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Jeff Kerksen-Griep

University of Portland, kerksen@up.edu

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Negotiating Identities and Mitigating Face Threats:
Interculturally Skilled Instruction Across Barriers

Jeff Kerssen-Griep, Ph.D.

Professor, Communication Studies, University of Portland

kerssen@up.edu / 503-943-7167

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Negotiating Identities and Mitigating Face Threats: Interculturally Skilled Instruction Across Barriers

Skilled instruction is a complicated business in any setting. Yet, popular media present teaching mainly as a process of experts simply sharing information with students, who are expected to take it in and proceed to their next lecture hall fill-up. Professionals know that nearly every component of that conception is supremely more complicated than most perceive it to be, even when teachers believe their instruction is occurring within their accustomed cultural identity groups. Instruction acknowledged to be across boundaries of culture, status, and identity – as virtually all teaching is – can feel almost infinitely more complex and daunting to do well. Those common reactions help obscure the transformative clarity and power there to be tapped in diverse teaching-learning situations.

Consider the students. Far from being one generic and passive receptacle for a wise speaker, each student brings a host of impactful individual, group, and cultural influences to bear on their engagement and sense-making in a learning situation. Such vital diversity shapes a host of variants in students' ability and willingness to perceive, engage, value, produce, and improve their understandings, evaluations, and applications of the subjects being learned. How best to teach in ways that tap and actualize those differences for learning's sake, rather than play down or ignore what is known about the impacts of such identities and characteristics, especially when accounting for instruction and learning across social and cultural power barriers?

Note also teaching's contextual components; or, more accurately, note how little popular conceptions of teaching credit a context's power to constrain and enable what a learner can engage and achieve via instruction. Aside from negotiating learning environments *per se*, more is known all the time about how students' and teachers' material, symbolic, cultural, and social

circumstances influence – often profoundly – how students and teachers perceive and engage in teaching-learning situations. Again, learning contexts that reflect or invoke ingroup-outgroup identity tensions can seem especially fraught and complex to engage as teachers and as learners.

Finally, consider how much more complex than “experts sharing knowledge” are teachers and their embodied instruction itself, the prime subject of this chapter. Besides understanding the uniquely enculturated people their students are, instructors also must adapt their work to the organizational systems that accompany their unavoidable positional status in classrooms. Some of those dealings manifest as paradoxical tensions teachers must manage in working with learners, such as those between teaching the needy few while leading the whole learning group; between teaching deeply while also teaching widely; between teaching for mastery while also leading for strong evaluative performance (Thompson, Rudick, Kerssen-Griep, & Golsan, 2017).

Teachers and scholars further recognize that such navigations are not simple matters of autonomous choices based on personal preferences and subject-matter needs, yet are choices that need making anyway. Most actions are complicated by organizational, cultural, status, and identity needs that popular conceptions of teaching-learning work often overlook. Yet, many benefits come from tailoring instruction and schooling to engage rather than ignore impactful identity profiles (e.g., racial and ethnic, socio-economic, sexual, gender identities and expressions, dis/ability) among learners and teachers. Despite often eagerness to reach and learn and teach well across such socio-cultural barriers, lack of knowledge or confidence about engaging such conditions can constrain participants’ productive engagements with each other’s diversities, spur self-silencing instruction, and hamstring both course content learning and the effectiveness of the activities meant to enhance learning.

This Project

Engaging rather than ignoring impactful differences is at the heart of excellent teaching, yet many instructors feel unschooled in exactly how (and sometimes, why) to teach in ways that intentionally negotiate identities and relationships attentive to learners' social, cultural, and personal identifiers. Taking an interpersonal and intercultural communication focus, this chapter invites readers to consider what is known about ways alert instructional actions can help set the table for cross-barriers learners' new knowledge acquisition, feedback reception, motivation, and performance, as well as help develop students' identities and productive learning relationships and ultimately influence the cultural narratives and ideologies that frame educational experiences.

This chapter's scholarship-driven communication guidance is meant to help participants mitigate boundary constraints and actualize more of the benefits available in multicultural environments. It begins by arguing for theory-based "in-mind" work to reframe instruction primarily as interpersonal and intercultural communication work. The chapter then offers several key identity-negotiation and instructional facework aptitudes as "out-loud" intercultural communication practices to develop for teaching and learning contexts. Rooted in theories of identity, self-determination, feedback interventions, and facework, these practical guides can help participants develop their abilities to engage skillfully in classrooms' ever-present identity and relational negotiations. This chapter argues above all that many benefit from understanding skilled instructional work also as principled intercultural communication. Even in circumstances where ethnic, cultural, or social diversities may seem hidden or largely absent, research indicates participants benefit in many ways from presuming – and communicating – as though such diversities are present to negotiate well.

Framing the Dilemma

Overtly prejudicial interactions certainly occur in teaching-learning contexts, and institutionalized racism, ableism, sexism, etc. also manifest in many modes via educational practices and schooling policies. But much of what can be mitigated interpersonally – the focus of this project – often occurs more ubiquitously and just out of view, even among high-achieving students working with challenging learning tasks and educators they value (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016).

Stereotype threat scholarship is one line that reveals how achievement can degrade merely from a student feeling distracted by the weight of representing a cultural or social identity group's expected underperformance in a learning situation (Spencer et al., 2016). Without skilled mitigations, such identity threats can impact, for example, female students' leadership aspirations (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005) and underrepresented students' senses of professional identity, integrity, and belonging (Broda, Yun, Schneider, Yeager, Walton, & Diemer, 2018; Jordt, Eddy, Brazil, Lau, Mann, Brownell, King, & Freeman, 2017; Schinske, Snyder, & Wyer, 2017; Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Underrepresented first-year students wrestling with college financing and family concerns, for example, reported feeling less integrated and less successful than their peers in science classes, a condition tied to perceptions of a competitive, challenging racial climate there as well (Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna (2007). Students from underrepresented groups thus often must expend extra energy and attentional resources to navigate socio-cultural barriers to their involvement and learning.

Such experiences often feel visceral to those involved, affecting participants' affect as well as their cognition and performance. Identity threats felt and managed by outgrouped

students can amplify emotions' already profound influences on engagement, processing, and self-efficacy, especially in feedback, group discussion, and other more fraught instructional situations (Do & Schallert, 2004; Kerssen-Griep & Terry, 2016; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Lang, 2016; Trujillo & Tanner, 2014; Värlander, 2008). Mundane-seeming classroom interactions still can reflect and reinscribe unhelpful ideologies in hegemonic thinking about what (and who) is taken for granted as "normal" in education practice. This is a significant set of issues implicated in teaching and learning (Spencer et al., 2016).

Although socio-political, organizational, and structural initiatives also matter to routinize healthier barrier-crossing systems, this chapter aims to hone instructors' and students' ongoing interpersonal and relational work with each other, with an eye toward its cumulative, constitutive effects on broader systems. In so doing, the identity-aware instructional guidance offered here adds intercultural intentionality to aptitudes many able teachers and students already engage in instructional situations, using relevant theories to reframe rather than replace those actions in a skilled communicator's repertoire. First, why and how might we centralize communication concerns in our 'in-mind' presumptions about teaching and learning? And, second, how can we apply specific intercultural communication abilities as key 'out-loud' attributes of learning and teaching across socio-political barriers? This chapter's remaining sections offer conceptual reasons and applied means to frame and engage each instructional situation as though it were an intercultural communication encounter whose content, relationships, and identities need navigating mindfully via an expanded, identity-alert instructional communication repertoire.

Framing Instruction as a Communication Practice

Learners and teachers benefit in several ways when they notice communication's central, constitutive role in co-creating their work together. Although teaching and learning certainly are shaped by psychological, relational, organizational, political, and cultural forces, forming instructional intentions into actions is at heart a communicative activity and is well-analyzed and improved as such. Communication scholarship is primed to see and explain identity, relational, cultural, organizational, and ideological negotiations operating within taken-for-granted, mundane interactions and circumstances as, for example, while teaching a class, engaging in a discussion, managing a curriculum, or organizing schooling. Skillfully applied, this perspective offers explanations and principles to help participants understand and improve instruction by embracing communication's driving (rather than passenger or bystander) role in how things unfold there.

Instruction as malleable

First, viewing instruction as communication is useful because it facilitates seeing teaching and learning always as negotiated, malleable works-in-progress, thus as potentially changeable engagements with people's thoughts, affect, and actions. Think about the sport of curling, a sort of shuffleboard on ice where only broomstrokes are needed to alter the ice-flight of a heavy stone once it is put in motion. On the other hand, moving that sizable rock from a standing start is (and feels) much less doable, overwhelmed as we are with the inertia of its apparently settled weight. Communication study similarly puts seemingly weighty, settled phenomena back 'in motion' for people; nouns like "identity" and "organization" get construed instead as actions like "identifying" and "organizing," for example. In so doing they invite people to notice ways personal actions are (re-)shaping structural patterns and realities.

Instruction as ontological

Communication study further frames instruction as ontological work in that people are constituting consequential relationships and identities with each other via everyday interactions (see e.g., Stewart & Koenig Kellas, 2019). Understanding communication's transactional nature in classrooms invites everyone there to focus on how people use messages to construct and negotiate a variety of meanings and roles within and across contexts. As evidenced later in this chapter, such identity-making work is central to instruction's quality and success, especially in barrier-crossing contexts.

Instruction as complex and multifunctional

Finally, conceiving instruction centrally as communication demands we attend to several ways teaching is more complicated than one party simply sharing subject information and feedback with generic, passive listeners. Consider that teaching always is accomplished nonverbally in context with words: all participants constantly coordinate meanings via each other's movements, tone, pitch, volume, silences, gazes, facial expressions, orientations, clothing, appearance choices, uses of space and touch, etc. Note also people's vigilance about tacit messages of power and status, and constant attention to signals that reveal a communicator's relational presumptions and indicate whether to hear a message as serious or humorous or incoherent, for example. Noting each of these transactional components helps a participant thicken what to notice about teaching-learning communication. Even while ostensibly discussing subject matter communicators unavoidably also negotiate relationships and identities with each other, and skilled cross-barriers instruction engages those processes actively, rather than blindly or passively.

Taken together, these communication features show the value in examining instruction primarily as interpersonal and intercultural communication activity. Even when an instructor's pedagogy might resemble something like public speaking, identity and relational negotiations still are present in all their complexity. Students and teachers benefit when instruction is understood and treated skillfully and with intention as the complicated barrier-crossing social accomplishment it is, rather than as a simple content to exhale toward an audience. Taking the richer communicative view surfaces several worthy tools to aid cross-barriers instruction.

Takeaway: Learn to notice the identity, relational, and content-understanding goals audible in others' (and your own) nonverbal and verbal acts – and silences.

Cross-Barriers Instruction as Interpersonal Communication

Within this frame, it is important not to define instruction as too narrow a type of communication. Teachers and students who view teaching chiefly as speaking with an audience, for example, can find themselves limited to noticing mainly just public speaking tactics available to shape equitably inclusive teaching-learning encounters and environments. Framing instructional communication more broadly also as interpersonal and intercultural work helps instructors and learners be alert to themselves negotiating content, relational, and identity goals via every act of speech and silence over time, even when the teaching itself may resemble lecturing. Extant scholarship reveals how reframing instruction in these more nuanced ways can add vigilance and communication abilities that are key to refine for cross-barriers instruction:

about identifying and relating with each other; about task and relational group leadership; about providing instruction and criticism; about communicating support wisely and with intention.

Instruction as Identity and Relational Work

Interpersonal communication study views classroom identities and relationships more as verbs than as nouns; as ever-present processes of ‘identifying’ who and what we and others get to be and do (Stewart & Koenig Kellas, 2019) in instructional settings. Theories explaining ingroup-outgroup identity and social identity complexity help illuminate the interpersonal processes happening in instructional communication, especially the relational and identity goals being pursued interactionally in such settings. Such theories help (re)frame people’s identities as multiple, negotiated, status-bound, and gap-prone, and identity-making as involving abilities to improve.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory's (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) central premise, for example, helps explain why ingroups and outgroups matter to most people in and beyond classrooms. The theory asserts that people feel compelled to organize, join, and sort groups in order to better know who we are, what to value, and how to act. It helps explain why learners (and teachers) almost always include cultural and social identity features (e.g., “Hawaiian,” “boarder,” “historian”) among the more personal ways (“kind,” “assertive”) people know and negotiate who they are with others. Understanding their own mix of supposed ingroups and outgroups helps each person know who they are. And, as discussed below, navigating those identities can play a consequential role in skilled cross-barriers instruction.

Takeaway: Expend time and effort learning which cultural and social identity markers often matter most to the individuals in class, including the instructor.

Communication theory of identity. Extending that social framing of identity, the communication theory of identity (CTI) posits that human identities are more shared than personal constructs – again, more verb than noun – and that people communicating unavoidably help define who and how others get to ‘be’ in a situation (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). CTI argues that each person constantly navigates four interpenetrating identity layers, sometimes experiencing consequential gaps between them. A *personal layer* reflects contains notions of who a person knows themselves to be: their self-concept, spiritual sense, how they know themselves generally and in specific situations. An *enacted layer* is who nonverbal and verbal actions present a person to be; identity as expression-in-the-moment. A *relational identity layer* reflects identifiers ascribed to a person by virtue of their connections with others: a friend’s friend, a team’s fan, a partner’s mate, an employees’ manager, etc. And, a *communal identity layer* reminds what society claims as “normal” to be, referencing supposedly common characteristics and expectations on the basis of history. Thus, according to CTI, a student who is Cuban-American in a White-dominated US instructional space embodies that identity as a complicated mix attentive to cultural reference points, relational expectations, personal preferences, and social enactments, perhaps even noticing it as a kind of narrative to sustain.

All these layers constantly interpenetrate as people interact with others, and in many situations some of the layers even may contradict or be exclusive of one another (Hecht et al.,

2005). A student's enacted self may overlap little with their personal sense of self in a situation, for example, or communal role understandings may jibe poorly with relational or enacted identities they otherwise feel compelled to own and offer. Even elementary schoolchildren show awareness of their identities reflecting social negotiations in their classrooms (Ilosvay & Kerssen-Griep, 2017).

CTI can help instructors and students see each person actively calibrating their identity enactments to suit their personal understandings of themselves, their personal layers to others' (including teachers' and peers' and parents') relational expectancies, all in the context of knowing how their communities view 'people like them' and 'relationships like those'. Identifying thus is a complicated, gap-prone, social accomplishment to engage with each other in teaching-learning situations, carrying genuine psychological, physiological, behavioral, and social consequences related to communication satisfaction, understanding, power, skill, and success (Hecht et al., 2005). Understanding instruction interpersonally helps reveal these consequential forces affecting everyone's reception to and sense-making from instruction.

Takeaway: Communicate knowing that the identities ascribed by instructional choices have tangible and consequential impacts on learners' identity negotiations in and beyond the classroom.

Instruction understood interpersonally also can help teachers notice and influence how each student creates a coherent sense of self from among these ever-transforming layers and

group memberships. Instructional communication research demonstrates the importance of engaging how students understand themselves in ingroup-outgroup terms; whom they picture as ‘their people’ and ‘others’.

Social identity complexity theory. Roccas and Brewer’s (2002) *social identity complexity theory (SICT)* proposed four distinct modes people use to reconcile their own multiple and potentially competing ingroup identities in order to define a congruent sense of self. Each mode offers implications guiding how such a person might perceive and act with those it views as “others,” and one mode – *merger* – is especially helpful for sustaining skilled and more navigable cross-barrier interactions and relationships.

Three of Roccas and Brewer’s (2002) four identity modes tend to create relatively firm ingroup-outgroup boundaries for those who espouse them. Those with an “*intersection*” sense of their multiple allegiances define their outgroup as anyone who does not share their particular intersection of more than one group membership. A student defining herself in this mode as a Latina footballer, for example, is prone to seeing her ingroup only as other Latina footballers; Latina non-footballers and footballing non-Latinas are viewed as outgroups from this identity stance. People with a “*dominance*” stance toward their multiple identities orient toward one primary group identification to define their ingroup (e.g., “psych majors are my people”), to which all other self-identities are subordinated. Others who lack that primary group identifier (i.e., all other majors’ students, in this case) are seen as outgrouped.

Third, people who “*compartmentalize*” their multiple identities activate those as relatively distinct selves in context- or situation-specific ways, with each identity compartment implicating its own distinct outgroups. This can puzzle others even as it makes sense to the person: a student defining herself in this way might treat an in-class project groupmate as an

ingroup member while working in that group, but as an outgroup member in another setting when the student is seeing themselves as another sort of person entirely. This identity mode (and the next) do show more complex awareness that “code-switching” is possible among multiple legitimate ways of identifying oneself.

Merger, a fourth identity mode, names a sophisticated way to conceive of one’s identity relative to others’ that often enables more adroit social awareness and skill (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). People espousing this self-identity embrace and integrate many of their own diverse group allegiances in simultaneous, inclusive form, evaluating both self and others as complex people who have multiple, even seemingly contrary ingroup allegiances. For example, Elayne may know herself as both hiker and consumer; as both mediator and challenger; as conservative and progressive in different ways; as plumber, writer, realtor, and emigrant, all. People with an inclusive *merger* sense of self-identity thus tend to draw few sharp ingroup-outgroup distinctions between themselves and others. All four of these modes are means people use to simultaneously recognize more than one social self-identity allegiance, and yet sustain a single ingroup representation for oneself.

Creating that merger sense of self-identity can occur via social perspective-taking practices that increase a sense of empathy for seeming-outgroup members, and can reduce feelings of intergroup bias. Activities and thought experiments that help people decategorize (dissolve group boundaries to see people as individuals rather than group members) and recategorize their own usual social groupings into new or overarching group identities can enable the empathic social perspective-taking that nurtures a more complex self-identification (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). Such activities work best when they honor the intergroup contact

principles derived from decades of contact hypothesis research about bias reduction; see for example Pettigrew & Tropp's (2006) meta-analytic findings from that scholarship.

Takeaway: Create conditions for social perspective-taking and activities that help students (and teachers) de- and re-categorize their in- and outgroup allegiances in multiple ways. In so doing, help normalize a more complex, less rigid *merger* sense of social self-identity relative to routinely outgrouped others.

Cross-Barriers Instruction as Intercultural Communication

Finally, useful resources emerge from framing barrier-crossing instruction as intercultural communication work. Adding this final reframe helps anchor interpersonal and group leadership guidance for teachers within some of what is known about working skillfully across international and socio-cultural boundaries. In fact, the principles touted in this section are effective, low-cost, and ubiquitous enough to implement with *all* instruction. Many less visible social, cultural, and personal classroom differences consequentially affect the engagement, learning, status, access, and power learners experience. Consider not only perceived racial, ethnic, national, and age differences, but also the sometimes more hidden diversities in wealth, sexualities, gender identities, abilities, even adverse childhood experiences still impacting present-day functioning. For all intents and purposes, all teaching benefits from being framed in part as intercultural communication work. Doing so here reveals several important considerations and techniques to facilitate that work.

Three Modes of Cross-Barrier Communicating

There are at least three conceptions of instructing across barriers. Picture them as three Venn-diagram circles, noting that each intended barrier-crossing outcome implicates slightly different intentions and abilities, though with overlaps between and among all three. One conception involves thinking of cross-barrier instruction as meant *to persuade “others”* who are unlike oneself. Such a frame invites thinking mainly about unknown- and hostile-audience-centered adjustments one might make to one’s influence tactics with others. Second, cross-barriers teaching also can mean *connecting with others in genuinely personal and individual ways* rather than in impersonal and role-bound ways. This frame welcomes more emphasis on developing communication’s interpersonal and “inhaling” elements, such as listening and collaborating, with an eye toward transforming the stereotypic or antagonistic “othering” into more congenial relating. Teaching across barriers also can mean learning *to ally and advocate skillfully with* those who are ‘othered’, sometimes regardless of whether one has learned to persuade or connect with people who identify in those ways. This mode especially invokes attending to political and justice concerns that affect “othered” people’s lived experiences within and beyond classrooms.

The three modes are overlapping rather than entirely distinct, yet knowing which matches one’s cross-barriers goals can help focus attention on the sorts of communicative developments most likely to enable successes there. Students and teachers benefit from realizing (and seeing modeled) that there are multiple ways to improve their effectiveness in such situations. Learning that multiple modes exist to frame cross-barriers communicating also can help erode misconceptions that people moving toward action must choose to be either a warrior for social justice or a hidebound cultural troglodyte. There are many subtler cross-barrier options available

between those dichotomous poles. Considering three modes of cross-barriers teaching and intergroup contact can help expose more specific abilities and goals to understand and pursue.

Takeaway: Invite yourself and others to consider and unpack options among three overlapping modes of relating to outgrouped “others” in and beyond the classroom, even regardless of the subjects being taught: persuading, connecting, and allying. Help others know multiple modes of cross-barrier contact exist, and can co-exist.

Systemic Oppression and Privilege Influence Cross-Barrier Communication

For people who inhabit majority or dominant cultural positions, new awareness of their links to unearned entitlements and advantages often feels uncomfortable and unwelcome, even threatening. People living oppressed identities of course experience domination and disadvantage directly, often unavoidably and repeatedly having to negotiate such identities’ hurtful micro- and macro-realities in daily living. Social science shows both oppression and privilege experiences are systemic disruptors of people’s cross-barrier perceptions and actions with ‘others’ and, in the case of wealth, often depress tendencies to think and act ethically with others (see e.g., Johns & Slemrod, 2010; Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). While these forces largely transcend what interpersonally-targeted remedies can address, staying ever-aware of individuals’ systemic experiences across many socio-cultural barriers can help participants generate more than one interpretation or evaluation of classroom actions that might initially

puzzle or trouble, as a skilled intercultural communicator might do in an unfamiliar culture (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Takeaway: Routinely seek more than one interpretation and evaluation of puzzling classroom actions. Be mindful that experiences of oppression and privilege both are implicit, systemic disruptors that reliably skew perceptions and affect the ways people otherwise might choose to interact with ‘others’.

Communicating Wisely Across Barriers

Competent identity negotiation relies on people working with accurate identity-knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with culturally dissimilar others (Ting-Toomey, 2005a). This implies understanding that each person rarely operates out of a single identity position (Collier, 1998; Hecht et al., 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Instead, multiple self-identifiers routinely guide any person’s perceptions, thoughts, and actions with others. People can feel challenged or daunted when trying to treat others (and selves) as though this was the case. What is known about communicating in ways that honor adroit identity-navigating principles?

Based on an extensive research program, Collier’s (1998) cultural identity theory (CIT) posited *synchronizing ascribed and avowed identities* as key to skilled cross-barriers communication. CIT suggests picturing a anyone’s many and various self-identifiers as a dynamic stack of boxes constantly arranged by that person to feature certain identifiers near the

‘top’ for them in a given moment. A skilled cross-barriers teacher would recognize that stack’s ordering and communicate with the student (ascribing) as though they embody the identity they themselves are featuring (avowing) atop their ‘stack’ in that moment. When (if ever) does a particular gender-transitioning student want communication featuring that identity marker, for example, and when might they *not* be thinking of themselves very much in gender (or racial, or ability, e.g.) terms, even if their instructor is? CIT frames as less competent the communicating that ascribes an identity ‘lower down’ another’s own stack of ID boxes, especially when working across fraught socio-cultural boundaries (related to gender, sexuality, or ethnic identities, for example). This explains, for example, why it can feel awkward to be called upon as an underrepresented minority (URM) student to ‘speak for people like you’ when the student themselves was not identifying primarily as that aspect of themselves in that situation.

Honor the Platinum Rule. Unlike the “Golden Rule” to ‘treat the other as you’d like to be treated,’ the even more empathic “Platinum Rule” mandates treating the other as *they* want to be treated (Bennet, 1998). This is a higher bar to clear, and also an expression of CIT’s edict to synchronize one’s identity ascriptions with another’s identity avowals in interaction. We generally know how we ourselves like to be treated, but often feel less sure about exactly how someone of a different culture or background may want to be known and engaged in a given moment.

CIT (Collier, 1998) proposed some considerations to help communicators better match identity ascriptions with avowals. In cross-barriers instruction, learn each other well enough to recognize and track which cultural, social, and personal identity markers often can matter to each. Learn when a deaf student may and may not want communication aligning them with that identity, for example, or when any URM learner seeks identification or anonymity relative to that

identity marker. Also reinforce how normal it is that people's social and cultural groups' histories with each other influence interactions between cross-barriered people with those identities. For example, it is not unusual that a student and teacher who enjoy talking with each other still have moments colored by remembering that they also are a "student" and a "teacher" talking. The goal is learning to adapt communication's "identifying" to better suit how each person is trying to be identified in that moment, to help avoid spurring identity gaps (Hecht et al., 2005) for anyone involved. Several dialectic tensions energize these interactions as people try navigating such interactions together (Collier, 1998).

Takeaway: Learn ways to have your communication 'identify' others as they are trying to be known in a given moment, rather than tacitly assigning them identities they were not trying to avow in that moment: honor the Platinum Rule.

Meet Face Needs and Mitigate Instructional Face-Threats in Cross-Barrier Teaching

If honoring the Platinum Rule feels more aspirational than prescriptive, attending to facework in teaching-learning encounters is one concrete means to actualize that goal one interaction at a time. Given there are so many potential consequential identifiers to consider, it makes sense for cross-barrier teachers to focus on adding identity-attentive focus and skill to instructional communication repertoires. Such abilities can help teachers engage responsively and effectively across barriers regardless of which identities might be in play or at stake in a given encounter. In that light, understanding notions of face needs and skilled facework in

teaching can help explain, analyze, and improve several types of inclusive cross-barriers teaching practices.

Instructional tactics can support face needs. Erving Goffman (1967) defined a person's "face" as the desired self-image they seek to maintain and present in interaction with others. But such self-images are social rather than purely personal accomplishments; they have force only to the degree they are supported rather than challenged or threatened by others in the course of interactions, where others also are negotiating identities. Everyone is concerned with maintaining face and often will support others' face needs in order to have their own face affirmed.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argued for two universal face needs that vary culturally only in their ratio to one another, which they labeled negative face (the desire to remain autonomous and unimpeded by others) and positive face (the desire to feel approved of and included by others). They showed that people generally mitigate "face-threatening" situations using verbal and nonverbal tools that vary in whether they are direct or indirect, go off- or on-record, and use negative and positive politeness tactics. Lim and Bowers' (1991) research later divided positive face into two distinct identity concerns: the need to belong (called "fellowship face," or "belongingness" by Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the need to have one's abilities respected (named "competence face"); they relabeled negative face "autonomy face." Satisfying these three identity needs is consequential to much instruction's success (Pintrich, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-face, other-face, and mutual-face concerns are present in most encounters (Ting-Toomey, 2005b). In classrooms, teachers' and peers' overt and implicit messaging about identities helps students (and teachers) know and negotiate their own senses of themselves.

Teaching-learning situations involve a degree of face-threat even when accomplished with care, by putting new tasks in front of students and limiting their freedom to pursue purely

their own agendas (Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009). Several kinds of classroom interactions can further threaten learners' face needs for competence, belongingness, and autonomy, such as when a teacher comments on a student's original thinking, or uses pedagogies involving risk, constructive conflict, collaborative learning, or offers chances to re-visit earlier failures (Ames, 1992; Clifford, 1991; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2000; Kerssen-Griep, 2001). People in and out of classrooms benefit when both corrective and preventative attention are paid to face needs (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Trees, et al., 2009).

Decades of self-determination theory and related research found that strategies supporting students' autonomy, competence, and belonging needs are key to achieving productive outcomes related to their motivation, achievement, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Pintrich, 2003). Several science education researchers, for example, found that identity-safe (i.e., not - threatening) learning environments fostered underrepresented minority (URM) students' sense of belonging within science settings and reduced the performance effects of stereotype threat there. Using counter-stereotypical directions, examples, and role models in course content and explicitly affirming learners' feelings of collaboration, integrity, and self-worth helped meet those positive face needs (Broda et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2005; Hurtado et al., 2007); McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003; Schinske et al., 2017; Stout, et al., 2011; Trujillo & Tanner, 2014; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Wayne, Vermillion, & Uijtdehaage, 2010). Normalizing URM students' worries about belonging in school and reminding them about similarities among socio-cultural groups also helped reduce stereotype threat's influence there (Rosenthal & Crisp, 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Cross-barriered URM students' autonomy needs can be met via tactics that give chances to talk and think self-efficaciously about the subject matter, such as in active learning

pedagogies, peer instruction, and think-pair-share exercises that by nature prioritize learners' understandings (Ballen, Wieman, Salehi, Searle, & Zamudio, 2017; Tanner, 2013; Trujillo & Tanner, 2014). Reminding URM students of their individual, autonomous identities also helped reduce their stereotype threat (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004). Honoring students' autonomy also helps collegiate instructors better manage some of teaching's inherent paradoxes (e.g., teaching for mastery and for testing) and helps cultivate an ethic of deliberative, democratic decision-making within and beyond the classroom (Thompson et al., 2018).

Takeaway: Design pedagogy and learning activities that help facilitate and support – not ignore or threaten – learners' senses of their own autonomy, competence, and belonging relative to engaging the subject matter.

Facework as interpersonal skill. Although learning activities clearly gain some of their tactical power by structurally supporting students' belongingness, competence, and autonomy needs, facework itself describes people's process of tacitly commenting on and negotiating identities and relationships via their verbal and nonverbal communication – including silence – in every interaction: facework is comprised of the interpersonal activities that engage each other's face needs for autonomy, belongingness, and competence (Lim & Bowers, 1991). Goffman (1967) conceived of interpersonal facework as similar to actors cueing each other when a line gets dropped in a play, that all are fundamentally invested in keeping the social 'play' going rather than having it grind to a halt.

Face needs for *autonomy* often get addressed with facework communicating tact, tentativeness, or curiosity, or by offering transparency rather than secrecy; messages of praise and downplay often address face needs for *competence*; and facework communicating interpersonalness, solidarity, and normalization often address *belongingness* needs (Goldsmith, 1999; Lim & Bowers, 1991; Tracy, 1990). From this perspective, feedback that questions, normalizes, and comments on the whole range of things done well and poorly should outperform feedback that is seen mainly to demand, diminish, note only weakness, and ostracize. Most interactions succeed best when people's communicated self-images are acknowledged and supported to the degree possible, rather than threatened in some way by others (Collier, 1998).

Instructional facework. In instructional settings, facework is a key means to support others' desired identities while also communicating sometimes face-threatening messages about them or their work (Kerssen-Griep, 2001; Kerssen-Griep, Hess, & Trees, 2003; Sabee & Wilson, 2005). Even the nature of teaching-learning work itself threatens face needs, by narrowing students' autonomy of thought ("think about this now") and creating puzzles and situations that can challenge senses of competence and belonging. Within that situation teachers and students also must deal with each other's misspeaks, mistakes, and other *faux pas*, often in front of others.

Paradoxical tensions can complicate skilled instructional facework when trying to satisfy one's own and others' face needs at the same time, like when offering an apology in class, for example. Supporting one face need may threaten another aspect of face, as when offering public praise to a student whose peers might ridicule praise for his learning, or when one's own face needs conflict (Goldsmith, 1992), such as when a student (or a teacher) simultaneously wants affiliation with *and* autonomy from a teacher (or a student) in a situation. Within such universal presumptions, facework priorities and abilities vary based on a host of cultural, situational, and

developmental forces (Tracy, 1990). Facework is an especially important ability in cross-barriers relationships (Imahori & Cupach, 2005) and teaching-learning situations (Trees et al., 2009).

Takeaway: Apply attentive facework practices to frame, filter, and model classroom communication, especially in face-threatening situations that arise and certainly when working across obvious socio-cultural barriers.

Mitigating instructional face threats. Face-threat mitigation (FTM) research is a key subset of instructional facework scholarship analyzing means to mitigate potential identity threats inherent in fraught instructional encounters, such as in disputes and feedback interventions. Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) feedback intervention theory models how dealing with "any cue that may be perceived as a threat to the self" (p. 267) can consume almost all the cognitive attention and energy spurred by feedback received. So, communicating feedback carelessly can leave its recipient with little energy to actually process and implement the guidance itself, as they focus mainly on repairing their social self in that encounter. Because off-task identity-protection processes are so costly, skilled feedback messaging thus should mitigate (and repair) face threats to keep the hearer's identity needs untroubled and their cognitive energies thus available for learning from the guidance. Cohen and colleagues' (Cohen, Steele, Ross, 1999; Cohen & Steele, 2002) "wise criticism" across cultural boundaries, which invoked high standards while also revealing the critic's confidence and investment in the learner, is one

means to mitigate identity threats that can be audible in feedback given across barriers of power and status.

Teachers' FTM ability in students' eyes – especially while giving feedback – has predicted several instructional outcomes pertinent to mitigating the influence of socio-cultural barriers on teaching and learning, including higher quality and utility perceived in feedback and less defensive responses to it; and higher teacher credibility and more perceptions of them as mentor and of their learning environments as supportive. Among students experiencing skilled FTM, findings show less reported apathy and greater intrinsic learning motivation, attentiveness, responsiveness, and task-mastery achievement orientation in classroom interaction (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014; Kerssen-Griep et al., 2003, 2008; Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012, 2015; Mackiewicz, 2013; Trad, Katt, & Neville Miller, 2014; Trees et al., 2009; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011).

FTM messaging offers autonomy by encouraging independent thought, conveying openness to others' views and ideas, avoiding strong pressure, and offering freedom to problem-solve: for example, "I noticed this as your paper's least well supported argument. How best to remedy that, given your resources?" It can support competence by noting improvements over time and communicating respect for ideas and confidence in abilities, such as when a teacher notes an assignment that affirms their confidence in a student's ability to reach high standards (Cohen et al., 1999). And FTM belongingness messaging often is individualized, inclusive, and helps normalize struggles (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2003) as, for instance, when letting a student know a particular mistake or struggle is standard for people learning that material or skill.

People accomplish these aims in myriad nonverbal and spoken ways with each other (see, e.g., Goldsmith, 1992, 1999; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Trees & Manusov, 1998; Witt &

Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Such tactics sometimes involve informal, ingroup language, tactful hedges and qualifiers, skilled humor, indirect, considerate language, encouraging tone, and appropriate self-disclosure. Messages can recognize another's effort or convey that it matters to you that the other understands this. To buffer its impact, messaging might share the reasoning behind judgments, sandwich criticism between positive notes (Davies & Jacobs, 1985), or discuss a problem first before offering advice.

People in classrooms use unique, congruent patterns composed of words, stories, tone, content, gaze, silence, spacing, pace, turn-taking, sequencing, etc. to signal degrees of responsiveness, redress, and directness in their constant facework with others. Yet, it can be difficult to propose universal sets of instructional FTM actions since each person's repertoire is a distinct, ongoing product shaped by the personal, relational, organizational, and cultural forces they encounter that help set norms and expectations for people interacting skillfully. FTM research indicates it is vital that message recipients believe their instructor is mitigating face threats in instruction regardless of which actions help spur those perceptions. Teachers (and learners) thus should learn and apply their own distinct facework tactics toward earning those FTM perceptions from others.

Takeaway: Notice, exercise, and hone your own distinctive facework repertoire to help mitigate the identity-threatening aspects of instruction, especially in cross-barriers instruction where identity assumptions should not be taken for granted.

Conclusion

This chapter offers interpersonal and intercultural means to reframe and accomplish identity-aware, face-attentive teaching and learning in order to communicate adroitly across a range of cross-barriers instruction. It also argues that virtually all instruction happens across socio-cultural barriers of some sort, rendering these tools widely useful for teachers and learners. The research summarized here suggests several more concrete means to develop this sort of instructional communication repertoire:

- Prioritize discovering multiple ways to identify each person. How else does that Senegalese, Thai-American, wheelchair-using, gender-queer, or tall person most like to be known?
- Become a student of others' and your own classroom silences as well as speech, of nonverbal as well as spoken communication, of modes of listening as well as expressing.
- Teach yourself to hear and respond to the relational and identity goals being pursued via people's discussions of course and other topics.
- Develop discipline-appropriate means to help others (and yourself) regularly re-consider in- and outgroup allegiances in multiple ways.
- Consider which modes of cross-barriers relating (i.e., persuading, connecting, allying) are your ambitions in each instructional situation and interaction, and pursue those with purpose.
- Be vigilant about discovering new ways your own mix of privileges and oppressions might be skewing your perceptions of classroom happenings. Get interested in shrinking your own blind spots.
- Learn to routinely seek more than one interpretation and evaluation of ambiguous or puzzling classroom phenomena, rather than simply running with your first judgments of its meanings.

- Develop your willingness to be called in or called out by others who can offer you a new perspective on consequences of your actions in class, even unintended ones.
- Expand your repertoire of nonverbal and spoken means to subtly acknowledge and support aspects of others' identities in interaction.
- Observe and try out facework tactics you value in others, as a means to continually hone your own distinctive repertoire for mitigating the face threats that are built into instructional work.
- Learn to embrace and enjoy the challenges of mitigating face-threatening situations that arise, especially across socio-cultural barriers.

Bearing in mind that skilled cross-cultural encounters rely on mindful work with accurate identity-knowledge and interaction skills (Ting-Toomey, 2005a), instructional communication repertoires built from these tools stand a good chance of manifesting those key intercultural aptitudes. Teachers and students with such repertoires are better able to shape and model learning conditions that can blunt and transform outgroup biases and help participants engage and navigate socio-cultural barriers across the wide, welcome range of human differences.

Instructional settings benefit in multiple ways when their participants can communicate skillfully across barriers in these theory-applied ways.

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