



Intercultural Mediation

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What is it?

The term intercultural mediation describes what happens when a third person or party helps two or more other persons or groups reach intercultural understanding.

Who uses the concept?

Professional conflict mediators in North America and Europe realize their clients are often highly heterogeneous and diverse and that conflicts between individuals, groups or even institutions can be a result of cultural differences. The structured approach of mediation as part of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) promotes Western cultural values. Some research on intercultural communication identifies the subtlety of cultural differences as the main difficulty of the subject. Third persons as spontaneous intercultural mediators may contribute a new view or more cultural knowledge and may help resolve a situation. Translation research as well as research on foreign language teaching always involve aspects of culture. Translators and foreign language teachers are thus studied in their role as intercultural mediators. Cultural anthropology explores how people in different cultures manage conflicts in constructive ways. This knowledge may potentially enrich Western forms of conflict management. International politics and diplomacy also are interested in forms of intercultural mediation.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Third parties may help to overcome potentially confrontational dualisms in theory and practice. Looking into other cultures and into the

neighboring disciplines mentioned here helps to expand the range of options for establishing understanding between cultural groups.

What work remains?

The disciplines engaged must enter into deeper exchange. Even constructivist concepts of intercultural mediation retain a cultural-essentialist flavor when they presume that people with different backgrounds do not understand each other. The concept of intercultural mediation needs to adapt to current debates on cultural theory.

Resources

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