Mediated communication as an entryway into interculturality

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Abstract

In this chapter, we discuss how utilizing mediated communication may open new possibilities into exploring and understanding intercultural communication in education. Set in the context of Finnish higher education, the chapter follows a social constructionist viewpoint into mediated communication. The chapter argues for the prevalence of media and technology-mediated communication as a tool with which citizens of a globalized world make sense of themselves as well as the other. We present and discuss practical examples of how learners' own media use practices may be drawn upon in teaching, and how focusing on the everyday affordances of media allows for strengthening learners' agency. Such a pedagogical approach can also be seen as contributing to the development of critical media literacy.

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Introduction

In the early third century – the time of the 'Three Kingdoms' – historian Yu Huan (魚豢) wrote the following text concerning people in the far-away lands to the west, that is, the Roman empire:

> This country has more than four hundred smaller cities and towns. It extends several thousand *li* in all directions. The king has his capital (that is, the city of Rome) close to the mouth of a river (the Tiber). The outer walls of the city are made of stone. (…) (The

people have) a tradition of amazing conjuring. They can produce fire from their mouths, bind and then free themselves, and juggle twelve balls with extraordinary skill. The ruler of this country is not permanent. When disasters result from unusual phenomena, they unceremoniously replace him, installing a virtuous man as king, and release the old king, who does not dare show resentment. The common people are tall and virtuous like the Chinese, but wear *hu* ('Western') clothes.[1]

This text, called the *Weilue* (魏略), and translated here by John E. Hill (2004), is a typical example of a mediated account of the other. Such accounts have existed most likely as long as the art of writing itself. Together with images, music, artefacts and so on, descriptions such as the one in the *Weilue* have made it possible for 'foreign' ideas, religions and ideologies to spread. They have also allowed for people to challenge existing notions of both themselves and of others. In short, they have been, and continue to be, key for what we may call interculturality.

In this chapter, we explore how mediated communication may act as an entryway into learning (about) interculturality. We approach the topic as educators working in the context of higher education, and therefore focus on adult learners. The chapter opens with a general look into the relationship between mediated communication and intercultural communication. We briefly discuss the illustrative and distortive role that media plays in our conceptualizations of culture and related concepts. We then move on to consider the educational and transformative power of mediated communication in the field of intercultural instruction. Towards the end of the chapter, we offer two concrete examples of how educators might go about utilizing mediated communication in the practice of intercultural education.

Our approach to intercultural communication may be labeled as *social constructionist* (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This means that we are generally less interested in people's 'given' social categories than the ways they make (cultural) group membership apparent and meaningful in communication. In other words, we take culture and interculturality to be interactional and discursive outcomes (see, for example, Piller, 2017; Stokoe & Attenborough, 2015), which is an understanding that opposes a common, inherently essentialist view according to which communication can be automatically treated and studied as *intercultural* when people who are considered to be different from each other are involved. While within the latter perspective intercultural communication and interculturality are often seen as pre-determined, problematic, and exotic (or as a source of misunderstandings and conflict, see Triandis, 2000, 2012), we approach constructions of and orientations to group membership as a normal part of everyday interaction and discourse.

As an interactional, social outcome, interculturality is dynamic and fluid. Thus, culture or group membership may *occasionally* become relevant for people, for example, in the form of 'intercultural moments' (Bolden, 2014), rather than invariably being 'switched on' just because interactants belong to or identify with a certain imagined community. This view appreciates interculturality as contextual and situated, which is consequential for how we study and teach

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[1] https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html

about intercultural communication. It allows us to ponder questions that are of timely societal relevance, such as under which circumstances do people make group membership apparent and meaningful, how do they bring up and go about differences and similarities in writing and talking, and what do they accomplish by doing so (see Piller, 2017).

Pedagogically, our approach entails that we avoid teaching about cultural 'facts', which can only be collections of stereotypical representations of imagined others, or established truths about intercultural communication. Instead, we encourage our students to engage with culture as an unstable, complex, and sometimes overemphasized social construct, and to observe and analyze interculturality as it becomes visible (or not) in their everyday lives, be it online, in printed media, or in interaction with people around them. The broad learning outcome of such intercultural education is to be able to critically reflect on everyday uses of the notions of 'culture' and 'intercultural communication', to be able to question and dismantle cultural representations (but also to appreciate them as such), and to be able to revisit one's own assumptions related to identity and group membership. We thereby align with Lee's (2005: 212) call for higher education that fosters "critical thinking through intercultural dialogue" and helps learners think beyond their cultural frameworks. The kind of critical thinking Lee refers to is to be seen rather as a moral obligation instead of a political mission. Still, it resonates with so-called critical pedagogy and its 'commitments' (Fasset & Warren, 2007), which include fostering dialogue and an understanding of the connection points between the everyday and the systemic, as well as highlighting the centrality of language and communication and the fluid and complex nature of systemic power and privilege.

We also agree with Dervin (2016: 81), who asserts that "There is need to recognize and accept that, as researchers and practitioners, we can only reach a practical simplification of intercultural phenomena". He proposes a (liquid) realistic approach to intercultural communication that navigates between simple and complex ideas. Accepting this stance means that intercultural communication instruction is seen as an ongoing project with a moving target that can never truly be 'reached', and where failure (at times) is also an option. Instead of looking for hegemonic knowledge, both educators and learners are seen as explorers embedded into the process of constructing culture. From this viewpoint, the aim of education becomes something of a shared journey emphasizing joint knowledge-creation. This is a challenging proposition, and, in our experience, something many students – even in the context of higher education – seem not ready for. For some, it is not idealistic enough, and for others, it does not offer the kind of tangible and 'safe' answers they yearn for.

Educators working within the broad field of intercultural education have for long utilized methods stemming from experiential or situated learning. This is also the approach we adopt here. While the exercises we describe towards the end of the chapter can and have been included within traditional didactic teaching modules, they allow for the participants to draw on their own experiences and highlight their own agency as learners.

The importance of mediated communication for intercultural communication

Why focus on mediated communication? Building on the example presented in the beginning of the chapter, our stance is that it is primarily through mediated communication that people living in the globalized world learn about and are in contact with 'others', and make sense of the social world in which they live in. From films to news to social media to video games, mediated communication occupies a central position in our everyday lived reality and therefore our understanding of the world around us. This view should not be mistaken to represent a juxtaposition in comparison with face-to-face communication. Indeed, so much of our communication and interpersonal relationships today are 'hybrid' (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002), that such dichotomies are generally best avoided. Our approach here reflects that of Couldry and Hepp (2017: 5), who assert that, "A theory of the construction of *social* reality must at the very least pay attention to a key element in the construction of social life today, which is mediated communications". Their argument emphasizes the fundamental nature with which our social world is interwoven with media, and how media-related practices even intersect with face-to-face communication.

The starting point outlined above follows in the footsteps of Anderson (1983), who proposed that large scale group identities such as national identities are constructed as an imagined belonging to other (mostly distant) people and places and produced in part with the help of media. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that, "any community beyond face-to-face interaction has to be imagined" (Eriksen in Breuilly, 2016: 628). From Anderson's (1983) *imagined communities* to Billig's (1995) *banal nationalism*, mediated communication is central in how contemporary logics of constructing ingroups and outgroups function. This includes concepts such as 'culture', 'ethnicity', 'race', and many more.

Mediated communication therefore allows us to imagine the world around us and our place within it. Appadurai (1996) has proposed that it is the transnational circulation of people and media that broadens our views on what is possible. Referring to the wide range of source materials to "imagine with" that media offers us (p. 53), he proposes that our mediatized world shapes the way we are able to imagine our social selves.

Mediated communication factors into intercultural communication along a number of axes. Martin and Nakayama (2010: 21-26) speak of the 'technological imperative', which for them includes (1) increased information about peoples and cultures; (2) increased contact with people who are different from us; (3) increased contact with people who are similar to us who can provide communities of support; and (4) changes in thinking about identity, culture, and technology. Such effects are so all-encompassing and have the potential of touching so many aspects of our lives, that, perhaps unintuitively, their importance may become easy to neglect.

Overlooking mediated communication

In the field of intercultural communication and intercultural instruction there has traditionally been a tendency to downplay mediated communication and communication technology, or even actively shut them outside of the general area of interest. This can be seen in content choices of many of the textbooks written on intercultural communication, as well as in the

statements of focus of certain key journals in the field. Using a smaller but illustrative example, in the preparation for this book we received a list of questions and potentially interesting themes coined by students. None of the questions in the list dealt with communication technology or mediated communication in any way!

It is possible that at least some of this disregard can be explained with early scholarship on mediated communication and how it has come to be characterized. Indeed, there exists a whole school of thought based on research done in the 1980s and 90s that built a case of how mediated communication could not be as 'rich' as face-to-face communication (Daft & Lengel, 1984), and how social cues were 'filtered out' by technology in communication (Culnan & Markus, 1987). Viewpoints such as these continue to resonate to this day and are something we are used to encounter as educators. In their extreme form, they propose that mediated communication is not as 'real' as face-to-face communication, and that, therefore, intercultural contact that happens through it is not 'real' either.

Another possible reason for the aversion to include mediated communication into intercultural communication research and instruction may stem from the essentialist viewpoint that since a great deal of technology-mediated communication does not (or, in some cases, did not) feature immediately perceivable identity markers such as skin color, or the way people speak, it may be difficult to discern whether the technology-mediated communication a person engages in should be considered intercultural or not. This perspective becomes all the more understandable when one takes into account the long tradition of focusing on (face-to-face) nonverbal communication in the field of intercultural communication. The seminal writings of Edward T. Hall (1959, 1969) helped lay out this path with analyses of e.g. proxemics and chronemics. Hall and many of his contemporaries worked from a very pragmatic viewpoint and ended up proposing a prescriptive approach to culture that focused on differences (for a historical overview, see Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Similarly, the neighboring field of intergroup contact and communication has been historically built on clear and dichotomous group divisions such as contact between 'black' and 'white' soldiers (Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, 2003). Understanding the influence of this starting point opens a possibility for interesting thought experiments that can be further explored with students. The question becomes: How big a part of interculturality in our minds is resting on the assumption of perceivable (external) differences? The same exercise, of course, can be used to illustrate the narrow ways in which concepts such as diversity are often operationalized.

Finally, even though artefacts certainly feature in the scholarship on nonverbal communication, it is possible that many a researcher and educator do not truly recognize contemporary media and communication technology as 'cultural'. Rather, television, radio, cell phones or computers are viewed as if they were neutral or apolitical. However, this is not the case. Technology is always created by someone, somewhere, and for some purpose. While it is true that humans ultimately decide how to utilize its *affordances* (Gibson, 1986), that is, the possibilities offered to us by objects in our environment, technology itself can also be seen as embodying certain kinds of values and ideologies. For example, even seemingly neutral tools that we may use on

a daily basis such as Internet search engines and similar automated algorithms have been demonstrated to reinforce racism through the way they manipulate their users (Noble, 2018).

Again, a thought-experiment may make things clearer. Imagine how we today try to understand the lifeworlds of those who lived a thousand years ago. How we focus on the way the people of the past built their dwellings, fed themselves, and moved from place to place, or the way their tools enabled them to alter their surroundings. Now, imagine the same being done to 'us', but from a thousand years into the future. How many of the things we take for granted in our lives – from railroads to electric networks to bicycles to cell phones – will undoubtedly appear alien to our future observers, as exemplars of a culture long lost. While some affordances of technology may be self-evident to distant observers, others will be lost in time. After all, technology such as communication media still needs people to give it meaning and decide how they want to use it. Such is the analytical view on media and communication technology that we could adopt today, when trying to understand our contemporary social reality.

Mediated communication in intercultural instruction practice

How would the practice of intercultural instruction look like if the concepts and approaches presented above would be utilized? In the next paragraphs, we will detail two practical learning tasks we have found helpful in introducing mediated communication, here especially online media and virtual teamwork, into our intercultural communication classes. Both learning tasks are described with sufficient detail so that interested educators should be able to adapt and reproduce them in their own teaching.

The first learning task (Table 1), asks the students to search for and analyze social media content that speaks about cultural contact with the students' own in-group. This can be any social category they identify with, such as nationality or ethnicity. Whether from YouTube, TikTok, WeChat, Instagram or any of the other applications that are popular within and across certain regions, language group or subculture, analyzing such material can give us great insight into how social categorization is communicatively accomplished. Since the target of these commentaries is something the students themselves identify with, their analysis should allow for us to explore the affective dimension of interculturality. The analysis should be open-ended, but it can be scaffolded by a list of ready-made questions as well as any relevant literature that the course in question utilizes.

Table 1: A sample task for analyzing social media

Task: Search for social media content that speaks about cultural contact with a cultural in-group you identify with. Analyze the content from the viewpoint of intercultural contact and communication. You may, for example, use the following questions to guide your analysis: - What kind of discursive positioning is evident in the text?   o What kind of discursive positioning is evident in the text?

	o What kind of right and responsibilities are implied?
-	How is intercultural contact depicted, what kind of narrative of contact is produced?
-	What kind of similarities of differences can you recognize in comparison with other forms of mediated communication you know about?
-	How do you, as a viewer, feel about these narratives and positionings?
-	As a viewer/listener/reader, are you offended, amused, or nodding in agreement? When and why?

Present your findings in your group/class. Discuss and compare what you found.

This task has been included in a course dealing with (cultural) narratives and discourses, but could easily fit into a course focusing on contemporary media landscapes as well. One of the benefits of such an exercise is that it allows for the students (and the teacher!) to step out of their habitual 'bubble' of communication media and learn of the media landscapes around the world. The exercise promotes a variety of voices and readings. Sharing these among the class participants offers a useful entry point into broader discussions concerning the way cultures and cultural contact are made visible. One way to extend the exercise is by asking for additional analysis of the way users comment on and discuss the content. There, questions related to the students' own voice may also become relevant. Do they participate in such discourses at all? Why, or why not? What could one learn from or achieve with such participation? Another way to extend the discussion is to focus on underlying power issues, including economic realities and other divisions that may cause hierarchies or inequalities. Such questions may also be used as a segue to other topics related to agency, social constructionism and so forth.

The second learning task (Table 2) differs from the first in its focus on the students' own social interaction instead of content produced by others. This exercise has been included in a course titled 'International Management'; it is the final task in a series of group assignments and focuses on virtual teamwork. The learning task works best in online learning situations, especially so-called telecollaboration or virtual exchange programs (e.g., Dooly, 2017) and similar cases where participants are globally dispersed. We have utilized this learning task for example during the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced many institutes of higher education throughout the world to move their teaching online. An important prerequisite for this learning task is that participants are distributed into small virtual teams in the beginning of the course, and that the groups remain the same throughout. In the case of 'International Management', in the assignments (learning packages) preceding the one described here, participants are asked to study, discuss, and critically reflect on aspects of globalization, public relations, the popularity of so-called value dimensions in the field of international management, issues related to 'diversity management', and leadership communication. Because of potential geographical distribution of the participants, most of the tasks are designed to function asynchronously. These include mutual writing tasks such as creating a Wiki entry together, writing a short reflection in a shared document, and discussing a topic on a shared forum. However, we recommend encouraging the students to engage in synchronous communication such as video-meetings (especially during the final assignment) as this might contribute to the functionality of the tasks (fostering, for example, immediate discussion).

The final learning package of the course, then, deals with global virtual teamwork from the perspective of international management. Since the course participants were actively involved in actual international and globally distributed teamwork during the entire course, they are asked to analyze and critically reflect their own experiences as virtual team members and relate them to readings on the topic. The task description refers to 'assigned readings.' These could be any contemporary empirical research papers focusing on the topic that the teacher sees fit to include.

Table 2: A sample task for analyzing global virtual teamwork

Your task is to analyze your virtual teamwork during this course.

1) Preparation (individual part)

Think about your group work and team interaction during this course and write down your experiences. What did you observe? What kind of feelings did the group work evoke in you? Your notes can relate to anything, for example language use, identity and group membership, the role of technology, the role of "virtuality", the timing and coordination of collaboration, conflicts, support and trust, outcomes, practices of collaboration, leadership, etc.

Read the assigned research articles. Remember to read critically, keeping in mind the points made earlier in your studies as well as in other readings. All group members should read the assigned articles. The idea is to establish a common starting point for everyone. You can also return to them in the analysis of your own virtual group work.

In addition, each group member should pick one extra research article from the list provided to you by the teacher. Agree with your group beforehand who of you reads which text. Each group member is expected to read only one paper for the analysis. Please make sure that group members don't accidentally read the same paper.

2) Analysis (group task)

While working on the group task together you can use any communication tool or channel you want. However, this part of the assignment might work best if you met synchronously at least once.

Please analyze your own virtual group work:

- Talk about your observations and agree on the focus of your analysis.
- Tell each other shortly what 'your' article was about.
- As a group, discuss how the papers you read in preparation relate to your observations and experiences. Reflect the findings presented in the articles against your group collaboration (do you agree with the findings of previous research or is it possible to question and criticize these studies based on your own experiences?).
- Critically reflect on your collaboration in terms of group work and 'virtuality' (What worked, what didn't, why? What could you have done better?).
- Relate your analysis to international management: What do your observations possibly mean for managing international virtual teams? Come up with recommendations for international managers (based on your own experiences and the readings).

• Remember to take notes of the group meetings!

3) Report (group task)
You can choose between recording a **short** group presentation, or handing in a **short**, shared document:

Group presentation (5 to 10 minutes)	OR:	Mutual document (2-3 pages)
You can create a video recording of your group presentation either by editing individually recorded videos together or recording audio that is collected to presentation slides.		You can create a shared online document and work on presenting your analysis and findings in written form. Remember, that the document doesn't need to be only textual, you may include pictures, graphs, or similar.

The assignment combines several benefits. Not only does it inspire the application of previous research findings and concepts studied during the course (and in preparation for this task in particular) to a concrete and personally relevant case, but it is also inherently self-reflective. For example, by asking the course participants to evaluate their virtual teamwork on the one hand ("How did we work as an international team?" and "What could we have done better?"), and to develop literature- and experience-based suggestions for international managers on the other hand, the students are encouraged to think about relevant skills and competences and how they themselves fared and possibly improved along these lines. This practice acknowledges recent criticism within the area of intercultural communication competence which exposes top-down assessment (often based on technical and essentializing intercultural competence models) as patronizing, arbitrary, and even unethical (Borghetti, 2017; Ferri, 2018; see also Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2012; Olbertz-Siitonen, 2021).

While some of the pre-readings we use in this assignment address questions of culture and intercultural communication (from different paradigmatic perspectives), the task description deliberately avoids reference to the role of social categorizations. This open-endedness aims to provide students authority over their accounts, allowing them to choose to draw on and justify cultural explanations or – equally reasonable – to 'ignore' (imagined) group membership beyond their core team. One underlying idea here is that such an approach offers opportunities to understand culture as a situated construct that may disappear behind varying language proficiencies, technological challenges, time differences, connectivity, and task orientation, or purposefully surface during conflicts and disagreements, etc. Ideally, this learning task contributes to building a critical stance towards overemphasized meanings of culture and to appreciating interculturality as dynamically and socially embedded in everyday mediated communication.

The risks and benefits of mediated communication in intercultural education

Utilizing mediated communication in intercultural education comes with both risks and possibilities. Mediated communication is a powerful tool that allows us to explore the world beyond our immediate surroundings and to directly engage with others in different social realities. It has the potential of enriching our view into the variation of human behavior and social organizing. However, the lens of mediated communication is not only illustrative but

also distortive. It can show us a world we did not know existed, but it can also paint that world in simplistic colors that strengthen our tendency to social categorization into ingroups and outgroups. A great deal of media builds on the logic of reification, whether it be about culture, ethnicity, race, religion, or any other similar social category. In doing so, it ends up contributing to the 'false fixing of boundaries' (Baumann, 1996: 10-11) that intercultural education should strive to question.

For example, mediated communication is consistently used in constructing images of 'the enemy' by building strategic narratives that tap into the target audience's values and fears. News and documentaries may become 'weaponized' (Grigor, 2020), and it may be difficult for the learners to distance themselves from the content they see every day even when analyzed in an educational context. Social media algorithms contribute to so-called antagonism, where members identifying into one social category end up avoiding connections with perceived outgroup members (Calais Guerra, Meira, Cardie & Kleinberg, 2013). Overall, affordances of mediated communication can easily be utilized to emphasize differences and therefore feed into the creation and maintenance of ingroups and outgroups. This, too, can be difficult to become aware of, especially if one does not include a significant amount of information into the course design concerning how media technologies operate.

On the other hand, mediated communication holds great promise as well. Research has illustrated how technology-mediated intercultural communication can reduce stereotypical thinking (Tavakoli et al., 2010), increase awareness of existing 'cultures' (Diehl & Prins, 2008), and broaden viewpoints and raise consciousness of the linguistic and cultural diversity surrounding them (Levy, 2009). Referring to the affordances of the Internet, Mollov and Schwartz (2010: 215) assert that "the internet can transverse geographical and even to some degree political barriers". Whether intercultural education is able to tap into this possibility or rather ends up strengthening existing barriers is a key question for educators.

One of the simplest and perhaps most surprising benefits of utilizing mediated communication in intercultural education is that it brings the topic close to the lived reality of the participants. Put simply, practically everyone in the context of higher education has some insight into mediated communication as a lens into interculturality. In our experience, sometimes, it happens that a student sees intercultural communication as something that happens to 'someone else', or that they personally do not have enough expertise or experience in it. This is especially prevalent in those cases where interculturality is extensively seen through the lens of (inter)nationality or ethnicity. However, taking mediatization as a starting point means that intercultural communication is *everywhere*, and for *everyone*. No one can live their life in a vacuum, and all of us take part in weaving the intersubjective pattern of the social world.

Emphasizing joint agency and 'ownership' of the topical matter goes hand in hand with a social constructionist starting point. As we have seen, from such a viewpoint human agency matters, and we have a say in the construction of social reality. This view is also compatible with technology and mediated communication (e.g., Bijker, Hughes & Pinch, 1987). Furthermore, an emphasis on joint agency leads easily to a key learning goal that can be included in a variety

of learning activities: an awareness that the social world, including concepts such as culture, ethnicity, race, and so forth, is *made by us* together, and therefore can also be *remade by us* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, 106). For example, in order to help students understand what reification of culture means, one should find ways in which they can participate in the process of reification in practice; catch themselves and each other 'doing it'.

A final pedagogical goal that we want to highlight here and that links to a focus on mediated communication is the concept of enhancing participants' media literacy. Being something of an emancipatory concept, the idea behind enhancing media literacy is that if we increase our "ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts" (Livingstone, 2003, p. 1), we can become more active participants in shaping our own lives and the societies we live in.

Conclusion

As educators in the context of higher education, we often come across deeply embedded ideas in our students that relate to culture(s) being a territory on the one hand and something one carries along and cannot escape on the other. Many of our students have learned and internalized (e.g., during their prior school years) that national or ethnic group memberships are the epitome of 'difference' or 'diversity', and that knowing about predefined differences will be beneficial for their interactions with a thus imagined other. In fact, asking students about their expectations at the beginning of our courses on intercultural communication, almost exclusively yields responses in terms of 'learning more about other (national) cultures'. This implies that for many, culture and interculturality represent something unfamiliar and difficult, even mysterious, and 'not their immediate concern'. It takes considerable time and effort to unpack these notions with the students and jointly find less restrictive ways to approach interculturality that highlight agency as well as multi-layered, situated identities. If students were allowed to develop more nuanced insights into interculturality in their earlier education, they would be better equipped to expand their understanding in the university level courses that are linked to questions of intercultural communication. Instead of having to return to the basics and deconstruct seemingly factual knowledge about the global social world, we could move on already to more pressing and current issues of living in an interconnected social reality, such as experiencing and critically reflecting on mediated forms of interculturality.

Hand in hand with an apparent exotification of culture and interculturality go scholarly as well as everyday (students') tendencies to overlook crucial interconnections with digital affordances and media. While not a problem *per se*, we propose that shutting mediated communication outside of the focus of intercultural communication and instruction is potentially detrimental. Mediated communication plays such a large role in the life of practically all higher education students and all those who operate within academia today, that including it opens a plethora of possibilities for the interested educator.

Our hope is that through the argumentation and examples presented in this chapter, we have been able to demonstrate how focusing on mediated communication may be beneficial for the

intercultural communication curriculum. Since all higher education is necessarily mediatized, and since practically everyone embedded within this context is somehow entangled in globalized flows of mediated communication, such a focus offers a way for us to 'demystify' intercultural communication. For both the student and the teacher, it is rewarding to be able to explore tangible sites and discourses where culture is made real and relevant. This makes it also easier to develop an active stance towards intercultural communication, a stance that highlights agency, change and responsibility. Incorporating mediated communication into the intercultural communication curriculum gives us an important tool with which we can understand ourselves and the way we position ourselves in the world, as well as how we view and come into contact with others. Simultaneously, it allows for us to develop various types of media literacies (Livingstone, 2003), which are frequently highlighted among the so-called 21st century skills and competencies in the form of digital literacy (Chalkiadaki, 2018).

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the possible pitfalls of utilizing mediated communication in the context of intercultural communication education relates to the way media follows the logics of reification. That is, mediated communication is rife with content that emphasizes and (re)creates seemingly fixed boundaries between ingroups and outgroups, and at times even the way the technology itself is built may feed into that process. There is a danger here that relates to Lee's (2005: 210) warning about being satisfied to introduce "a multiplicity of voices for the sake of inclusivity" into the intercultural curriculum. According to Lee (2005: 207), the outcome that intercultural education should aim for is that of enhancing communication, whether it be between groups or individuals, and that this aim cannot be reached by simply adding 'multiculturality' or 'diversity' in an effort to render "multicultural education into some kind of cultural quota system". Similarly, simply adding 'diverse' examples of mediated communication into the course contents is not enough to enhance intercultural learning and dialogue. It requires considerable effort to escape simplistic operationalizations of culture and related concepts. Luckily for the interested educator, there is a considerable body of research into technology-mediated communication available which may be used in developing an advanced understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the context.

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