Becoming Intercultural: Inside and Outside the Classroom

Yau Tsai, Stephanie Houghton (eds).
Newscastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 245 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4438-2286-8.

This is a collection of papers from the CULTNET group spanning Europe and East Asia. The group was set up by Michael Byram and the tone of the book reflects his humane progressive-liberal approach to the issues. Byram himself is cited by all but one of the papers, Bourdieu and Foucault by none. It is a key theme of the volume that Byram and his school have gradually come round to the view that teachers should intervene actively to guide students towards a liberal-democratic stance, rather than merely making them aware of cultural difference.

After a foreword by KARIN RISAGER, the first chapter by MICHAEL BYRAM and MANUELA GUILHERME presents a broad picture of intercultural communication as an activity and intercultural competence as a set of skills to be acquired. For some intercultural communication is intimately connected with language learning, for others language is not an issue. In the EU intercultural competence is closely entwined with linguistic competence and the authors describe (limited) progress towards scales for assessing intercultural competence in a way analogous to the Common European Framework for more linguistic skills.

The status of intercultural competence and ways of reaching it are also the topic of YANNAN GUO's chapter. As in other chapters, terminology can seem unfocussed: the notion of motivation is, for example equated at one point with intention and at another with attitude. Nevertheless Guo usefully points out that the scope of intercultural studies has widened over the years both in the number of situations covered and the aspects of them that are considered. In particular there has been a shift from a view focused on the instrumental needs of sojourners and immigrants to one able to include concerns of power and equality. Following Byram, the notion of intercultural citizenship is invoked as a way of dealing with cultural excuses for oppression and unethical behavior; we must not only have the motivation, knowledge and skills

that make up intercultural competence, but also the political will and insight to make judgements.

In a further investigation of this elusive concept, JOSEP M. COTS and ENRIC LLURDA cast a critical eye on the way they themselves constructed "interculturality" in the formulation of a questionnaire for teachers in Spain. They found that their items presupposed the existence of interculturality as a noun, a thing, rather than an attribute, corresponding to the noun. They had associated this "thing" with multilingualism, acceptance of cultural diversity, and the school's responsibility for propagating it, across disciplines. However, the respondent teachers problematized different issues. Their experience of multilingualism in the languages of Spain made notions like knowledge of a language problematic for them. Similarly, acceptance of cultural diversity was more a fact of their diverse classrooms than a conscious teacher decision. Responsibility for disseminating an intercultural stance also felt like an extra burden, diluting the serious disciplinary work they had to do.

Another way of identifying the nature of interculturalism or intercultural education is to look at official syllabuses and other documents. LYNNE PARMENTER's useful chapter reports a content analysis of 65 such guiding documents around the world. It shows that globalization has affected the sphere of fine words about interculturalism in two ways. Worldwide the documents contain quite similar positive formulations about what intercultural awareness is and aspirations for achieving it. This says little about classroom practice or teacher understanding, but it is likely to be a prerequisite for success in these areas. Secondly, dealing with diversity inside the nation is increasingly being seen in the same terms as dealing with it across national and language boundaries: the language-learning and citizenship agendas are merging.

The next three chapters form a section on "Becoming intercultural through experience". YAU TSAI's model-building paper "From intercultural learning to interculturality and second/ foreign language acquisition: how and why?" is hard to understand because of loose use of abstract vocabulary (and poor proof-reading) which obscures what is intended to be novel in this widely-used, and quite influential, model.

The study abroad experience is frequently intended to be an experience which leads young people to interculturality. MARI AYANO interviewed a large number of Japanese students in exchange-student and study-abroad

environments in Britain. The stories she tells broadly show that the experience is mixed in the way that other accounts of exchange students' stays abroad suggest. It is very hard to make local friends, and consequently those who do so risk a degree of exclusion from the home-country group. These Japanese students did not even manage to be integrated into the (European-dominated) international-student community, the usual source of intercultural experience for exchange students. But when it came to time to go home many noticed that they had changed and in some way become intercultural, perhaps even to the extent of being at home in neither culture.

YUMIKO FURUMARA's chapter is perhaps more about cross-cultural difference than about intercultural competence. Japanese students with good competence in English role-played various situations in which they were required to refuse to do things under different conditions of power and urgency. The role-plays were performed in both Japanese and English, and English native speakers also performed them (in English only, unfortunately). NSE Judges who were native speakers of English then evaluated the recorded dialogues in terms of criteria such as directness and assertiveness. The Japanese informants were statistically more likely than the native speakers to be judged ineffective, whichever language they used, so there was a good deal of pragmatic transfer despite the informants' linguistic competence. This is one of several papers in which there seems to be too much focus on adapting to the native-speaker culture and not enough consideration of Byram's "intercultural speaker" construct.

The third section is called "Becoming intercultural through education" and looks at techniques for developing intercultural awareness. ETSUKO YAMADA's chapter describes work with British university students of elementary Japanese intended to investigate whether basic language-teaching at tertiary level can help in developing criticality in the sense of Barnett (1997). Yamada finds that that instruction at this basic level can (modestly) stimulate thought both in terms of cultural awareness and language awareness, and that instruction targeted at criticality can enhance these effects. In interviews and post-class questionnaires, learners questioned, for example, the popular perception that Japanese is very difficult, observed how learning changed their perceptions of English, and came to understand the relativity of symbols from reading Japanese *haiku*.

In the next chapter PRUE HOLMES and GILLIAN O'NEILL report on using autoethnography and self-reflection to develop intercultural awareness in

New Zealand, without reference to language learning Their participants were local and international students of various ethnicities (including, for example Asian-New Zealand vs Maori-New Zealand as well as "New Zealander" vs Malaysian). Pairs of students from different backgrounds interviewed one another repeatedly on attitudes and experiences related to culture and cultural difference, and kept a journal. Detailed instructions guided the students towards awareness of their own intercultural competence and instilled the spirit of intercultural citizenship. We hear the voices of a handful of participants, illustrating how very much could be learned from the method in terms of intercultural understanding; the quotations are inspiring and it would be nice to know how representative they are.

STEPHANIE HOUGHTON's final chapter on "*Savoir se transformer*, knowing how to become" describes an elaborate method-comparison project for Japanese students of English conducted in Japan. It is structured according to Houghton's interesting Intercultural Dialogue (ID) model of the development of intercultural competence. The three methods compared aimed respectively at an empathetic stance in learners, a critical awareness of one's own evaluations, and critical awareness with explicit adoption of democratic values. It is not clear from the discussion whether the methods achieved their various aims, but it is clear that this type of explicit teaching led to greater awareness, and that it is possible to learn to transform oneself.

Several of Houghton's informants complained that it was difficult to express complex ideas in a foreign language. It is notable that Yamada's students used their native language, while some of Holmes and O'Neill's informants used their first language and others a second language. The common thread is of course that all used English. However, the structural inequality between English and all other languages in the globalized world is not discussed in this book. Much of CULTNET's rhetoric and agenda matches that of the advocates of an English as a Lingua Franca approach (Mauranen, 2012) and it is a pity the two schools do not refer to each other's literature. Intercultural competence should surely include awareness of the implications of lingua-franca use which is *de facto* a condition of intercultural communication.

The group whose papers are published here have read widely and integrated a variety of approaches. Their conceptualizations, their research methods

used and many of the instruments will be of great use to other investigators and an inspiration to teachers both of languages and of intercultural communication.

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