

2026 International Conference on the Development and Assessment of Intercultural Competence

Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL), University of Arizona



Status: Review pending ✓

Proposal Contents

Title

Leveraging Dissonant Edges to Foster Sustainable IC

Proposal Type

In-person paper presentation

☒ Check here, if you would like to be considered for either in-person or online presentation

Strand (primary)

Theoretical and conceptual approaches

Strand (secondary)

Exchanges (physical and virtual)

Summary (350 characters maximum, including spaces)

Leveraging Adult Development and Transformative Learning, this paper argues dissonance, often arising through immersion or exchange experiences, combined with reflection may accelerate developmental shifts and catalyze intercultural communicative competence development, essential for navigating global crises and fostering sustainable futures.

Abstract (3,000 characters maximum, including spaces)

This paper examines the intersection of Adult Development Theory (ADT), Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), and Intercultural Competency (IC) development, arguing that dissonance serves as a key catalyst for growth across all three domains. In a world facing urgent ecological disasters, geopolitical conflicts, and systemic inequalities, as highlighted by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering robust intercultural competence is paramount for achieving sustainable futures. While IC development is widely recognized as an experiential process, limited research explores how adult developmental stages influence this process and the specific role of dissonance (Kjellström & Stålné, 2017; Mitchell & Paras, 2018; Pfaffenberger, 2005, 2007).

Drawing on foundational theories from Kegan (1994), Cook-Greuter (2004), Torbert (2004), and Berger (2012), alongside Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory, this paper explores how immersion or exchange experiences—which often introduce culturally dissonant or disorienting

dilemmas—may align with developmental shifts in meaning-making structures. Through a directly engaged research experience, this study applies these theoretical perspectives to examine how individuals navigate dissonance and developmental growth within an immersive context. Findings suggest that intentional exposure to dissonance, when paired with structured reflection and facilitated dialogue, accelerates movement along adult developmental trajectories, which may foster deeper intercultural and communicative competence. This process is vital for cultivating the adaptive capacities required to address complex global challenges and promote a more sustainable world.

The paper introduces "dissonant edges"—the developmental threshold where individuals reconcile conflicting perspectives—as a pivotal mechanism in both adult learning and IC growth. It explores what an intercultural communicative language education for a more sustainable world might look like by emphasizing pedagogical approaches that intentionally expose individuals to experiential dissonance, provide structured reflection, and adapt interventions to participants' cognitive capacities. Implications for intercultural education, executive coaching, and leadership development are discussed, emphasizing the importance of tailoring IC training to developmental capacities and fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets. This integrated framework offers a robust model for designing programs that foster deep, sustainable transformation, contributing to the development of adaptive, globally competent leaders capable of supporting sustainable futures for all.

How did you hear about this event?

Dr. Mattix-Foster, George Mason University, who recommended I submit a proposal.

Have you presented at the ICC conference before?

No

Primary Presenter

Your proposal must include 1 primary presenter.



Stephanie Mikulasek

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Professional biography (must not exceed 50 words)

A former U.S. Diplomat, Stephanie Mikulasek, MPA, MA, is an executive coach and founder of The ServantEDGE (www.theservantedge.com). She helps individuals and teams rediscover who they are and how to lead with courage, compassion, and clarity. Her Ph.D work focuses on how experiential immersions develop transformational leaders.

Secondary Presenters

Your proposal may include up to 7 secondary presenters.

No secondary presenters were added to this proposal.

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