

NICI Study Abroad Student Handbook Appendix 3

Six Strategies for Building Confidence Communicating Interculturally

I am assuming if you are reading this you have made a decision to explore how you can communicate with more confidence with people who come from cultures other than the one you grew up in. Making that decision, even if it tentative, is the first in a lifelong journey that will offer you opportunities for understanding and friendships not possible before. Know that by being open to enhancing your intercultural communication you will make mistakes; and learn from them. You'll also reduce your anxiousness about talking with people from away, and you will develop an openness to difference that will offer chances to share in ways you have not experienced before.

Plan to adopt curiosity, mindfulness and an appreciation for difference and you WILL be rewarded for your efforts.

The following is a compilation of several excellent academic articles which focus on intercultural communication. The articles are posted on the NICI intranet site and can also be obtained from the NICI office in Courtenay. Feedback and sharing of your intercultural communication experiences and revelations are always welcome.

1. Assume there **are** differences between you and the other person!

Study the history, political structure, art, literature, and language of the country. This study will help you create a framework to observe. It will also help you to become curious, less judgemental and more comfortable with ambiguity (lack of certainty). All of this will help you be less defensive and more open to learning. You might also start to realize how some of your values and assumptions, from your cultural perspective, might be different from the other person.

2. Recognize that language will get in the way.

Definitely work on improving your use of the language, but also realize that words can have more than one meaning, depending on the situation. Understand that a different tone might create a slight difference in meaning. Use your new language, even if it is only Hola (an informal hello in Spanish) and arigato (Thanks in Japanese), you have opened doors to more communication.

Language patterns also create differences in meaning. For example in some countries it is normal when asked if you would like something to eat to say no the first time, no the second time and only on the third time give your real answer. Listen, observe, ask questions with sincerity and again, expect difference.

Know that culture is also reflected in how a language is spoken. Volume, articulation, pitch range and intensity, pace and accent are all parts of paralinguistics that are embedded in culture. For example Arabic spoken by two male friends may seem like an argument to a North American. The pace of Spanish is much faster than northern European languages.

How someone says something is as important as what they say. Consider both messages and be curious about any dissonance between the two messages.

And it's worth remembering that many cultures have English as their language of communication so just because someone is from away does not mean they don't speak English.