



# ICC Journal



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the international language association

## ICC JOURNAL Volume 2 Issue 1

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**From the Editor**

Welcome to our ICC-Languages Journal Volume 2, Issue 1.

This issue covers Dr Rudi Camerer's assessment of the changes and new descriptors of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference, an article by Claudia Schuhbeck and Alba Angelika Martine on developing a bilingual education programme and Matilde Grünhage-Monetti's report on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of the founding of the ECML The European Centre for Modern Languages. In addition, we report on new projects for helping Francophone African countries increase their access to English and easing access to international employment through improving English language skills for Francophone African school and college leavers. Finally, we review a new book by Chia Suan Chong, entitled, 'Successful International Communication' (published by Pavilion Books).

As always, our brief covers all aspects of language and linguistics, intercultural studies, language and cultural training, the use of technology in language and cultural training and developments in testing and assessment. We are especially interested in your research and classroom ideas.

Let me know if there is anything you would like to publish in ICC-Languages Journal. It does not need to be long and we are especially interested in practical items on teaching plans, model lessons and teacher training ideas.

Have a good summer and enjoy your summer reading in these difficult times!

Barry Tomalin, Editor ICC-Journal

## **CEFR Companion Volume: What's really new!**

**Dr Rudi Camerer**

**Director, ELC (European Language Competence)**

The Companion Volume of the Council of Europe CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference For Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment) 2014-17, containing new descriptors, was co-ordinated by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division and involved 1500 language experts, 300 institutions, hundreds of validation workshops and sixty piloting projects. The English and French versions were published in 2018 and the German and other versions from 2019 onwards. Together with Jurgen Quetz, I was the official translator of the German version.

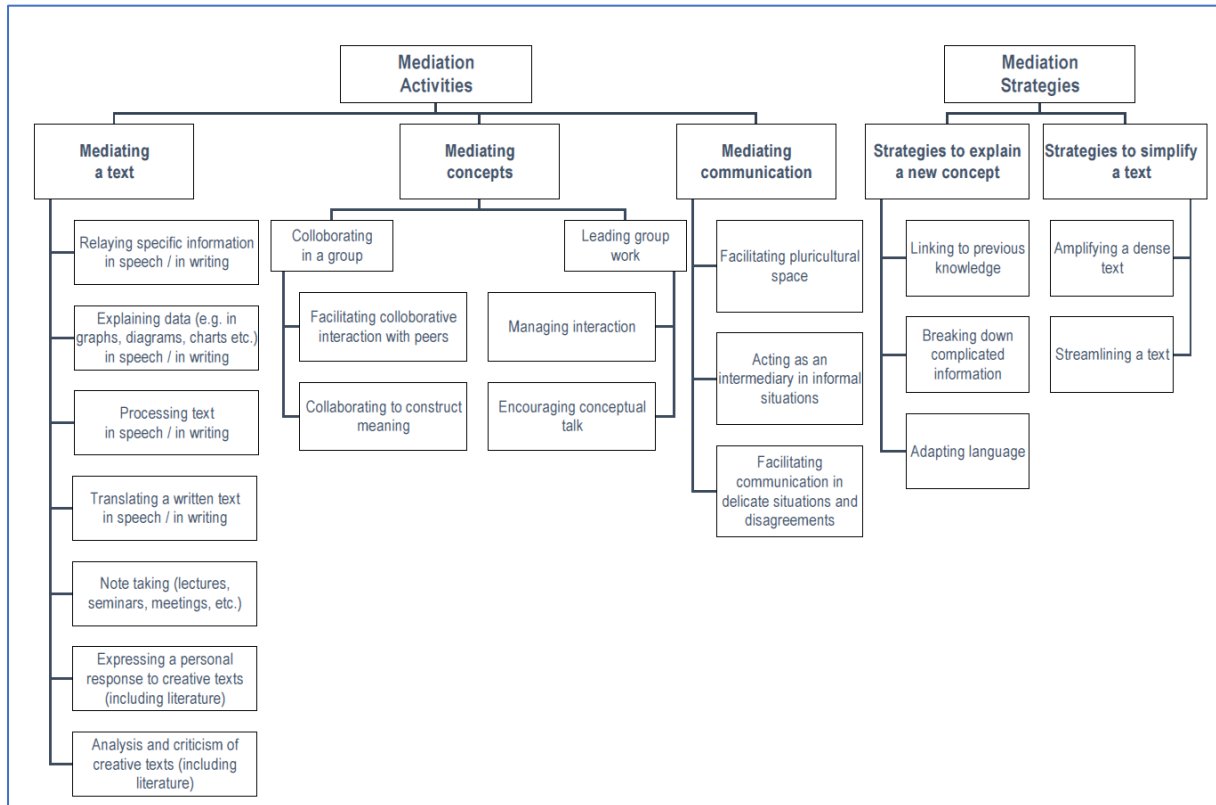
The CEFR-Revision project was 'How do you respond if things which had been taken for granted for a long time suddenly seem to be anything but?' You may hear, for example, that, according to the CEFR Companion Volume, Speaking-Listening-Writing-Reading are no longer considered as the four macro-functions on the basis of which all foreign-language teaching should take place. What? After a moment of shock you might ask what on earth is supposed to replace them? And it is at precisely this moment that you start discussing what has been one of the most interesting developments in foreign language teaching for many years.

Now you're in for a second surprise and this is the term "co-constructing meaning". In the original CEFR you would not have found this phrase once. Now it's at the heart of the Companion Volume and, even more clearly than in 2001, aspects of relationship-building have been moved to the centre of language teaching. The same is true for contexts and the role they play in meaning-making. After all, contexts - among them cultural ones - are the crucial factors which make any communication effective.

And there is a third surprise waiting for you, which is "Mediation". Following the CEFR's publication in 2001, this term was successively introduced into secondary school education across Europe. Mediation, understood as *Translating and/or Transmitting information using one's own words*, became a part of school-leaving tests in several European countries. As a language expert, you will know, of course, that identical words do not necessarily mean the same thing in different languages. This is also true of the term "mediation", which makes it necessary to start by clarifying the meaning of the term. The CEFR-CV introduces a concept of mediation, which is more comprehensive than anything seen in language teaching so far. It starts with descriptor scales for *Relaying specific information in speech/writing*, and goes on to scales like *Linking to previous knowledge*, *Facilitating*

*collaborative interaction with peers, Facilitating pluricultural space* and includes scales like *Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements*. The systematic approach to such an extended concept of mediation is, in fact, the key to understanding the new Companion Volume to the CEFR and is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 The concept of mediation



Still not enough surprises? There is a new answer to questions concerning “standards” of foreign language teaching, which may surprise quite a few people. The dispute was raging even before 2001. Is a “native-speaker” construct helpful for specifying the aims of teaching and learning? Who or what exactly is a “native speaker” and why should learners be motivated to become members of this species? Scholars from the ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) school weren’t the only ones to vehemently dispute the use of this concept in the original CEFR. Now, the CEFR-CV takes an unequivocal stand: the “native speaker” is gone. The aims of teaching and learning are described differently – and in practical terms.

And there is more to come. Scales for online-communication, scales for young learners, for dealing with creative texts, for sign-language, new pre-A1 descriptors and much more - all of these make up a Companion Volume to the CEFR which goes far beyond what the original CEFR of 2001 had deservedly been valued for.

How all of this connects with yourself and your teaching? Well, it's probably not too far-fetched to assume that the CEFR-CV will prove as equally influential in Europe as the original has over the years.

Secondly, the new approach is highly promising, both in terms of its theoretical foundations and its pedagogical potential. So it deserves to be studied with care.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, your learners will profit from it.

How this can be achieved in practice should be the topic of discussions, workshops and training sessions in the months and years to come.

## **Beyond the classroom: integrating Gestalt practices into a bilingual educational model**

**Claudia Garcia Schuhbeck PhD**

**Alma Angélica Martíne, MBA**

### **Abstract**

Principles and techniques derived from Gestalt therapy and Gestalt perspective on growth are being internationally applied in a variety of educational settings. Gestalt Theory is a milestone for the modern study of perception and emphasises that learning and self-development are inseparable because the whole of anything is greater than its parts in isolation. The new educative bilingual model in Latin America is focused on those objectives that target teacher personality, teacher skills, and written curriculum. The aim is to increase in teachers and students the self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-awareness, sense of personal control, flexibility, and attention to the "here and now."

In this global world, the experiences at school are not enough to achieve international competence. Students and Professors should be prepared for a multicultural work field. The traditional class has changed. The teacher is a facilitator and the student is a continuous researcher. Globalisation takes education to a higher international ground in order to communicate and understand the perception of products and services in overseas markets along with human communication skills in different social and cultural scenarios. *Beyond the classroom* is a new project in Latin America to develop super learning skills in the students based on Gestalt teaching practices. Those include arts to develop language competence, resilience practices to build confidence, emotional intelligence to face new challenges, cognitive exercises to learn by doing, and new technologies for education, among other techniques based on the new models that integrate a foreign language as a second official language.

This paper will present the initiative taken in Mexico to prepare the teachers for the new bilingual educative model based on pedagogical Gestalt best practice. This includes enabling teachers to create a class by balancing the use of grammar concepts with maximising the students' experience in language acquisition.

### **Keywords**

*Super learning; Cognitive learning; Resilience; Emotional Intelligence; Gestalt.*

## Introduction

Why do languages come easily to some and not to others? Learning has its roots in culture and previous experiences blended with new ones. For instance, immigrants who arrive in a new country, adopt the local language by quickly adapting to the new environment, and add new vocabulary and cultural expressions by relating to their own cultural background. Day by day, they have the “experience” of language, until finally they blend in at different levels depending on specific context. That is, they “live” not only the language, but a whole set of customs, points of view, routines and other things perceived in the new environment.

Experience is defined as “knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, lived through, or undergone” (Kellogg, 2018). Perception, on the other hand, is defined as “the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding”, and “A single unified awareness derived from sensory processes while a stimulus is present” (Kellogg, 2018).

The Gestalt perspective upholds the view that both experience and perception have a great impact to the way people learn (David L, 2015). Reviewing these concept definitions, we can identify common terms such as “apprehend by the senses”, “the mind” and “live through” which incorporate keys to implementing a successful learning plan.

In plain language, the brain maps stimuli perceived through lived experiences, past and present, establishing the foundation for significant learning (David L, 2015).

In many Latin-American countries, it has been observed that students have had trouble acquiring a second language in order to apply it in a working environment or daily routines. The traditional educational systems conceive of the student as a passive character who receives information. However, a gap arises at the moment of transferring the information to solve problems or create knowledge.

The Gestalt approach calls for presenting students with learning experiences that require cognitive processes of a higher order to enhance not only problem-solving skills but related language social practices to be transferred beyond the academic context to the work and life environments (Phillips, 1985).

Therefore, as in the case of immigrants, the teaching of languages would have greater success by deploying learning strategies, such as *beyond the classroom*, which include super-learning



skills, resilience, emotional intelligence and cognitive exercises to learn by doing. The Gestalt learning techniques involve holistic thinking, cosmovision and living the present moment (“here and now”) theories.

Under such challenge, students and teachers face a milestone in their development process. Their competences are now elevated to another dimension of **self-development** where self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-awareness, sense of personal control, brain plasticity, and attention to the here and now are the areas to pursue besides technical and academic skills.

For students, the demand is set by the global arena and companies searching for people who have integrity, and are socially responsible, have respect for diversity and a commitment to lifelong learning. These abilities, often called “soft skills” now take to centre stage.

The aim is now to downsize the gap between the students’s academic experience and the living experience in order to produce a more comprehensive learning experience overall.

#### ***Beyond the classroom: Language Programme***

In México, the New Educative Model 2018 declares that students’ participation in language programmes should be directed towards social practices which demand communication in diverse social contexts promoting:

- The application of a second language in real or close to reality settings,
- Learn to learn skills,
- Auto-regulation of emotions,
- Collaboration skills,
- Respect and inclusion values. (SEP, 2017)

Because of that, many institutions are designing tools that help students to reach their learning goals, by using *principles and techniques derived from Gestalt therapy*.

According to the Gestalt perspective, students must be more than mere data loggers and learn to autonomously search for ways to solve their difficulties.

It is oriented towards a goal starting from what already exists, taking advantage of what already interests the student and not what "should interest" and that necessarily implies that cognition and emotion go together, and that we cannot stimulate learning without taking into account how to learn and how to develop cognitive skills outside of affect (Salama, 2008, p.213).

That is, motivation and emotion contribute to addressing behaviour. The *reasons* cause the movement or action of the human being to satisfy a need or to achieve a goal.

Since learning from the Gestalt is to discover that something is possible and that this implies unconscious and conscious experience that is why it is indispensable that in the design of the learning and teaching strategies the students' needs, concerns and previous knowledge are taken into account, in order to create a relevant training programme that fits the requirements of the context.

For this reason, in the new educational model in Mexico it is proposed, that planning be carried out parallel to the didactic, in which activities are systematically designed to include real events to present a conflict of values, to encourage dialogue and discussion, and promote self-observation and self-knowledge, in addition to being able to develop the learners both individually and in teams.

The starting point of Gestalt in education is based on the perception and organisation of information. Therefore, and following the learning process, we can perform activities that awaken the system of reception, processing and application of data received through the visual, auditory and kinesthetic channels.

Because of the importance and time involved in doing the above, it is proposed that these activities are part of extra-curricular activities, but mandatory in some of the schools. It is expected that after the first school year of 2019-2020, advances will be seen in the following areas:

- Creativity
- Critical planning
- Conflict resolution
- Emotional intelligence
- Collaborative work
- Learning to learn skills
- Mastery and comprehension
- Information reception and processing
- Application of information

### **Objective**

The objective is to create a class that includes applying *Beyond the classrooms* skills based on Gestalt teaching strategies to promote self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-awareness, sense of personal control, flexibility and attention in order to maximise students' language acquisition.

### **Methodology**

In order to transform the traditional class into an authentic experience where the process of acquiring a language becomes relevant to students, the first step is to give special attention to the planning process for both a complete course and a class.

For this project the aim is to guide teachers in the planning of a Gestalt class integrating the macro skills (Listening-Reading-Speaking-Writing) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), maximising the students' language learning through a holistic class in a cosmovision and mindfulness frame.

In *Beyond the classroom* the teacher makes the difference through four steps:

- Preparing the students mentally and physically by activating their senses to receive information, deploying all reception channels, taking in account that emotions and feelings are relevant to significant learning.
- Supporting students' integration of both brain hemispheres to process information.
- Orienting the students' application of the received and processed information to real or close to real contexts.
- Guiding the students' assessment process: through physical and cognitive exercises, encouraging auto/evaluation as well as peer evaluation.

Below, are shown some examples of activities proposed by the faculty that developed this proposal for the new educational model. Remember that this planning is not the planning of the regular class of languages, but is a class that students will take in other school periods to reinforce their learning ability.

1. For emotional intelligence and brain activation:
  - a. To reach a balance of emotions: Breathing and Mindfulness
  - b. Rectifying body posture
  - c. Breathing to oxygenate the brain
  - d. Mindfulness to focus on the here and now
  - e. Brain gym
2. For mastery and understanding:
  - a. Explaining events and concepts "in your own words".
  - b. Mimic to explore alternative communication channels
  - c. Speed activities to challenge our ability to recognise, remember and understand words. They also exercise fluency, grammatical skills and vocabulary.
  - d. In your own words: Foreign language
  - e. Your own explanation through art expressions.
3. For creativity:
  - a. To make suggestions, formulate questions and warnings with regard to specific events or concepts.

## Conclusion

In this new attempt to improve school results, experts in different areas have combined their experience to introduce activities parallel to the curriculum, so that only a short part of a designated class is devoted to trying to guide students to increase their mental and emotional capacity. This work has to be done parallel to the regular subjects, pointing out the importance that the development of those skills will have for the academic and professional life of the student. It is expected to have good results in the pilot schools, which were designated at the beginning of 2019 and were selected according to the following criteria:

- Schools with good school average
- Schools with low school performance rates
- Basic, middle and higher academic level institutions
- Strategies will be established according to the age and geographical location variables.

We look forward to updating readers on the success of the project when the first reports become available.

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## **ICC Languages and ECML**

**Matilde Grünhage-Monetti**

At the end of 2019 the ECML (European Centre for Modern Languages) celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a conference entitled 'Languages at the heart of learning: 25 years of inspiring innovation', in Graz, Austria.

The event celebrated the ECML's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (as well as the Council of Europe's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary), and offered the opportunity to engage with the Centre's contributions to the field of language education in Europe – present, past and future.

The conference opened at the prestigious baroque Meerscheinschlössl of the Karl-Franzen University of Graz. The first day was dedicated to the anniversary celebrations and opened with an impressive performance by the deaf Finnish rap artist Signmark, born Marko Vuoriheimo. In his understanding, society should not treat deaf people as disabled, but as a linguistic minority with their own culture and history. Sign language was in fact a central issue both to the conference and the ECML within the larger issue of the role of quality language education in fostering a culture of democracy.

In a carefully conducted orchestration of keynote speeches, panel discussions and interactive presentations, the conference investigated the role of the ECML in promoting quality language education, at the interface between policy, research, professional development and practice. Prestigious guest speakers represented the most important local and European political bodies of the European Union and the Council. Key policy developments were discussed, such as the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly recommendation on protecting and promoting sign languages in Europe, and the Council of the European Union's recommendation of a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages.

The second day, held at the ECML premises, focused on the presentation of the results of the ECML projects of the expiring programme and the insights gained from the Training and Consultancy Activities of the Centre, as well as a preview of the issues of the projects of the upcoming programme.

In four parallel sessions, participants had the opportunity to explore the nine thematic areas covered by the last ECML programme: Language teacher and learner competences, Plurilingual and intercultural education, Sign languages, Migrant education and employment, New media in language education, Evaluation and assessment, Early language learning, Content and language integrated learning, Language of schooling. The plenary sessions at the beginning and at the end of the day illustrated dissemination, adaption and impact, drawing on successful examples from ECML member states.

A further, central issue was the conference declaration on 'Quality Language Education for a Democratic and Socially Cohesive Europe: Nine ECML Cornerstones'. The first draft of a paper on the key contribution of quality language education to democratic societies and acknowledging the challenges that need to be addressed was discussed and presented at the conference. The final version was issued in early 2020. As such, the Declaration could pave the way for a Council of Europe Recommendation on Quality Language Education.

The conference closed on a very personal note. The ECML's long-standing expert consultant, Frank Heyworth, who has been closely involved with the Centre since its inception, recounted his story of how the ECML has evolved and what his engagement has meant to him, throwing a glance in future directions for language policy and practice in the ECML and the wider Council of Europe.

## **ICC Languages Big in Africa!**

**Barry Tomalin**

Not what you expected to read, I bet, but ICC members Michael Carrier, Rob Williams and myself have been involved in two major Francophone Africa projects aimed at giving opportunities to Africans to practise and improve their English and indeed get jobs and advance their careers as a result.

The first project had two parts, radio and newsprint. The first part was a media-led project aimed at providing bilingual (English/ French) radio programmes to be made available to local radio stations for broadcast, particularly in Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali. The programmes, sponsored by the British Council, were hosted by a leading BBC World Service presenter, Venuste Nshimiyimana from Rwanda. Venuste, obviously, is bilingual in English and French. Rwanda in 1994 took the decision to go bilingual, adopting English as an official language in addition to Kinyarwanda, Swahili and French..

The second part of the project involved the preparation of a series of articles in English for Senegalese, Ivorian and Malian newspapers. These articles on various areas of African innovation and development from all over the continent were accompanied by vocabulary explanations and comprehension exercises as well as teachers' notes for classroom exploitation. Programmes and articles were written and recorded in London, a very interesting and rewarding experience for us all.

The second project, also sponsored by the British Council was even more important. This involved a study of the role of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education) through the English language in building language skills, communication-skills and self-confidence, aimed at helping young people in the final years of secondary school prepare themselves for employment, especially in the international companies investing in Africa and using English as the language of communication. We explored the situation in two countries, Djibouti, in the horn of Africa and Gabon in central Africa on the equator.

One of the great pleasures of these research projects is the opportunity to meet and exchange views with teachers and trainers and education officials who are doing a fantastic job with great enthusiasm despite the lack of facilities,

**Review****Successful International Communication****Chia Suan Chong****Published by Pavilion Books, Brighton 2019**

Reviewed by Barry Tomalin

This is a really useful and practical teacher's guide aimed at teachers and trainers in international communication and cultures and particularly for teachers and corporate trainers in business. Its great advantage is that it explains and shows how to use both culture and communication models in teaching and training and contains lots of illustrative mini case studies (critical incidents) showing how cultural communication misunderstandings play out in international teamworking, leadership, managing conflict and building good relationships. 'Critical incident', for any reader who doesn't know, was a term defined by psychologist, John Flanagan, as, 'a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broader psychological principles' (Flanagan, J.C., 1954, The Critical Incident Technique, Psychological Bulletin Volume 51 Issue 4).

One example that stood out for me was the role of apologising for mistakes in the UK and Japan, As Chia Suan Chong points out in her example, a British manager explained how a problem could be solved, but resolutely refused to accept blame as it would be an admittance of guilt, and might lead to him being blamed for the problem by management. A Japanese manager faced with a similar situation apologised profusely for the error and apologised also for the time it would take to correct it. In this way he hoped to maintain good relations with upper management. This goes some way towards understanding the criticism I have heard by Japanese managers speaking of British employees. 'The British don't know how to apologise. They only know how to make excuses.' Taking the shame of making an error and apologising for it is a characteristic of Japanese business far more than of British business.

In discussing the cultural differences in conflict management, Chia Suan Chong also introduces models from business management to explain how conflict can be resolved. For example, she presents the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument as a way of understanding the five dominant modes of conflict management. They are:

1. Competition Mode – competitive and assertive.
2. Accommodating Mode - cooperative but not assertive
3. Compromise Mode – looks for the middle ground and seeks and offers concessions



4. Avoiding Mode – unassertive but also uncooperative

5. Collaboration Mode – looks for resolution through collaboration and seeking creative solutions.

(See: [www.kilmanndiagnostic.com](http://www.kilmanndiagnostic.com)).

Having explained the model Chia Suan Chong goes on to provide examples from international business situations which are excellent for classroom use and then provides explanations and offers ten dos and don'ts when communicating in a conflict situation, making sure that theory, practice and opportunities for reflection are all provided.

Chia Suan Chong explains the key models of culture, principally by Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Meyer and shows how they apply in practice to international business communication. One of the biggest issues in international business is the task orientation and relationship orientation described by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner in 'Riding the Waves of Culture' as the 'Specific/Diffuse' paradigm and by Meyer in 'The Culture Map' as the 'Trusting' scale. Once again in the example of Ferris (a task-focused team member) and Max (a more relationship-based team member) she explains the problems in building a good international working relationship with a team member in another country, because of a failure to appreciate that the 'task-based' colleague is more likely to want to dive into project management issues whereas the 'relationship-based' colleague wanted to learn about his new colleague's personal background and family first.

The important point that Chia Suan Chong makes is that task-oriented and relationship-oriented are not opposites, as so often depicted in examples of cultural misunderstanding but are in fact interdependent. Both are needed to successfully complete an international team project to specification, on time and on budget. What matters is to recognise in international communication that people bring with them, "a range of behaviours, expectations, values, beliefs and attitudes that are influenced by their different cultural associations (e.g. gender, age, nationality, occupation, social groups). Yet these are by no means static or fixed; they change to adapt to the people and situations we are in".

What is important says Chia Suan Chong is to help students and trainees "to develop a set of behaviours that can help you to face any kind of diversity you come into contact with when communicating interculturally".

The key for Chia Suan Chong is adaptability, and the key concept she introduces in the book is ADAPT, described as a model for dealing with communication misunderstandings based on cultural differences. ADAPT is an acronym, the letters standing for:

A Awareness – being aware of what is happening.

D Don't judge – Don't be too quick to judge.

A Analyse – Analyse the situation and the possible interpretation and the values and beliefs that underlie the behaviour.

P Persuade Yourself – Persuade yourself by finding commonality between your beliefs and your wide range of communication skills.

T Try – Try doing or seeing things slightly differently from the way you're used to.

One issue Chia Suan Chong addresses is the use of English internationally. She is Singaporean by birth but resident in England and an internationally recognised teacher and trainer in communication skills. Based in York in the north of England with her family, she has lived in Japan with a Japanese family, in Germany and in London and rejoices in her status as a 'citizen of the world'. The ability to communicate in English (Singapore adopted English as one of its four official languages and the language of business and administration and as the medium of instruction in 1965) is something she considers a great gift while recognising the very great differences in the language as it is used around the world, in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and communication style.

All communicators in English whether so called 'native speakers' or 'non-native speakers' can learn certain core techniques to avoid communication misunderstandings, They include speaking clearly, slowing down, avoiding too many cultural references and being careful about the use of humour, adapting to different styles of communication and, above all, respecting others. Maybe that's what it is all about, showing respect for others and willingness to resolve communication misunderstandings positively in international dealings. In offering analysis, case studies and techniques for doing so, Successful International Communication is a great support for teachers, trainers and indeed, for international communicators in general.

NOTE: You can read an article by Chia Suan Chong in TLC Journal Volume 4 Issue 1 on this site.



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