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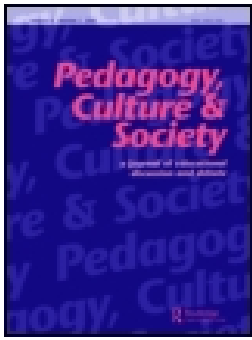
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# Introducing intercultural communication pedagogy and the question of the other

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## ABSTRACT

This paper constitutes the introduction to the special issue of *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, titled 'Intercultural Communication Pedagogy and the Question of the Other', which emerged from the launch event of the Institute for Language Education at the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh. It proceeds from the arguments that intercultural communication pedagogy has clung too long to essentialist competency models that erase all differences, and that to counteract their effects one needs to pay greater attention to the most pre-original and non-synthesisable ethical relation between self and other. To do so, the paper draws on debates that have problematised competency models, discussing in depth two interrelated central themes that these debates have tended to overlook. The first theme refers to the possibility of the oppressed turning into oppressors in their efforts to free themselves from the unified notion of culture that competency models support. The second theme refers to the emancipatory mission of critical pedagogy which, despite its best intentions, operates within a normative framework from which self and other become the same. The paper culminates with the questions that drive contributions to this special issue, offering an overview of the papers that it contains.

## ARTICLE HISTORY



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Intercultural communication pedagogy; essentialist competency models; self-other ethical relation; critical pedagogy; emancipation; normativity

## Introduction

This special issue of *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* features five papers that were presented at the official launch event of the Institute for Language Education at the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, on 23 March 2022. The official launch event, entitled 'Intercultural Communication Pedagogy and the Question of the Other', invited presenters to examine critically the ethical relation between self and other and, in so doing, to explore an alternative conceptualisation of the intercultural that is based on open-endedness and incompleteness. The central arguments underpinning this critical examination were that intercultural communication pedagogy has, perhaps, clung for too long to essentialist competency models that achieve nothing more than erasing all differences, and that to counteract their effects one needs to pay greater attention to the most pre-original and non-synthesisable relation between self and other. Indeed, several

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critical scholars (e.g., Arnett 2003; Ferri 2018; Gehrke 2010) have problematised competency models for reducing all difference to sameness, arguing for a non-model of ethical intercultural interaction that exceeds recognition of, or agreement with, another person. In their arguments, however, these scholars have also suggested that non-models of ethical intercultural interaction remain significantly under-theorised in the relevant intercultural communication literature and call for a deeper philosophical investigation into the question of otherness and its conceptual framings of ethical responsibility and responsive self.

The purpose of this launch event was to respond to this call. So, rather than effacing the dyadic self-other relation as is arguably the case in most intercultural communication scholarship, this launch event set out to reconceptualise the ethical relation with the other as an irreducible alterity that interrupts the solitude of the knowing ego. To achieve this, it challenged the ideal of individual rational autonomy from which that ego emanates by arguing in favour of a non-intentional consciousness that places the self in an infinite relation of responsibility for the other. The aim of this launch event was to explore not only how such responsibility preserves the radical alterity of both self and other, but also to act as an important catalyst for continuing discussions about how to understand the origins of the responsive self.

To frame their presentations in the launch event, and subsequently their paper contributions to this special issue, contributors were asked to consider some of the key conceptual debates that have problematised competency models in the field of intercultural communication pedagogy. To provide an essential background context for contributing papers, therefore, the first section of this introductory paper reviews these debates critically, focusing specifically on two interrelated central themes that remain, perhaps surprisingly, at the periphery of scholarly attention. The first theme refers to the self-motivated conscious agent whose individual free will is suppressed by competency models that treat cultures as coincidental with countries, regions and continents. We argue that although debates surrounding this first theme have done much to highlight the interpretive and wilful activity of this agent, they often neglect to consider that the oppressed might also become oppressors, particularly during value-laden conversations that exemplify how self and other fail to agree. The second theme, which is associated with the first, takes the discussion of competency models a step further in suggesting that these models overlook the situated power interests and ideologies that perpetuate relations of oppressive domination within grossly iniquitous societies. In so doing, it focuses attention on the emancipatory mission of critical pedagogy but suggests that because critical pedagogy rests on certain normative foundations to educate people from different cultures towards transformative positions of active resistance, it risks fostering a universal consciousness from which self and other become one and the same.

Recognising that our own critical discussion of the debates surrounding competency models could jeopardise the discursive openness of this special issue, we also asked contributing authors to turn a sceptical eye towards our views with the aim of helping the field of intercultural communication pedagogy move forward. Our request was driven by the idea that any discourse can become as totalising as the discourses it problematises, particularly when it claims that its truths are *the* truth, and that such a stance almost always brings about closure, finitude and a silencing of open alternatives. Pennycook (2001, 8) has described the constant questioning upon which this special issue rests as

‘the restive problematisation of the given’, arguing that this problematisation seeks not so much to provide answers to the problems posed, but to open up a whole new array of questions and concerns that challenge the assurances of totalising conclusions. The second and final section of this introductory paper shows precisely how contributors achieve this by providing an overview of the papers that we accommodate in this special issue. Each paper offers new and fresh ways of reconceptualising the ethical relation between self and other within the field of intercultural communication pedagogy and identifies areas that require ongoing reflection in the spirit of enabling this exciting field of inquiry to grow further.

### **Competency models and their attendant debates: a critical review**

For some time, intercultural communication education has been described as a transformative field of pedagogic practice that enables people from different cultures to co-exist harmoniously within the same society (Zhu 2014). To foster this important endeavour, several key scholars in the field of intercultural communication education (see, among others, Byram 1997; Deardorff 2006) have focused their research and scholarship on the development of competency models and theories that aim to equip students with the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to bridge differences among cultures. The principal assumptions behind this work, Moon (2010) and Warren (2008) explain, are that differences create problems when distinct cultures come into contact with each other and to avoid such problems, one needs to acquire an instrumental set of rules which can be brought to bear when crossing geographical or other boundaries. In their respective essays, however, Moon and Warren also argue that this work rests problematically not only on nation-driven conceptualisations of culture, but also on a binary logic that is completely blind to the power structures underlying social inequities. It is precisely on this argument that many debates on competency models have focused in intercultural communication pedagogy to which we now turn in the remainder of this section. Having suggested earlier in this introductory paper that these debates do little to preserve the radical alterity of self and other, the following critical review identifies moments of self-contradiction and incidental turns of argument in the debates under scrutiny to set the field of intercultural communication pedagogy in motion.

### ***Competency models as instruments for preserving the model of culture as nation***

One often-cited criticism that targets competency models in the literature of intercultural communication pedagogy is that they are predicated on the equivalence of one-nation-one-culture-one-language and in the expectation that one member of a group can be replaced with a seemingly identical other. Holliday (1999, 2005, 2011), for example, was among the first scholars who criticised these models for grouping vast numbers of people under a grossly homogeneous single culture, arguing that they portray culture as an agent who feels, thinks and behaves. In his thesis, this scholar also distinguished the ‘large culture’ paradigm, whereby cultures become coincidental with regions, countries and continents, from the ‘small culture’ approach that views culture as the composite of cohesive behaviour within any social grouping, adding that culture is the resource upon which people draw selectively to say or do particular things (see also Holliday

1998). This is also Street's (1993) view. As early as 1993, he formulated the proposition that *culture is a verb* to emphasise the importance of treating culture as an active process of creating meaning. Specifically, Street pointed out that membership of a given culture does not always imply similarity, and that wilful and conscious agents have a range of discursive means at their disposal to reinforce and/or to undermine the structures within which they have been socialised. From this, he moved on to argue that there is little point in trying to define what culture is, but to understand the time-bound contextual conditions that make certain definitions of culture more acceptable than others.

Taking their lead from Street, several scholars (see Dervin 2012 for a comprehensive overview) have suggested abandoning the concept of culture altogether in discussions about intercultural competency. This suggestion centres not only on the difficulties encountered when attempting to define the term, but also on the socio-economic and other inequalities that hide behind the all-embracing notion of culture. Indeed, both Eriksen (2001) and Blommaert (2005) have noted that culture constitutes a 'cosy blanket' that is used to explain many social inequalities, whilst Piller (2011) has gone even further to argue that divorcing the concept of culture from its socio-economic connotations runs the risk of reproducing practices of exclusion and injustice. In light of the biased and ethnocentric attitudes that continue to trouble diverse societies, Piller urges intercultural communication educators to cultivate in students abilities that will enable them to reflect on their own cultural assumptions as they study the material and socio-economic aspects of communication. In this way, she returns to the old adage – 'know thyself' – of intercultural communication education that necessitates developing an understanding of one's self before approaching others, alongside other researchers (e.g., Evanoff 2006; Samovar and Porter 2009) who adopt a similar perspective in their efforts to reconceptualise the self/other relation.

Scholars who have considered Piller's (2011) suggestion argue that becoming aware of one's own cultural assumptions can create a whole new set of problems, not least because awareness regards the self as the primary site from which all intercultural communication training should begin (Aman 2013). Blasco (2012), for instance, relates awareness to the Cartesian notion of self-accessible self. She points out that although this self can act as its own inner consultant of perceived communication problems, it paradoxically reproduces an ethnocentric way of seeing the other as fixed and knowable. Pinchevski (2005) and Dasli (2019) agree with this point when suggesting that awareness delimitates the boundaries between 'what is' and 'what is not'. Both scholars concentrate on the metaphysical workings of Western philosophy that determine the characteristics of a desirable social existence in the process of elaborating a theory of the self-same. For Vetlesen (1995),

[this theory] aims at totalisation; its project is to subsume everything to be known under the already known; it has no patience with otherness, with novelty, with the unprecedented, since it always seeks its own accumulation and confirmation. What is accumulated and confirmed is the same. (367)

In the context of developing a model for interacting in the multicultural workplace, Guilherme, Keating, and Hoppe (2010; see also Guilherme 2020) note that it is possible to counteract the adverse impact that awareness-raising can make on individuals, as long as they demonstrate a certain degree of intercultural responsibility towards each other.

These researchers define such responsibility as ‘a conscious and reciprocally respectful relationship’ among interlocutors who ‘expect of themselves as much as they demand of others’ (79), although they note further that the act of being responsible requires some background knowledge of the fragmentary cultural idiosyncrasies that are deemed to affect any interactional context. Given that these cultural idiosyncrasies are fragmentary and potentially shifting, Ferri (2018) sees some merit in the aforementioned model. On closer inspection, however, she suggests that the conceptualisation of responsibility on which this model rests regards the individual as a self-regulating rational being who acquires the competences that bridge differences among cultures before becoming responsible. Not only does acquisition ignore the role of the other in interaction, but also acts as a driving force for interpreting behaviours as expressions of cultural difference. Our position in this introductory paper aligns with Ferri’s, who adopts a Levinasian understanding of responsibility to conceptualise the notion as an ‘ethical demand that the other imposes upon me’ (57). She explains that this demand does not emerge from an abstract moral imperative to which the self must respond, but from the irrecuperable shock of being-for-the-other before oneself.

Moreover, the extent to which interlocutors will demonstrate a consciously respectful attitude towards each other in conversation has been challenged by scholars who argue that the function of much argumentation is to convince others of one’s own opinions (Freedman 2007). Billig (1991), for example, relates the holding of opinions to patterns of domination and control. He argues that because opinions are passed down to individuals through the workings of dominant ideology, interlocutors find themselves repeating assumptions that reinforce existing power arrangements. Parekh (2006) and van Dijk (2002) share this perspective when discussing how major means of public communication preformulate the ethnic consensus. They note that these means of communication are controlled almost exclusively by powerful white elites. Therefore, members of majority groups have very few alternative sources of information to problematise prevailing racial and other prejudices. As Bell (2003) and Dasli (2014) have persuasively argued, however, this may not be true for minority group members who challenge the mainstream discourse on race in conversation with one another in their communities. Thus, in their studies that concentrate on the stories told by targets of racist behaviour during in-depth interviews, these researchers demonstrate how participants used discursive manoeuvres to shift the racial order in their favour.

The findings generated by these two empirical studies seem to resonate with conceptualisations that destabilise essentialist notions of identity. Hall (1996), for instance, describes identity as the meeting point of discourse processes which, on the one hand, insert individuals into given social categories and, on the other hand, produce subject positions that resist the categories into which one may be put. From this, he goes on to argue that identities are not fixed and permanent, but rather are continuously formed and transformed in relation to context-dependent interactions (see also Hall 1992). This view is echoed by Davies and Harré (1990), who explored the many ways in which speakers position themselves and others in their talk. These scholars explain that because the creation of positions forms part of a non-linear contradictory narrative, hearers may pursue a storyline that is different from the first speaker’s utterance as an attempt to contest it. Weedon (1997) attributes contestation to the infinite openness of language that gives rise to endless provisional meanings. She suggests that these meanings

constitute a site of struggle for power which individuals exercise constantly over one another either to restore hegemonic interests or to challenge and change the conditions by which they live.

As Usher and Edwards (1994) have convincingly argued, however, challenging and changing the conditions by which one lives may result in the oppressed becoming the oppressors. Indeed, there is always a danger of simply replacing one totalising discourse with another, particularly in situations where the resources deemed necessary to lead a 'better' life do not suffice for all involved (Rose 1996). Bourdieu ([1985] 2021) associates totalisation with the accumulation of specific forms of capital. That is, by suggesting that forms of capital enable individuals to advance their position in a stratified society, he demonstrates how one exercises power over another to maintain the material and symbolic profits they have secured within a field of relations. Foucault ([1979] 2008) also discusses totalisation in his thesis on governmentality. He argues that governing in a neoliberal democratic way necessitates the construction of an enterprising self whose conduct can be brought into alignment with political objectives. This self, Rose (1996) explains, is both calculating and active in that he or she is able not only to calculate for personal advantage, but also to become that which he or she wishes to be. Pointing out that in neoliberal democracies enterprising individuals are governed through their personal aspirations, Foucault (1982, 220) concludes that power achieves its totalising effects when 'the other is thoroughly recognised and maintained to the very end as a person who acts'.

This section presented a critical review of the literature that has problematised competency models in the field of intercultural communication pedagogy. To do so, it began with a detailed discussion of the predominant framing of culture as nation to explain how this framing conceals social inequalities, before considering responses designed to bring exclusionary relations of power to the centre of scholarly attention. Acknowledging, however, that these responses might reproduce the ethnocentric tendencies they claim to overcome, our critical review moved on to present a Levinasian conceptualisation of responsibility that stresses the importance of being-for-the-other-person before oneself. In so doing, it distinguished this conceptualisation of responsibility from other understandings of the notion that exist in the relevant literature, noting that these other understandings overlook not only the function of much argumentation, but also the conditions that may turn the oppressed into oppressors. The following section re-visits the idea that competency models conceal social inequalities by considering and problematising proposals that regard critical pedagogy and its emancipatory mission as a viable approach to restoring the ethical relation between self and other.

### *Competency models as instruments for concealing social inequalities*

Scholars of intercultural communication education have also criticised competency models for overlooking the larger visible and/or hidden structures of power that constitute intercultural communication encounters and relations. For example, Nakayama and Halualani (2010; see also Halualani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka 2009) have explained how these structures position cultural group members and their identities disproportionately to each other, and argue for the need to reconceptualise culture as a site of ideological struggle where competing interests vie for dominance and control. Levine



and Phipps (2012; see also Phipps and Guilherme 2004) have also written about the relations of power within which intercultural communication encounters are almost always implicated. They argue that these relations can be as enabling as they are constraining in that they also provide individual actors with the opportunity to contest and then to reconstruct the meanings that are made available to them. This argument, however, does not align closely with the perspective held by critical theorists (e.g., Bronner 1994; Held 1980), who direct attention to the manipulative and duplicitous character of dominant ideology to suggest that meaning reconstruction remains a difficult process.

Defining 'ideology' as a set of broadly accepted beliefs that support the power of a ruling class, Brookfield (2005) and Eagleton (1991) identify two mutually reinforcing ways through which the concept must be understood. While the first way works to convince people that existing social arrangements advance the interests of all, the second way ensures that a grossly unjust society reproduces itself with minimal opposition. Indeed, as Marx and Engels ([1932] 1970, 66) have so aptly put it in *The German Ideology*, ideology works effectively when the ruling class 'presents its interests as the common interest of all the members of society [. . .] it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones'. According to Billig (1991), this conceptualisation of ideology finds itself caught in two contrasting views of the ordinary person. On the one hand, the ordinary person is perceived as a passive recipient of thoughts who accepts unquestioningly the erroneous ideas of the ruling classes. On the other hand, this same person is seen as an agent of thinking whose critical consciousness enables him or her to create more democratic social forms. Billig suggests that relying on another thinking agent, who remains unaffected by the workings of ideology, plays an important role in creating such forms.

Having in mind this second and more optimistic view of the ordinary person, an important body of scholarship has emerged in the field of intercultural communication education that advocates making the culture curriculum actively political and transformative in nature. As Dasli (2011) and Guilherme (2012) contend, this body of scholarship draws on Freirean and other critical approaches to emancipatory education to develop in students the social skills and intellectual capacities that will enable them to shape their future experiences in both affirmative and life-changing ways. Through these approaches, Guilherme (2002) explains, students learn not only how to recognise and challenge the asymmetric relations of power that impose meanings on their lives, but also develop a language of possibility as part of the practice of freedom. Dasli and Diaz (2017) agree with this explanation when asserting that critical pedagogy works in the interests of creating a more just and equitable social order. In their edited collection of essays, they also take this assertion further to suggest that ethics constitutes an inextricable component of critical pedagogy, not least because it takes students beyond the world with which they are familiar as an attempt to organise their struggles with others. Indeed, Giroux (2005) has been extremely clear on this when urging educators to see ethics as a relationship between the self and the other, stating more specifically that

Ethics is not a matter of individual choice or relativism but a social discourse that refuses to accept needless human suffering and exploitation. Ethics becomes a practice that broadly

connotes one's personal and social sense of responsibility to the Other. Thus, ethics is taken up as a struggle against inequality and as a discourse for expanding basic human rights.(67)

Although this conceptualisation of ethics has many similarities with the positional stance taken in this special issue, it also has important differences which may be worth exploring in depth. Gore (1993) is correct to point out that these differences emerge from debates over structural and post-structural positions; that is, those that find their grounding before the construction of discourses and those which reject universalised notions with the aim of locating critiques in specific discursive contexts. Burbules and Berk (1999), as well as Biesta (2005), make the point that although critical pedagogy is aligned closely with ethical discourses, the means through which it pursues its central emancipatory mission remain thoroughly modern and structural. In their respective essays, these authors refer to such structural tendencies as creating normative foundations on which to ground a priori value judgements and purportedly valid truth claims, inviting educators to consider carefully the arguments that have been targeted against critical pedagogy. In the spirit of strengthening the ethical relation between self and other, we turn now to present these arguments.

One set of arguments developed against critical pedagogy has been put forth by Ellsworth (1989) as early as in 1989 in the process of teaching a 'Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies' course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The first argument included in this set refers to the production of fully rational subjects. Ellsworth believes that because critical pedagogy aims to interrogate relations of oppressive domination, it often falls in the trap of enforcing the rules of reason in the classroom. Defined as a series of thoughts adopted by the ideal rational person, these rules ensure that students 'arrive logically at the "universally valid proposition" underlying the discourse of critical pedagogy – namely, that all people have a right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract' (304). Ellsworth demonstrates how rationalism sets up the self in opposition to an 'irrational' other, adding that experiences of oppression remain partial since they project the interests of one side over others. The second argument that has been made by the same author relates to power imbalances between students and teachers. Ellsworth suggests that although critical pedagogy has made concerted efforts to eliminate these imbalances, it has in fact left the essentially paternalistic project of education intact. To explain her suggestion, she discusses approaches that expect teachers to 're-learn' an object of study in dialogue with their students, stating that the only rationale these approaches provide for re-learning is 'to devise more effective strategies for bringing the student "up" to the teacher's level of understanding' (306).

The third argument that Ellsworth has developed against critical pedagogy is associated with student voice. Ellsworth argues that although critical pedagogy recognises that students bring a multiplicity of authentic voices in the classroom, it makes no serious attempt to engage either with their intersectional character, as formed by class, gender and other identity categories, or with the particularities of the historical context from which these voices are created. Referring to the concept of 'voice' as highly problematic, she suggests that it is impossible to speak from any one voice without being interrupted by the traces of other voices, adding that 'pluralising the concept as "voices" implies correction through addition' (312). Ellsworth's fourth and final argument against critical pedagogy focuses on dialogue. She suggests that because critical pedagogy sees

dialogue as a powerful means for debating social change, it often encourages students to agree on the goals of such dialogue before it can even begin. For Ellsworth, such agreement not only 'requires and assumes a classroom of participants unified on the side of the subordinated against the subordinators' but also 'fails to confront dynamics of subordination present among classroom participants and within classroom participants in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions' (315).

Ellsworth's compelling set of arguments against critical pedagogy has attracted attention from scholars who discuss the problems they encountered when putting this form of pedagogy into practice. Usher and Edwards (1994), for example, have described how the teleological goal of critical pedagogy jeopardised their efforts to introduce diversity of opinions into the classroom, while Burbules (2000) has considered the ways in which dialogue in the critical pedagogy sense works to exclude or silence participants from radically different subject positions. To explain how this is attained, Burbules draws attention to prescriptive and procedural modes of dialogue, stating that whereas prescriptivism refers to an allegedly innocent set of communicative norms that serve to co-opt interactants into given viewpoints, proceduralism points to a reinvigorated application of those same norms to resolve any conflicts that may arise. More recently, Biesta (2017) has discussed the emancipatory logic of critical pedagogy that is responsible for many power imbalances between teachers and students. He notes that because emancipation requires a particular intervention from the outside, it instals a relation of dependency between the one to be emancipated and the emancipator. This relation assumes not only that teachers are already aware of their students' objective condition, but also that it is their task to expose this condition with the aim of moving the student from a situation of ignorance to one of awareness.

This section began by re-visiting the idea that intercultural competency models conceal social inequalities. In so doing, it focused on the workings of dominant ideology and the ways in which this ideology ensures that grossly unjust societies reproduce themselves with minimal opposition, before moving on to consider proposals in the relevant intercultural communication literature that regard critical pedagogy and its emancipatory mission as a viable approach to restoring the ethical relation between self and other. We suggested that although critical pedagogy is inextricably intertwined with ethical discourses, the means through which it meets its central emancipatory aims remain thoroughly modern and structural. To strengthen our suggestion, we presented a convincing set of arguments that have been targeted against critical pedagogy, focusing on such issues as the production of rational subjects, power imbalances between students and teachers, student voice and dialogue, while also linking these issues with problems often encountered when one attempts to put critical pedagogy into practice.

Because we remain deeply dissatisfied with debates that ignore either the possibility of the oppressed turning into oppressors or the structural means through which critical pedagogy achieves its emancipatory mission, our aim in this special issue is to provide intercultural communication pedagogy with a renewed understanding of the ethical relation between self and other. This understanding does not necessarily intend to lay the foundations for principles that will throw a safety net under the pedagogical decisions one may be asked to make. After all, how could this be possible when ethics in itself is subject to its own undoing, when 'the net is already torn, is "always already" split, all along and from the start', as Caputo (1993, 4) rightly suggests. Rather, it intends to show that any

decision-making may not be as safe as ethics would perceive it to be, and that we might as well remain open to the possibility of proposing that the relation between self and other does not have to be ethical. In order to do so, the following questions drive contributions to this special issue:

- (1) What ontological assumptions does intercultural communication pedagogy make in its efforts to build social cohesion and peace across cultural divides? What is the problem, if any, with these assumptions?
- (2) What non-words, concepts and theories may be used to reconceptualise the ethical relation between self and other in intercultural communication pedagogy? What transformative impact, if any, may these non-words, concepts and theories make on the practice of intercultural communication pedagogy so that it moves the dialogue with the other on without reaching a conclusion?
- (3) How might continuing the dialogue with the other in intercultural communication pedagogy generate possibilities for critical resistance to perceived injustice without resorting to grounded principles to do so? What possible implications and tentative conclusions might social justice pedagogues and intercultural communication education policy makers draw from such dialogue?

### Overview of the special issue

The first contributing paper is authored by Gert Biesta, who draws attention to five interrelated issues on which contrasting pedagogies of empowerment and disarmament have focused: 'preparation', 'culture', 'the other', 'time' and 'pedagogy'. Regarding 'preparation', Biesta points to lists of intercultural competences that are designed to equip students with the skills deemed necessary to communicate appropriately with people from other cultural backgrounds, suggesting that these lists project an idealised version of the intercultural encounter that ignores the ever-changing contexts of interaction. These contexts, Biesta continues, are also ignored in debates that use 'culture' as a way of explaining difference. He argues that when using culture-as-explanation one not only locates the power of explanation on the side of the one explaining the difference, but also risks eradicating the difference by putting it in a particular explanatory frame. Trying to move the field of intercultural communication beyond culture, Biesta goes on to consider the encounter with 'the other' and the work that has drawn on Levinas's ethics of responsibility. Biesta differentiates his position from this work when suggesting that this work often refers to an ethical turn according to which everyone should act responsibly and instead conceptualises the encounter with the other as one that puts the self in question. This conceptualisation aligns well with the discussion of 'time' and 'pedagogy' with which Biesta subsequently directly engages in that it not only points to the need for meeting the other in the same contemporality, but also urges teachers to provide students with the time to encounter what comes to their attention.

The second contributing paper authored by Itamar Manoff and Claudia Ruitenberg continues the theme of pedagogy by discussing one classroom encounter the first author had with one of his students while teaching English as an additional language in Vancouver. The discussion focuses on the conflict that may emerge between the teacher's need to demonstrate the correct grammatical form and his or her efforts to respond to the

address of the unique and singular student, which Manoff and Ruitenbergh consider in association with the distinctively different Levinasian constructs of the *saying* and the *said*. They explain that although the saying disrupts the information that can be exchanged through the designative function of language to which the said refers, there is always a possibility for the said to be embedded in the saying. Manoff and Ruitenbergh discuss this possibility as a way of reconceptualising the types of ethical encounters that can take place within language and intercultural communication classrooms, bringing into view three important challenges that cannot be easily resolved. The first challenge refers to the aporetic nature of the teacher's dual responsibility to respond to the student through both the saying and the said. The second challenge focuses on the impossibility of knowing how to do justice both to the student and to the task of language teaching. The third challenge points to tensions between Levinas's ethics and political critiques of language and intercultural education.

The third contributing paper authored by Giuliana Ferri turns the spotlight onto the bodily aspects of interaction. Starting from the premise that these aspects are not captured fully in Levinasian debates that focus on the *here and now* of intercultural encounters, Ferri directs attention to the experiences of 'othered' sexualised, gendered, disabled or racialised bodies which constitute one's sense of self. In so doing, she reviews ample evidence in the relevant literature that show how these bodies are subjected to discursive practices of exclusion in educational and other spaces, before moving on to argue for an intercultural communication pedagogy that accounts for and makes embodied difference noticeable. Central to Ferri's argument is the use of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea of 'assemblage', which describes how different elements organise themselves in combinations that are not predetermined or held together in advance, thereby creating freely other tentative combinations. Considering the physical and social arrangements of the classroom as an assemblage, Ferri concludes her paper by outlining possibilities that can problematise the three strata from which highly-structured intercultural learning environments are often formed: a) the separation between the teacher and the student; b) the separation of language from its semiotic and multimodal relation with bodies, senses and objects; and c) the separation between body and mind and self and other.

In the fourth contributing paper Katja Frimberger conceptualises intercultural encounters as art to move the field of intercultural communication pedagogy and research beyond what she calls 'the Levinas-inspired turn'. To achieve this, she first reviews critiques of competency models and problems with emancipatory intercultural education, before explaining how these critiques have led to the development of de-centred research approaches that promise to keep the space between self and other infinitely open. Realising, however, that the rational self could still find expression in these approaches, Frimberger points to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer to conceptualise intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena that cannot be defined against ethically suspect data-driven social science methods. In so doing, she first explores the kind of 'truth' that is sought to reside in intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena in relation to Gadamer's (2003) notion of 'play', before moving on to consider how Gadamer conceives of the sensory alterity of the work of art and the role that alterity and prejudice play in Gadamerian dialogue. The paper concludes with Frimberger's suggestion that grounding the ethical event of encountering the strangeness of the other in Gadamer's aesthetic hermeneutics can support the field of intercultural

communication to pursue a research agenda that moves beyond the search for universal meaning.

The fifth and final contributing paper is authored by Michalinos Zembylas, who returns to the critique of intercultural competency models from which this special issue began by providing a powerful analysis of two landmark OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) policy documents. The first document is titled 'Preparing our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World: The OECD PISA Global Competence Framework (OECD 2018)'. The second document, which supplements the first by offering guidelines of how educators can embed global competence into existing curricula, is titled 'Teaching for Global Competence in a Rapidly Changing World' (Asia Society/OECD 2018). With reference points drawn from *affect* theories (see Gregg and Seigworth 2010 for an overview), Zembylas's analysis of the policy documents directs attention to two key themes: *global and intercultural competencies as self-centred emotional skills* and *the use of specific affects/emotions as moral imperatives*. Findings from the first theme reveal that the OECD global competence framework presents certain 'positive' behaviours as universally shared and stable while negating the existence of 'negative' emotions, such as frustration and anger. Findings from the second theme reveal how key desirable values, such as tolerance, empathy and respect, are framed within a language of individualism and cognitivism to construct a self-governing subject who acts upon these values. Zembylas argues that the OECD global competence framework constitutes a form of affective governmentality that essentially prevents students from challenging unequal social structures and concludes his paper with research, policy and pedagogy implications that aim to enrich the ethical relation between self and other.

As co-editors, we close this special issue with a 'concluding remarks' paper that presents our own reflections of the broader implications and possible conclusions that can be drawn from the contributing papers. Returning to the three central questions that have driven these papers, our reflections focus on the aporetic and almost impassable road that contributors had to cross when reconceptualising the ethical relation between self and other. In so doing, we do not argue that our contributors have refrained from making difficult pedagogical and/or other decisions about the shape this relation might take in the future, for that would run the risk of bringing the field of intercultural communication pedagogy to a disastrous halt. Rather, we suggest that each contributor has approached their task with extreme caution on the understanding that the ground on which they stand is not absolutely firm and that the relation between self and other must remain infinitely open to further discussions and reflexive theorising. Our 'concluding remarks' paper culminates with such theorising by bringing the 'ethical', the 'intercultural' and the 'political' together.

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