they did previously.

The second chapter describes qualitative research on a rather successful project team communication in a managerial environment involving Chinese and German participants working in English in the process of setting up a custom telecommunication network. It explores both the up and downsides of strategies needed for using a corporate language as a link with the various levels of fluency required and encountered as a project proceeds and as it involves personnel of various functions and authority. The key challenge here is the existence of personnel who may be competent in general language ability and those not so generally competent but well immersed in the genre language (specific to the technical aspects and details). Put in personal terms, this is a situation I can find myself in when taking a car to the garage for repairs. My daily conversational French is quite good, but, lift the bonnet on the *bagnole*, and I am lost, whereas the immigrant mechanic has words and functions for everything, but has a hard time bringing them to bear on my confusion with the technical problem.

The third section of the book is about Gypsy media in the Transcarpathia and the struggle for social inclusion and economic advancement where cultural differences are hindered due to long-standing exclusion. Forced integration has been a failed



strategy and bad press had exacerbated bias. Now some cultural organizations have made progress in recognition and greater acceptance of Roma. Focus is on the newspaper *Romany Yag*, and the promotion of cultural unity and expression, a rebirth in online media as well as print. The situation nonetheless remains fragile.

Chapter Four deals with the cultural phenomena of rhythm and discourse which form an often-unappreciated aesthetic, or even a neglected feature within intercultural theory and practice. This essay by Stephen Holmes fascinated me most as an interculturalist. It reawakened my perspective, by putting some step and tune into what tended to be rather static and standard intercultural descriptions and dimensional modeling of communication. Alas, these are still very much in vogue for many teachers, practitioners and coaches. While it has been pointed out that the music and the dance, that is, vocal tonality, movement and gesture frequently outweigh the words we speak when we seek to establish meaning and intention, these elements are often ignored. This is perhaps because they are harder to interpret and, also perhaps because of our classic dichotomous thinking about human nature as split into mind and body. Opposing thinking and words to sensing and feeling has subordinated the physical to the mental in how we value them. This is a persuasion that contemporary neuroscience and cognitive psychology no longer permit us to hold. Artifacts and architecture are as culturally expressive as literature and rhetoric. Theory is now emerging to support our aesthetic sense.

The book closes with the study of Chilean migration from a woman's perspective. Half a century ago, I wrote an article asserting that gender was the ultimate cultural difference and, rereading it today in the light of this research essay, much of it seems still relevant. In this chapter, the phenomenon of migration and women's experience of it brings the topic into focus once again. While difference can be understood as part of one's being, the inner narrative of identity, it can be as well as a narrative externally imposed, as the two become entangled and politicized. This is unquestionably highlighted in the nakedness of the person imposed by migration. This essay shines this light on the female narrative of identity through qualitative research focused on migrant women in a specific Latin American context. Ten migrant subjects revealed their experiences, often discriminatory and subordinate positioning and treatment. One senses the pain and loss as they are frequently forced and molded into socially constructed roles and precarious employment situations.

In sum, this book broadens our sense of intercultural communication's challenges, allowing them to be seen in the experience of both communities and individuals in daily life and interaction with each other.