



BRIDGING CULTURES: APPLYING THE INTERCULTURAL PRAXIS MODEL IN CENTRAL ASIAN CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the application of Kathryn Sorrells' Intercultural Praxis Model (IPM) within Central Asian settings, notably Uzbekistan. Because the global arena is becoming more interconnected as a result of globalization, successful intercultural communication becomes ever more important, especially in multicultural-rich settings like Central Asia. The study explores how the six interconnected elements of the IPM, Inquiry, Framing, Positioning, Dialogue, Reflection, and Action, can be practically applied in navigating complex intercultural communication in Uzbekistan's multicultural social space.

Drawing on Central Asia's ancient heritage as a meeting point of civilizations along the old Silk Road, the article shows how classical cultural norms, contemporary influences, and Soviet legacies blend together to create unique intercultural dynamics. Through practical examples of Uzbek practices of hospitality, gender relations, business negotiations, and educational exchange, the research demonstrates the way each element of the IPM can lead to intercultural competence and mutual understanding.

The study illustrates that successful intercultural communication in Central Asia requires more than knowledge of cultures, it requires critical self-consciousness, awareness of power relations, and commitment to socially responsible action. The article concludes that through systematic application of the IPM model, both individual and institutional stakeholders can convert intercultural challenges into opportunities for effective communication, towards social cohesion and sustainable development in Central Asia's multicultural societies.

Introduction

Does it ever seem like our world is becoming more interconnected? Consider the clothes you are wearing right now. Who made them? Perhaps the cotton was woven in Uzbekistan, the design made in Italy, and the finished garment made in Bangladesh. Similar to your



clothes, your life is closely connected to people and cultures from around the globe, even if you never leave home.

In Central Asia, this interconnectedness is not new. For over a thousand years, the region has been the meeting point of civilizations, as caravans and visitors traversed the ancient Great Silk Road, exchanging commodities, ideas, and traditions. Today, Central Asia continues to be a vibrant meeting place of peoples, languages, and religions.

However, when people from different backgrounds come together, differences emerge, the way we communicate, the way we behave, and what we believe. Communication between cultures can be challenging, especially when our relationships are shaped by invisible hierarchies and social arrangements, within families, the workplace, or broader communities. Our lives and ways of understanding the world are influenced by different forces such as ethnicity, gender, language, religion, and history.

It requires more than good intentions to successfully navigate those complexities. It needs intercultural communication, which means understanding, valuing, and interacting with members across cultures. Because it guides us into attempting to make sense in the interplay, the Intercultural Praxis Model (IPM), as introduced by Kathryn Sorrells (2016), can be practically useful and reflexive model. It encourages us into examining our own frames and practices, and it builds important relationships and social responsibility action in this increasingly globalized world.

Throughout this research, the intercultural communication dynamics in the context of Central Asia, and specifically Uzbekistan, are going to be analysed in a systematic way. The examination is going to be based on the utilization of the Intercultural Praxis Model as a conceptual framework through which to investigate and make sense of the intercultural interactions in this geographical area.

Understanding Intercultural Competence

Intercultural communication is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. Never before has this competence been as critical as it becomes in this extremely globalized era, both in overseas business and diplomacy but in casual conversations in multicultural communities.

In the Central Asian, setting, intercultural communication takes on a particular significance. The region's ancient history as a transit point during the Great Silk Road exerts some effect on its culture, which was perfected during centuries through acquaintance with the most diversiform nationalities, such as Persians, Arabs, Turks, Russians and others. This syncretic legacy can be tracked in the languages, manners, and social etiquette in the states.

Developing intercultural competence means more than just knowledge about other cultures. It means self-awareness, empathy, and openness to changing one's own behaviour. It also means having a sense of how larger social structures, including ethnicity, gender, language, and religion, condition our experiences and interactions. In Uzbekistan, where traditional values frequently intersect with contemporary influences and the impact of Soviet occupation, a grasp of these dynamics is essential to forming successful relationships across cultural boundaries.

IPM provides a model for the development of this competency, encouraging people to critical examination of their own worldview and to engage with others in a way that is both

effective and respectful. Praxis Model is explained in the following section and its dimensions are given.

The Intercultural Praxis Model

Given the complexity and dynamism of culture, Kathryn Sorrells' Intercultural Praxis Model (IPM), which was introduced in 2016, offers a practical and reflective framework for navigating complex intercultural terrain. The model is based on a three-fold understanding of culture, which Sorrells conceptualizes through three key elements:

Shared Meaning: This dimension identifies culture as a system that helps us make sense of life. It is the shared values, practices, and understandings that hold communities together. Shared meanings give us frameworks for interpreting experience and interacting with others. In Central Asia, shared meanings could be hospitality customs, respect for elders, or communal celebrations.

Contested Meaning: This dimension acknowledges that meanings are constantly being negotiated within culture. Every member of a cultural group has a different perspective on and understanding of cultural norms. These disputes are frequently a sign of power dynamics and societal differences in opinion. For instance, there might be conflicting interpretations in Central Asia about regional identities vs national coherence or traditional values versus modernization.

Resource: The third factor considers culture as a potentially useful resource. People and civilizations can use cultural wisdom, tradition, and worldview as resources to overcome hardship and seize opportunity. This type of comprehension serves as a reminder to embrace cultural variety as a strength rather than a barrier to communication.

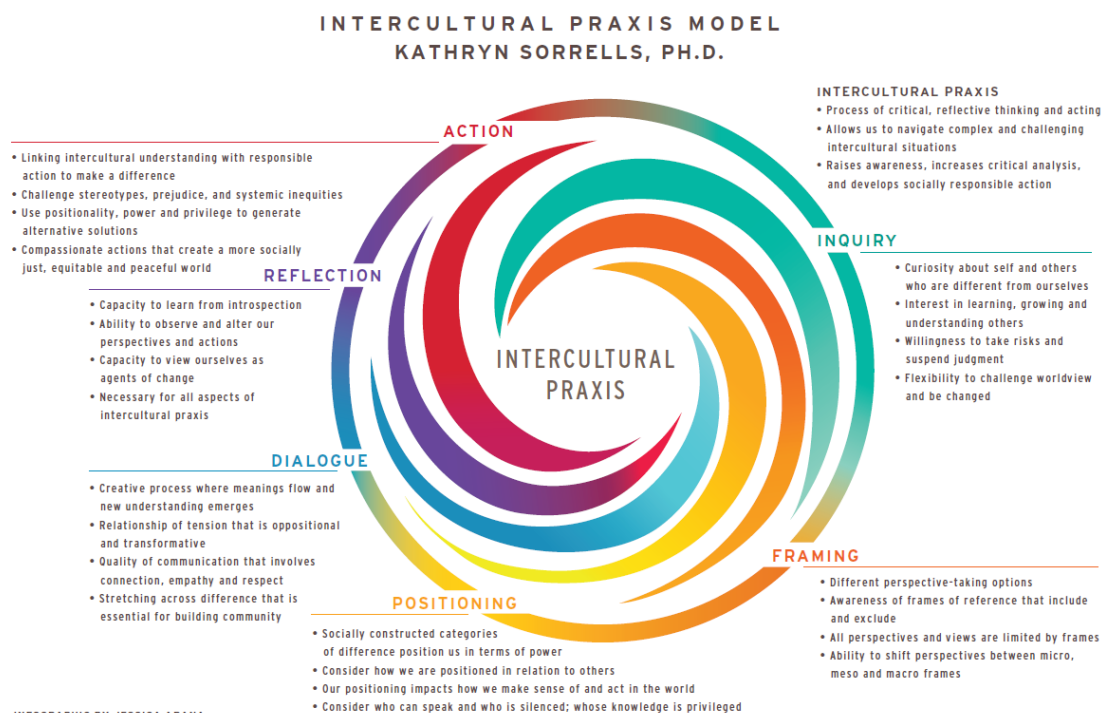


Figure 1. Source: Katherine Sorrells, 2016.

The value of critical reflection in cross-cultural relationships is emphasized by the IPM. We become more conscious of our own cultural positioning and presumptions as a result of



this reflection, which puts us in a better position to be authentic when dealing with other people. We can develop a more sophisticated knowledge of cross-cultural interactions by looking at how our cultural context and social settings shape our perspectives.

This Model acts as a roadmap for handling complex cross-cultural situations. Inquiry (i), Framing (ii), Positioning (iii), Dialogue (iv), Reflection (v), and Action (vi) are some of the interconnected entry points that make up the IPM, which functions as a circular framework as opposed to a linear one. Without a predetermined order, the model (see figure 1) highlights how various elements are interrelated.

The IPM's ultimate goal is to encourage moral behaviours in cross-cultural settings. It forces us to consider the ethical ramifications of our choices and engage with cultural diversity in a way that respects social justice and human dignity. This pledge of accountability is especially relevant in areas such as Central Asia, where advanced intercultural dynamics have been influenced by historical, political, and social considerations.

Applying the Intercultural Praxis Model to Central Asia

We are able to develop more successful strategies for establishing cultural bridges while taking into account the power dynamics and subtleties that structure interactions inside Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia by using the IPM for defining relations.

1. Inquiry: The First Step in Intercultural Praxis.

Intercultural praxis, an activity that helps us traverse the complex and varied cultural landscapes we come across on a daily basis, is built on inquiry. Inquiry is essentially about developing a sincere interest in other people and the world we live in. It is about being prepared to ask questions, look for answers, and set aside our preconceived notions even when we come across viewpoints that differ from our own.

The first step is to develop a sincere interest in Uzbekistan's history, culture, and society. This entails posing open-ended inquiries concerning regional communications, values, and traditions, such as the expression of hospitality, the importance of religious practice, or the role of family in day-to-day existence.

In Uzbekistan, on arrival of the guest, the host greets the guest at the door and inquiring about the guest's health and family. The initial greeting is not ritualistic but an invitation to hear and tell lives and values. It is customary for Uzbek hosts to ask the guest to take a seat on the *dastarkhan*, the spread table of bread, sweets, seasonal fruits, dried fruits and tea. The tea is served by the host in small amounts, meaning respect, the more tea the guest requests, the more honour. This ritual encourages the guest to inquire about local traditions, family customs, and social norms, arousing curiosity and mutual understanding.

In Central Asian and Muslim cultures, inquiring is not just about asking questions but about being respectful, open, and willingness to engage with the other person's culture and experience. This is exactly what the IPM emphasizes on curiosity and skilful questioning as the foundations of intercultural communication.

2. Framing: A Port of Entry for Intercultural Praxis

After cultivating curiosity through inquiry, the second is the process of recognizing how our backgrounds, experiences, and identities shape the way we see and interpret the world around us. Framing is recognizing that our perceptions are not so much absolute truths as



they are lenses that have been crafted by our particular cultural, social, and personal backgrounds.

Every person has a number of frames that influence the way they perceive reality. The frames are built on:

- Gender, ethnicity, and race
- Religion and spiritual beliefs
- Education and socioeconomic background
- Nationality and geographic location
- Age, language, and family experiences

Understanding Central Asians, particularly Uzbek identity, is about the recognition of how it has been shaped by centuries of history, such as Persian, Turkic, Islamic traditions, the Soviet legacy, and regional local influences. At the same time, it's also necessary to be mindful of one's own cultural assumptions and biases, for these frames influence the way we interpret and engage with local community.

For example, the social customs and etiquette when a person places his/her left hand over his/her chest with a slight bow, expresses deep respect and part of the cultural framework informing interpersonal interaction. Honorific titles and polite forms of address are employed by the youth when they address older individuals, in relation to their social status. Another example, in Uzbekistan, younger people use polite forms of address when speaking to elders, such as '*aka*' (older brother), '*opa*' (older sister), are given respect to even non-relatives. In addition, when eating or on social gatherings, the younger people must serve food and beverages to those who are older than them before themselves, as a sign of respect and care.

Since Central Asia is home to various ethnic groups, which are accompanied by its own cultural frames, languages, and traditions, to create a complex mosaic of identities. Recognising these frames allows people, both Central Asians and foreigners, to better understand the construction of regional identity and how their cultural assumptions can influence their perceptions and interactions.

3. Positioning: Power, Place, and Perspective

Positioning calls us to reflect on where we, and others, are positioned in the social, cultural, and political landscapes that frame our meetings. It is a question of attending to how power, privilege, and social identity inform our experience, our voice, and our relationships.

Intercultural competence involves awareness of power dynamics within Central Asia's ethnic majorities and minorities, gender, and generational differences. It also involves consideration of how foreigners, expatriates, business travellers, or tourists are perceived by the locals, and vice versa.

For example, traditional gender roles continue to play a significant role in many part of Uzbekistan, reflecting characteristics of masculine culture, where values such as assertiveness, leadership and family authority are often emphasized (Hofstede, 2001). Men tend to be positioned as family heads and primary decision-makers, and women's roles tend to emphasize care of family and community. However, modernisation and education are gradually changing these roles, creating new social positions and sometimes conflict between old and new expectations. On the other hand, consider Uzbek woman as a mother, which is



thought to be the emotional and moral hubs of the family. A woman as a daughter is positioned in family as carrier of honour. Daughter should exhibit obedience and respect towards the elders, especially parents.

Positioning is actually a question of recognizing the fact that our place in the world, socially, culturally, and politically, affects the way we live and interact in intercultural relations.

4. Dialogue: Engaging Across Differences

Dialogue goes beyond mere conversation, it is the practice of arriving at new understanding through encounter of difference. It challenges us to step outside our comfort zones and link up differently with other points of view (Sorrells, 2016).

Dialogue is challenging, particularly in situations where there are imbalanced power relationships, historical injustices, or deeply held convictions at issue. Intercultural interactions are necessarily relationships of tension, involving a 'crossing, a reaching across, a sharing if not a common ground of understanding' (Crapanzano, 1990).

Open and respectful communication is the essence of building trust and comprehension. In Central Asia, this might be best seen in business relationships, student exchange, or tourism interactions. Dialogue allows for the negotiation of meaning and the building of shared understanding.

In context of Uzbekistan, among tourists and tour guides, dialogue goes beyond the attractions to include such topics as local traditions, religious practice, food and family life. Tourists ask questions about local customs, and guides explain the significance of practices like hospitality and respect for foreigners. This dialogue enriches the travel experience and builds intercultural communication on both sides.

Another example, in Central Asian business negotiation environments, a successful dialogue involves not just translation of words but also familiarity with local communication styles, where indirectness, non-verbal communication, patience, and building personal rapport before negotiating contracts are preferred. While negotiating, parties do not just negotiate conditions but also trust, bargaining through cultural expectations of respect and hierarchy.

As we witness in samples, conversation is characterized by attentive listening, openness, mutual respect, and critical reflection. It is a dynamic process in which meaning is constructed together, power disparities are acknowledged, and cultural differences are negotiated with care, core tenets of the IPM.

5. Reflection: Deepening Understanding in Intercultural Praxis

Reflection is the process of looking inward, pausing to examine our own thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to others and the world. Reflection involves more than simply thinking about what happened.

Most educational concepts of reflection are derived from John Dewey (1910), an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, perhaps the father of reflective practice. He wrote: 'We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflection on experience'. Reflection is generally understood to involve some, a number or all of the following: sense-making of an experience, re-running a (critical) incident over and over again, stepping back to get a better view, in order to construct a deeper understanding, in the



direction of more honesty, taking or balancing the good and bad points and making good judgements (Kinnunen P., 2018). In a wider sense, these cover thinking, reading, writing, discussing, observing, and, above all, experiencing

Ongoing self-reflection is also necessary. Through reflection on misunderstandings and effective interactions, people learn and adapt, and their intercultural skills develop over time. For instance, a visiting lecturer who is teaching in Uzbekistan initially mistakes students' classroom silence as a sign of disconnection or disinterest. By reflecting, the teacher realizes that respectful listening and not openly challenging or countering teachers are valued behaviours in Uzbek culture. This prompts the teacher to challenge assumptions and alter teaching techniques to encourage participation in culturally appropriate ways.

As Kathryn Sorrells (2016) highlights, reflection is a continuous process that will guide future action rather than a one-time event. It enables people to make connections between their own experiences and larger historical and societal settings, fostering empathy and social justice initiatives.

6. Action: Transforming Understanding into Change

Our heightened consciousness and comprehension translate into concrete endeavours to establish a more equitable, inclusive, and tranquil world when we take action. This could involve community programs that encourage cooperation and understanding across cultural divides, regulatory changes, or educational initiatives.

Action in intercultural praxis, which draws inspiration from Paulo Freire's (2000) work, goes beyond merely doing something for the purpose of doing it. It is based on continuous cycles of reflection, action, and thought. In order to effect significant change, intercultural praxis encourages us to have a deeper awareness of the world, ourselves, and others (Freire, 2000; Sorrells, 2016).

Our actions are always shaped by our identities, histories, and the power structures in which we are embedded. Factors such as culture, gender, race, class, religion, language, and nationality influence what actions are possible, encouraged, or constrained for each of us.

For example, Central Asia is home to more than 100 district cultural groupings. To enhance intercultural communication among its citizens and foster national unity, the countries organize multicultural festivals at the international level, such as Navrouz and Independence Days celebrations. These events showcase the rich shared heritage of Central Asia's diverse communities through vibrant displays of music, dance, traditional cuisine, and storytelling, creating a space for cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

By taking such practical steps, the region translates intercultural learning into community-building efforts that address social divisions and empower citizens to become agents of positive change in Central Asia's diverse society. Events such as multicultural festivals, art exhibitions, and educational exchanges enhance public awareness, foster goodwill, and support long-term international cooperation.

It should be noted that tourism and cultural diplomacy serve as powerful platform for creating opportunities for real action and conflict resolution at both governmental and grassroots levels.

Conclusion



The exploration of intercultural communication in Central Asia through the lens of Kathryn Sorrells' Model of Intercultural Praxis reveals both the complexity and promise of cross-cultural engagement in one of the world's most diverse region. 'Indeed, where ethnic diversity is high, historical heritage is rich, and social dynamics are changing, thereby creating complex intercultural cross-cultural situations. The ability to navigate the complexity in a sensitive, as well as conscious, manner is the central challenge to achieve social harmony, cross-cultural understanding, and sustainable development.

As we have observed, the six interconnected elements of the IPM, Inquiry, Framing, Positioning, Dialogue, Reflection, and Action, provide a helpful toolkit for navigating the rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions that make up Uzbekistan and the larger Central Asian context.

The relevance of the IPM to Central Asian settings makes it categorically evident that intercultural communication in the workplace is about much more than cultural tokenism or tolerance of difference. It is about an underlying commitment to understanding how our own cultural positioning colours our perception, how power conditions intercultural communication, and how authentic dialogue can bridge even vast cultural distances. From everyday hospitality customs to the evolution of gender roles, from corporate communication to educational interaction, the examples taken from Uzbek society demonstrate that intercultural competency is a process rather than a final result of continuous learning, introspection, and development.

The IPM provides useful advice for professionals operating in Central Asian contexts, including education, business, tourism, and community development, on how to go beyond genuine but superficial cultural interchange to more profound, richer cross-cultural relationships. The model's call for socially responsible action binds practitioners to pursuing more justice and inclusion, while its requirement for critical self-reflection challenges practitioners to examine their own presumptions and biases.

Looking ahead, this analysis has several important implications:

1. Using the IPM's rigorous approach of developing cultural competency would enhance Central Asian intercultural education projects by moving beyond static cultural representation to dynamic inquiry and dialogue procedures.
2. Organizations operating in multicultural Central Asian environments must make investments in training that enhances employees' critical reflection and culturally responsive action capabilities.
3. Policymakers must recognize that effective integration of diverse communities requires more than administrative action. It requires sustained commitment to creating true intercultural awareness and cooperation.

The challenging of the 21st century facing Central Asia, economic success, social harmony, ecological sustainability, regional cooperation, cannot be tackled in the absence of effective intercultural communication. The IPM provides a model for changing cultural diversity from a possible source of conflict to a real source of innovation, creativity, and enrichment on a mutual benefit basis. With the societies of Central Asia progressing in their development and interaction with the rest of the global community, the principles and practices outlined in this report shall become increasingly vital.



Ultimately, this study demonstrates that intercultural communication is not only an intellectual exercise or a professional skill but a fundamental competence for the building of the kind of open, respectful, and cooperative societies Central Asia's multicultural populations are entitled to. By embracing the IPM's challenge to ongoing inquiry, critical examination, and action for reform, individuals and institutions throughout the region can assist in crafting a future in which cultural difference is valued as a source of strength and not as a barrier to comprehension.

The ancient Silk Road united far-off cultures on the basis of business and cross-cultural understanding. The Intercultural Praxis Model offers a template today for constructing new kinds of bridges, connections not based simply on commerce but on respect, learning, and collective action for social justice. Thus, Central Asia's heritage as a cross-cultural bridge can be recreated and extended to face the problems and possibilities of the contemporary world.

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