Introduction to Intercultural Communication
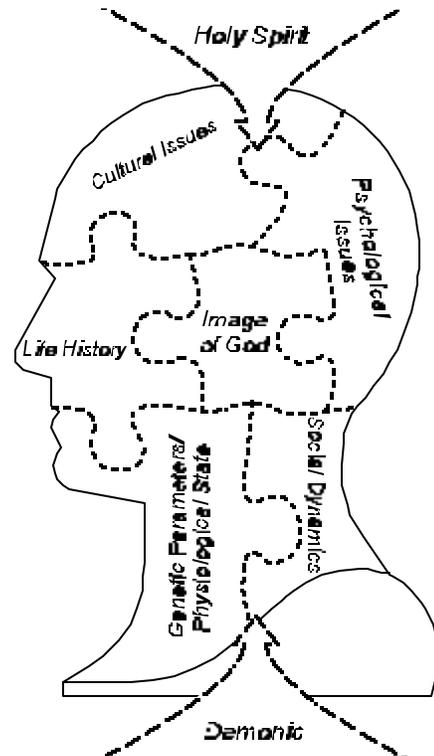
1. Theological foundations

    a. We are communicating creatures (made in God's image)

    b. We serve a communicating Creator (revelation)

    c. We are commanded to communicate with others (evangelism/discipleship)

2. The "human" factor

    a. We are physical (and therefore limited)

    b. We are finite in knowledge

    c. We are categorizers (language)

3. The complexity of what we take for granted

    a. Communication is *always* a two-way street

    b. There are levels of interlocking and dynamically changing assumptions

    c. Factors involved do not simply add up in a linear fashion; they blend together like ingredients in a cake

    d. As individuals we use different formulas of factors in different settings--we change depending on the context. Therefore static paper models of intercultural communication by definition will never justice to the complexity of this discipline.

    e. To some extent, the "cultures" we discuss are all the products of our own organizational frameworks and are really inventions that help us understand the maps people use to guide them through life.

    f. The fields of legitimate inquiry into intercultural communication include anthropology (cultural, psychological, ecological, semiotic), sociology, social psychology, and communication. For the Christian, theology (and contextualization) must also be

included.

g.   Aspects of communication include language, paralanguage, symbol, body, noise, entropy, etc.

4.   Concerning the discipline of intercultural studies, at this time:

a.   Solid empirical research is on the rise, but still insufficient. The very complexity of the event is prohibitive for appropriate operationalization.

b.   There is no coherent, single intercultural communication model that is accepted across the board.

5.   Issues in intercultural communication:

a.   Using the metaphor of an artist's palette (see diagram), there are several basic "paints" that will facilitate understanding the strategies and patterns of communication in different cultures. These include:
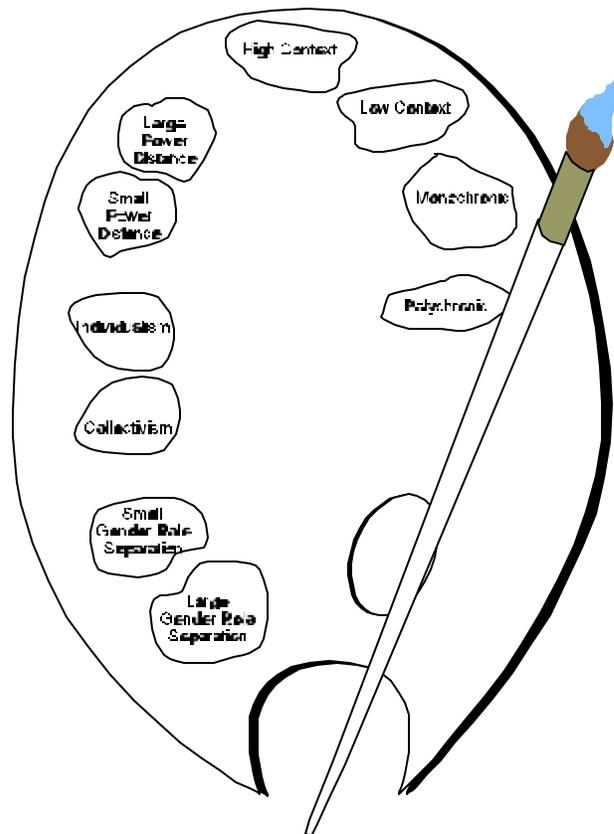
    i.   Choosing what data to process and how to process it (contexting)

    ii.   Juniors relation to seniors (power distance)

    iii.   Male and female relations and roles

    iv.   Identity boundaries (me [or us] vs s/he [or them])

    v.   Foundational factors in finding meaning in life (primarily cosmological analogies as a means of explaining the events of life).

b.   The "palette" may be used as a foundation upon which we may examine a model of competency in intercultural communication together with some of the most significant scenarios of communication that missionaries to any culture will face.