

**This is a Reviewed Article**

## **Intercultural Training: Learn to avoid treading on other people's toes or experience walking in the other person's shoes**

*Kristin Rygg*

*Norwegian School of Economics*

[\*Kristin.rygg@nhh.no\*](mailto:Kristin.rygg@nhh.no)

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**Abstract**

*This article raises the question of whether the traditional approach in intercultural training focusing on knowledge about cultural differences and skills to avoid culture clash is sufficient in order to prepare intercultural communication trainees for dynamic and psychologically demanding multicultural environments. Inspired by the concept of mentalizing in the psycho-therapeutic method called Mentalization-based treatment, training that encourages imaginatively "seeing the other from the inside and oneself from the outside" is suggested as better able to prepare for complex intercultural realities. Tolerance is seen as tolerance for being in the intercultural process as much as tolerance for others' differences. A theoretical discussion between the notion of mentalizing in mentalization-based treatment and perceptions of empathy, imagination and mindfulness further provides insight into the role of interactive tools such as case work and role plays in intercultural training. These, in turn, are seen as best suited to fulfil the goals and ambitions of the theories. However, experiences gained from them must be verbalized in order to cause increased awareness.*

## 1. Introduction

In interviews with Norwegian businessmen in Tokyo (Rygg 2012), a man named Rune talks about how he switches between a Japanese way of thinking and behaving and a Norwegian one in the same way as you switch from one setting to another on a dial [*bryter*]:

It is like turning a dial to and from depending on whom you are talking to [...]. In the beginning it is hard to turn and you get frustrated, but when you have done it a couple of times, then you continue to do it without thinking about it."

The traditional approach to intercultural training builds on essentialist/functionalist ideologies and has given rise to course objectives focusing on acquiring knowledge about the 'other' in order to avoid culture clash. Thus, a student in a class on intercultural communication maintained that the main course objective, in her view, was "to learn how to avoid treading on other people's toes".

I do not contest that knowledge and skills to handle intercultural encounters are important ingredients in intercultural training. However, this article was written based on a concern about whether such training is enough to prepare someone for the kind of complex and psychologically demanding multicultural environment that Rune portrays.

This article discusses intercultural training with the rather new conceptual lenses of the so-called *mentalizing* tradition (Allen and Fonagy 2006; Bateman and Fonagy 2012), which, in short, focuses on 'walking in other people's shoes' instead of learning how to avoid treading on other people's toes.

The conceptual framework of mentalizing originates from psychology, and has led to the development of a psychotherapeutic method called *mentalization-based treatment*. In this article, however, I do not aim to discuss the principles of mentalizing used in clinical methods, but rather focus on the relevance of the theoretical concept to intercultural training. The question discussed in this article is:

RQ: What may the concept of mentalizing offer to intercultural training in order to better prepare intercultural trainees for complex and emotionally demanding multicultural realities?

Although this is mainly a theoretical discussion, it is illustrated with concrete examples from intercultural experiences and training practices (author's data).

In part 2, I look at the traditional approach in intercultural training in more detail and discuss why a new scope is needed. In part 3, I discuss why alternative approaches this far have not been sufficiently equipped to act as alternatives to the traditional one. Thus, I introduce the mentalizing framework in part 4, and look at intercultural training literature and practices through its lenses in part 5.

## 2. The traditional approach to intercultural training and why a new scope is needed

In Spitzberg's (1989) classical definition (referred to in Spitzberg 2009), intercultural competence encompasses a cognitive aspect of *knowledge*, a behavioural component of *skills*, and an affective component of *attitude*.

Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2010:384) promote their bestselling textbook in intercultural training with: "Our goal here is to lay before you the skills you must develop to become a competent intercultural communicator". It seems that these are skills that anyone can learn.

However, curiously, many works on intercultural communication still seem to harbour a persistent notion of an 'other' unable to learn. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:54) note that:

Another implicit assumption is that the other interactant is a prototypical member of the other or 'host' culture towards whose culturally based expectations the first interactant has to adjust, rather than a person possessing intercultural experience and/or competence *also* able to adjust in order to create interactional appropriateness.

Since 'the other' is perceived as a prototypical and essentialist member of his culture and unable to change, literature has aimed to provide information about how to avoid problematic miscommunications with the stranger. Thus, for instance, Ting-Toomey (2004) argues that intercultural training must combine knowledge about culture differences with skills to minimize the potential conflict that may arise when people with different subjective cultures meet, but without addressing the possibility for mutual influence. In such a view, *mindfulness*, a term she uses to refer to attentiveness towards others, and tolerance naturally become important attitudes. The term *tolerance* stems from a Latin verb meaning 'to endure' (Dahl 2013:293) in the meaning of enduring that others' values and norms are different from one's own. However, tolerance for others' differences, appreciated as it might be, only sees the other from one's own perspective and does not encourage active participation in other's realities. In respect to the latter, there are a number of other attitudes that are more central.

In the overviews provided by Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009) and Spitzberg & Changnon (2009), the notion of *attitude* is understood, among others, as the readiness to respect (i.e. tolerate) and value cultural diversity (Deardorff 2006), to be mindful (Gudykunst and Kim 2003; Ting-Toomey 2004), and to be curious, open and ready to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own (Byram 1997). Deardorff (2006) places these attitudinal aspects as the motivational basis for wanting to acquire knowledge and skills. Further, with the right attitude, knowledge and skills in place, the desired attitudinal outcome is empathy, flexibility and adaptability. Hiller (2010:149) concretizes this further by adding awareness of the complexity of interactions, the ability to change perspectives, and openness to potential influences.

The further down the list, the further towards a constructivist view on communication, and the less attention paid in the traditional approach to intercultural communication. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) argue that knowledge and skills have tended to take precedence over attitude in intercultural training. This makes sense when we see that the dominating focus in the essentialist/functionalist approach is on the stranger rather than on how one's own attitudes and psychological reactions affect communication.

What most distinguishes living in a multi-cultural society compared to a mono-cultural one is probably a reduced feeling of control in social interactions. Misunderstandings and conflicts, which often lead to anger, fear and anxiety, tend to make us "mentally blind" (Skårderud and Sommerfeldt 2008:4). Also, Gudykunst and Kim (2003:39), important contributors to the traditional approach, maintain that in stressful situations, people tend to act on 'auto-pilot', simplifying the other into stereotypes and resorting to old prejudices. Thus, I agree with Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:1) that intercultural training should include training to tolerate the psychological demands and the dynamic outcomes that result from complex intercultural interactions. This has not been given enough attention in the essentialist/functionalist approach.

### 3. A reaction to the traditional approach

The following presents a communication model building on constructivist principles (Yoshikawa 1987) that was intended as a reaction to the traditional approach (ibid.:320).

As discussed in part 2, intercultural dialogues may be looked at 'pessimistically', as problems that require tolerance and skills to avoid culture clash. However, intercultural dialogues may also be looked at with positive anticipation as Yoshikawa (1987:328) does in his *double-swing model*:

Unlike the highly controlled approach to intercultural communication, this model brings in an element of surprise and curiosity to the intercultural communication process.

The element of surprise is due to the constructivist dynamics that are caused by two people interacting. Yoshikawa's model is inspired by the philosophies of Martin Buber (1965) and holistic Buddhist logics. Both are occupied with how independence and interdependence exist simultaneously in human relationships.



In the double-swing model, one has to step out from one's own ground to meet the other. The infinity symbol visualizes 'identity in unity' which is the twofold movement between the self and the other that allows for both unity and uniqueness. The tension that results from the meeting between two unique individuals causes a dynamic flow of dialogical interaction where both are influenced by the other in a constant pull from both sides. This creates a 'dynamic inbetweenness' which may be temporal or may cause a lasting change in the identities of either or both.

The model describes the inherent complex dynamism of intercultural encounters better than the essentialist/functionalist approach above. However, it is difficult to use as a guideline to intercultural communication training practices because it is merely descriptive and does not suggest how to ensure the type of harmonic communication that he describes. Further, the model describes communication as "dynamic, tension-laden" (Yoshikawa 1987:327) but without discussing what effect the tension has on the interlocutors, and how they can handle it. Thus, even though one might say that Yoshikawa's model and the mentalizing tradition share a common ideological foundation (constructivism), the mentalizing approach is more analytical, and therefore may function better as a contrasting framework to the essentialist/functionalist one.

### 4. Mentalizing

Mentalizing (Allen and Fonagy 2006; Bateman and Fonagy 2012) is a social competence originally developed within developmental psychology. The key figures in this tradition are Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman. Later, the concept functioned as an intellectual framework for developing attitudes, stances and techniques for psychotherapy, originally psychotherapy for severe personality disorders, more specifically borderline personality disorders. Such disorders may be described as severe impairments in mentalizing capacities, i.e. "losing one's mind" due to even small frustrations. Later, mentalization-based treatment (MBT) was developed and implemented for other diagnostic groups. In this milieu, Anthony Bateman is the central person translating theoretical concepts into clinical and therapeutic principles. Skårderud and Sommerfeldt (2008), who discuss the concept of mentalizing in a Norwegian journal, list a number of clinical studies where mentalization-based treatment has proven to have a positive effect. Holmes (2006:35) sums up the phenomenology of mentalizing as follows (numbers added by this author):

(1) It involves the capacity to empathize, that is, to be able to put oneself in another's shoes; (2) encompasses the ability to see and evaluate oneself and one's feelings from the outside; (3) denotes the capacity to differentiate feelings about reality from reality itself, (4) is a graded rather than all-or-nothing phenomenon; (5) is related to arousal; and (6) is enhanced by the presence of a secure soothing partner or other intimate.

From this summary, I elaborate further on points 1-5. The main aspect that is used in mentalizing is that it refers both to understanding the minds of others and one's own mind (cf. Holmes' points 1 and 2 above). Hence, it is a rather wide concept. Skårderud and Sommerfeldt (2008:2) use the phrase "seeing the other from the inside and oneself from the outside" about this duality.

*Empathy*, *mindfulness* and *imagination* are mentioned as conceptual cousins to mentalizing (Allen and Fonagy 2006). However, there are some central differences. Allen and Fonagy (ibid.:24) define *empathy* as being able to identify with the distress of other persons. However, mentalizing also includes empathy for oneself. I return to what this entails when I discuss its relevance to intercultural training below.

In Zen Buddhist literature, the term *mindfulness* is understood as watchfulness, wakefulness, and one's own personal experience of the present 'now' (Trungpa 1976). Mentalizing, on the other hand, entails reflecting on past and future feelings and events, and the focus is on being mindful both to one's own and the other's experience (Allen and Fonagy 2006:15).

*Imagination* as a mentalizing method has to do with being able to imaginatively putting oneself in the other person's shoes (cf. Holmes above). Thus, to be able to play and pretend are important activities in the mentalizing process. However, it requires 'grounded imagination' (Allen and Fonagy 2006:17), which means to inquire what others feel instead of just assuming what they feel (cf. Holmes' point 3). When mentalizing fails, it is because of 'mindblindness' (obliviousness to mental states) or distortions, i.e. misreading of the mind or unrestrained imagination, which is the opposite of 'grounded imagination' above. Further, to participate in imaginative play also means to be "amenable to other's influence" (Allen and Fonagy 2006:21), which puts the theory in a constructivist perspective.

Mentalizing competences are developed within the framework of secure attachment, while insecurity may inhibit the development. That is, mentalizing is not a fixed property of mind, but a process or capacity that may be present or absent to greater or lesser degree when interacting with other people (Holmes' point 4). Thus, mentalizing is a competence that is dependent on affective state, e.g. it is more difficult to mentalize when there is affective arousal, as anger or fear (Holmes' point 5). Allen and Fonagy (2006:35) see stress as the enemy of mentalization:

When anxiety reaches a certain level the mentalization brain goes offline and moves into survival mode.

Therefore, the aim of the therapy is to "generate insight on the fly" (ibid.:18), which means to practice bringing the event to mind deliberately without becoming too emotionally immersed in it.

These different elements are further elaborated on below when applied to the interpretation of an authentic case from an intercultural training class experienced by the author. Further, the ideas put forward in the mentalizing framework are not completely new to the intercultural field. Thus, when commenting on the case, those theoretical studies within the intercultural field that resonate with the mentalizing concepts are being emphasized.

## 5. The concepts of mentalizing applied to a case study

Below, I give an account of an intercultural training course conducted at a Norwegian school of economics with focus on East Asian culture and communication. There were thirteen nationalities in the class, including several East Asians (four Japanese and two Chinese) and two lecturers, one Norwegian and one French/Chinese.

The case shows how the course objective changed from a functionalist/essentialist approach to an approach reflecting the mentalizing principles, especially those of "seeing the other from the inside" and "seeing oneself from the outside". Recollection of the case is written in italics.

### 5.1. Seeing the other from the inside

*During a lecture on high context communication based on Japanese examples, the lecturer realized that the four Japanese students in the class felt awkward. The lecturer interpreted the reasons for their discomfort as follows:*

*The theories on high/low context communication (Hall 1976) are presented as dichotomies. That is, they only include aspects of communication where high and low context can be clearly contrasted to each other. Further, they are linked to national cultures in an essentialist manner. The four Japanese students in class were not only being 'simplified' as human beings but also contrasted to and, thus, isolated from the other 'low context communicators' in class.*

One might say that this was a typical example of a lecture based on the essentialist/functionalist ideologies, where the others, in this case, the Japanese, were being portrayed as different, static and inadaptible. This approach became especially difficult because the Japanese students in class had different degrees of intercultural backgrounds (e.g. one whose father's job transfer had taken him to the USA for part of his childhood) and undergone different degrees of adaptation to the Norwegian/intercultural business school environment. Their personal experiences were simply too complex to put them in one stereotyped category.

In the following lecture, the lecturers decided a change in methodology:

*The students were asked to work on a case recounted by a Norwegian woman, Marianne, who was sent to Japan to work as the project manager for a group of international computer programmers. This was a real case acquired from an interview conducted in Japan (referred to in Rygg 2012). The project task was to install a new program for a large Japanese firm, and the group was confronted with many problems related to communication and management style. A Japanese man, Mr Tanaka, was coordinating the team together with Marianne, and his comments also appeared in the case.*

*The result of the casework was something quite different from the first lecture. Some of the Japanese had to be Marianne, and others, regardless of nationality, had to be Mr Tanaka. This is not to say that they pretended to talk like them, as one might do in a role play, but simply that they tried to argue their case from their perspectives.*

The mentalizing principles do not focus on learning about the other, but on 'seeing the other from the inside'. Lomas (1993:18), another psychotherapist, points out that:

Much of the art of therapy depends on being able to place oneself within the experience of the other and to feel, in some measure, what it is like to be him.

Through empathy, the stranger becomes more transparent and known, and less strange and foreign. This is what 'seeing the other from the inside' means, and what happened when the students tried to argue their case from Marianne's and Tanaka's perspectives.

This training approach also finds resonance among some intercultural scholars. According to M. Bennett (1998:211), the concept of *empathy* in intercultural communication entails a temporary suspension of self for the purpose of understanding the other. He stresses that it does not mean thinking about what the other might think or feel. It is rather a position where we "imaginatively participate in that person's experience" and is something similar to the imaginative participation that occurs when we participate in a play or are immersed in a novel. From a similar academic background, Kimmel (2006:461) argues that:

Mere information about your own and other's cultures does not affect your mindset or provide a solid basis for intercultural exploration; training that stimulates real emotion and communication among trainees does.

Thus, Fleming (2003:87ff.) discusses how drama can play a role in intercultural training because it involves the whole self, intellectual, physical and emotional. The concrete context that drama provides is more defined and controlled than in real life, and thus, more easily observable. The participants draw on their own experiences but can also explore new creations of meaning without having to take responsibility for their actions in real life.

Fowler and Blohn (2004:46), referred to in Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:216), state that "if the outcome of the training is that trainees will modify their attitudes, methods need to touch trainees' belief systems, often intensely". In their view, this intensive touching of belief systems can especially be experienced through participation in exercises such as simulations, role plays and games.

In part 6 below, we see how intercultural sensitivity or competence takes a long time to learn in real life. However, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009:216) argue that exercises such as simulations and role plays "may at least be initiated even in short development interventions".

In our case, we concluded that:

The casework was so successful that we decided to use cases from real life experiences on all the topics in the course.

However, later the course curriculum caused strong reactions among the students:

*When the students had started to read the course curriculum in order to prepare for the final exam, there were many complaints about the textbook on Japanese culture and communication. Two randomly chosen quotes from the book are:*

*Since the Japanese are extremely concerned about interpersonal harmony and protection of each other's 'face' in face-to-face encounters, they use a variety of ingenious tactics of interpersonal communication [...] (Nishiyama 2000:13)  
Japanese businessmen value the use of all five human senses. In addition, they rely even more heavily on their sixth sense (kan) or "intuition" (ibid.:71).*

This was a textbook that had been used without complaints on several courses before. It contained much practical information about how to communicate with Japanese business executives, and was even written by a native Japanese. However, after

experiencing being Mr Tanaka and other Japanese individuals through case work, the textbook's perspective seemed to cause offence.

In retrospect and in view of the principles of mentalizing, it seems that through casework, the students had gained insights from "seeing the Japanese from the inside" that collided with the textbook's functionalist/essentialist perspective. Nishiyama's view is similar to that of Ting-Toomey's (part 2) in the sense that he is mindful to others' differences but, still, sees 'the other from the outside'. Thus, the textbook seemed to be perceived as 'a return' to seeing the Japanese from an outsider's perspective and too stereotypical to the students who had experienced 'walking in Japanese shoes'.

'Trying out different types of shoes' can be an emotionally demanding activity. Therefore, it requires tolerance for being in a psychologically demanding and dynamic process as much as tolerance for differences in people's values and norms. As mentioned by Fleming above, it might be better to practice tolerance for unpredictable situations in a drama activity in the classroom than in authentic encounters, because it provides an opportunity to explore without being responsible for one's emotions in real life.

## 5.2. Seeing oneself from the outside

Ting-Toomey (part 2), applied the term *mindfulness* in the meaning of attentiveness towards others but without a self-reflective component. Within mentalization-based treatment, on the other hand, the therapist is taught that qualities such as empathy, acceptance, respectful curiosity and openness have both inner and outer aspects. That is, getting to know the other goes hand in hand with getting to know the 'otherness' in oneself. The 'otherness' in oneself are the assumptions and the taken-for-granted that are out of awareness until challenged by other's worldviews.

In this respect, Alred (2003) found in a study among exchange students going abroad for one year that the majority of them experienced not only increased understanding of the host culture, but also reported marked changes in self-perception, personal development and maturity. Thus, the experience had taught them more about themselves. It had boosted their self-esteem and given them insight into their own worldviews, which until then had been subconscious to them. This is what "seeing oneself from the outside" means.

Hall (1976:42), often considered the founding father of intercultural communication, argues that:

Everything man is and does is modified by learning and therefore malleable. But once learned, these behaviour patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and, like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths.

The part of culture that is out-of-awareness consists of perceptions and attitudes that have not yet been formulated linguistically (Hall 1992:7). However, they are observable to others through one's actions and regulate emotions on a subconscious level. 'Seeing oneself from the outside' means bringing these to the surface. In the mentalizing tradition, 'grounded imagination' is when the clients are asked to inquire what others feel instead of just assuming what they feel (cf. part 4). Similarly, they are being asked to verbalize their own thoughts. That is, they become conscious of their own out-of-awareness rules by making them explicit, i.e. by putting them into words.

Applied to the case from the intercultural classroom elaborated on above, this means that imagination in itself is not enough. Imagination must be verbalized in order to create

conscious awareness. A way to verbalize one's own experiences is to relate them to the literature (i.e. theorized and written down experiences) by various scholars within the field. Consequently:

The imagination exercises were followed up by oral and written reflection tasks where the experiences were related to intercultural communication literature.

Ting-Toomey does not acknowledge a possibility for mutual influence (part 2). The opposite view and more in line with mentalization-based treatment is when Kimmel (2006:461) states that:

Intercultural exploration can help to combine the ideas and approaches of individuals with dissimilar subjective cultures into something new that none of them could conceive alone.

This is taking the activity above even further towards constructivism, but is something that is not an unrealistic objective in authentic intercultural encounters, as we see in part 6 below.

## 6. How the mentalizing principles are reflected in authentic intercultural encounters

In this part, I return to Rune's experiences presented in the introduction and compare them to those of another Norwegian named Trond. The aim is to strengthen my case that the concepts of mentalizing do not only provide ideas for 'fun' classroom activities, but that they are principles that can be related to how intercultural encounters are experienced outside the classroom.

The two extracts below are taken from Rygg (2012), a qualitative study on the experiences related by Norwegian business executives working in Tokyo. Rune has more than ten years' experience from Japan. His perception seems different to that of Trond, with only 1 ½ years in Japan. Thus, one way of interpreting the results of the study is that the length of time spent in an intercultural setting has an effect on one's increased ability to "see the other from the inside".

Trond states that:

*"Well, I adjust of course as much as can be done, erm or, based on what I think is beneficial to me <laughter> [...]. Well I don't bow as much as the Japanese. Maybe I wish to show strength rather than respect [...]. It is also about who bows the least or the most and in a way, how you place yourself in relation to the others, so well, I try to find a balance [...]. Sometimes it is beneficial to play the [gaijin role] (act as a foreigner in Japan) to the full, but also be Japanese to the extent that you show respect, not to be aggressive [brautende], [...] and then it varies a lot depending on who you talk to, I think."*

According to Spitzberg (2009:386), intercultural competence includes adaptation skills that "rather than radical chameleon-like change, implies a subtle variation of self's behaviour to the behavioural style of others". With reference to Spitzberg, Wiseman (2003:193) states that "competent communicators should be able to control and manipulate their social environment to obtain those goals (of effective communication)" (additions mine). This is what Trond does above. He has acquired skills to avoid treading on Japanese toes. However, he still sees the Japanese "from the outside". Thus, when he changes his behaviour temporarily, it is a change for instrumental purposes into something that is not 'himself'.

As mentioned in the introduction, Rune comments about changing between being Japanese and Norwegian in the following way:

*"It is like turning a dial to and from depending on whom you are talking to [...]. In the beginning it is hard to turn and you get frustrated, but when you have done it a couple of times, then you continue to do it without thinking about it."*

Acculturation refers to the "process of cultural and psychological change that results following meetings between cultures" (Sam and Berry 2010:472). In a constructivist view, accommodation is less of a strategic choice of the skills a communicator possesses, but more of an on-going and not always conscious process between the interactants. Rune has walked in Japanese shoes for so long that 'acting Japanese' is just another setting on the cultural dial that constitutes his personality. If we look at the people with an identity of a 'dial', one might say that they have been moulded by several cultures which have become an integral part of them. Thus, the stranger is no longer strange because Rune is "seeing the other from the inside" of himself.

One might argue that the frontiers between oneself and 'the other' have become less clear. Fuchs (2001:156) maintains, from a constructivist perspective, that culture "creates boundaries of varying sharpness and permeability [...] sometimes there is much movement across the frontiers, making it more difficult to separate inside from out". In radical constructivism, even the concept of 'self' has been rejected as a stable entity (Hacking 1999). Yoshikawa (1988:142), on the other hand, sees Rune's approach to the intercultural dialogue as "the double-swing stage of adaptation". It is not limited to walking in either one's own or in the other person's shoes. It is a stage where one is in a 'dynamic inbetweenness' able to move between different cultural traditions by acting appropriately and feeling at home in each. However, in doing so, one does not lose oneself, but simultaneously maintains an integrated, multi-cultural sense of self.

One might imagine that this puts high demands on the attitudinal, motivational and emotional abilities of the communicator. Rune implied this when he stated that *"It is like turning a dial to and from depending on whom you are talking to [...]. In the beginning it is hard to turn and you get frustrated"*. Yoshikawa does not elaborate on how being consciously aware of and prepared for the process might have helped Rune become less emotionally frustrated. Mentalization-based treatment aims to "generate insight on the fly" (part 4). Translated to intercultural communication training, this implies that instead of reacting emotionally as 'mentally blind' (part 2) to new and possibly stressful situations, insights gained from experiences in the classroom may be reactivated in real life using conscious awareness rather than emotions.

Above we have seen that seeing the other from the inside, oneself from the outside, and being in-between are not imaginary states but observable in real life acculturation processes. Thus, if one believes that these are real issues in intercultural situations, the following step must be to consider how it might be reflected in intercultural training practices.

## **7. Implications for the intercultural training class**

There might be an increasing concern among researchers and practitioners about whether mere knowledge about others does not, in fact, provide a false sense of control in intercultural encounters outside the classroom. In part 2, it was argued that knowledge and skills have tended to have priority over attitude in intercultural training. However, there are some tendencies that indicate that this might be about to change. Lásár et al. (2007:27),

who provide a guide for European language educators on how to develop and assess intercultural communicative competence, argue that:

So far, assessment related to all dimensions of being/*savoir-être* (i.e. *attitude*, additions mine) has been left aside and teaching focused mostly on "cultural awareness" which refers to the understanding of differences and similarities between cultures.

This means that the main course objective until now has been on knowledge. Instead, they suggest changing the focus to "the acceptance of new world views" (ibid.:29) but also expands to "reshape [...] own values and integrate new perspectives" (ibid.:27). In mentalization based treatment, this is best achieved by creating awareness through imagination practices that gives the trainees the opportunity to try on different shoes from their own.

The research question was: What might the concept of mentalizing offer to intercultural training in order to better prepare intercultural trainees for complex and emotionally demanding multicultural realities?

The main ideas triggered by the concept of mentalizing in this article is that imaginatively "seeing the other from the inside" place oneself within the experience of the other. Thus, the stranger becomes less strange and foreign, because one is seeing the other from inside oneself. This makes stereotyping others more difficult. Secondly, by "seeing oneself from the outside" people get to know the otherness in themselves because they are being challenged by others' worldviews. Third, mentalization re-emphasizes what was once cautioned also by interculturalists (part 2) that empathy and mindfulness do not happen in stressful situations. Thus, training must not only deliver knowledge and skills, but also trigger emotions in order to prepare for psychological demands in real life. Training should provide opportunities for unexpected outcomes and thus prepare for unexpected outcomes in real life. Finally, it should provide 'grounded' insights that may be re-activated and prevent acting affectively on auto pilot in authentic situations in real life.

To be honest, it is probably just as difficult to train a high degree of cultural awareness/sensitivity in a classroom as it is to teach language fluency. Therefore, some might argue that it is better to teach knowledge about culture differences in class and let awareness develop through intercultural contact later. I do not agree, and in fact, I might go as far as to claim that awareness training is more important than skills. That is, when dialogue fails outside the classroom, people find themselves immersed in negative emotions, the level of stress rises, and everything they have learnt about 'the other' during an intercultural communication class may become reduced to stereotypes and prejudices in a state of 'mindblindness' (part 3). This is why, I believe, we must widen the scope in intercultural training to include practice handling the dynamics and the psychological demands involved in intercultural interactions.

To sum up, inspired by mentalization-based treatment, the framework of mentalizing in this article has been used to promote an approach of providing opportunities to experience walking in the other person's shoes rather than the traditional training approach of learning how to avoid treading on other people's toes.

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