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Citation for published version:

Biesta, G 2023, 'Becoming contemporaneous: Intercultural communication pedagogy beyond culture and without ethics', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, pp. 237-251.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Pedagogy, Culture and Society

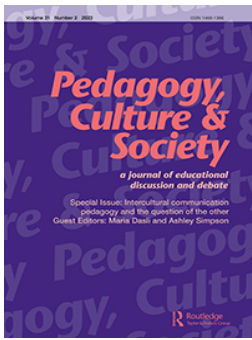
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To cite this article: Gert Biesta (2023) Becoming contemporaneous: intercultural communication pedagogy beyond culture and without ethics, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 31:2, 237-251, DOI: [10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2164341>



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Becoming contemporaneous: intercultural communication pedagogy beyond culture and without ethics

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ABSTRACT

There is a significant amount of literature in which the educational question concerning intercultural communication is seen in terms of providing students with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and competencies that will enable them to become effective intercultural communicators. While this line of thought seems to have become the ‘common sense’ of much educational policy, there is also a growing body of research in which critical questions are raised about this approach. There are particular concerns about the totalising tendencies in such approaches, and ethics is often mobilised as a way to understand and enact the intercultural encounter differently. In this paper, I contribute to these discussions from an educational perspective. I contrast a pedagogy of empowerment with a pedagogy of disarmament, show how the idea of culture functions as an explanatory device, raise the question of time in intercultural encounters, and argue that an ethical ‘turn’ may run the risk of becoming another totalising gesture in intercultural communication. Through these explorations, I outline the contours of a pedagogy for intercultural communication beyond culture and without ethics in which the central challenge is that of trying to become ‘contemporaneous’. I pay particular attention to what this may require from the teacher.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 December 2022

Accepted 6 December 2022

KEYWORDS



Intercultural communication; pedagogy; empowerment; disarmament; time; Levinas, coevalness; contemporaneity; teaching; perspectivism; culture

Never need a reason, never need a rhyme, kick your knees up, step in time.

MaryPoppins (The Musical)

Introduction: A pedagogy of empowerment

Pedagogies for intercultural communication have a tendency to focus on the ways in which, through education, individuals can be equipped to become competent communicators across cultural difference. Much of the literature focuses on identifying the competences needed for effective intercultural communication (see, e.g., Byram 1997; Dearsdorff 2006), while the pedagogies mobilised for this are often presented as pedagogies of *empowerment*, making students ‘ready’ for the intercultural encounter. In recent years, as the editors of the special issue to which this paper seeks to make a contribution

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have pointed out (see Dasli 2021), there has been an increased interest in the ethical dimensions of the relationship between selves and others, particularly in order to challenge totalising assumptions around intercultural communication, both about 'others' and about 'selves'.

What characterises this ethical 'turn' is that it tends to see the ethical relation between self and other from the perspective of the self, thus ending up with egocentric – or with the term I prefer: egological (see Biesta 2016) – undertones. In addition, the idea of the ethical self benevolently 'reaching out' to others bears the hallmark of a colonial gesturing, which is as totalising as the totalising tendencies it seeks to overcome. For these reasons, then, the editors of this special issue suggest that 'the time is ripe . . . to provide intercultural communication with a renewed understanding of the ethical relation between self and other and . . . to reinstate the possibility of proposing a non-normative pedagogy that may even challenge the idea that the relationship between self and other has to be ethical' (Dasli 2021).

In this paper, I take up this particular challenge, working towards the suggestion that the relation between self and other may indeed be better enacted and, after that, understood *without* ethics and, in a sense, also *beyond* culture. I come to these issues as an educator and educationalist, which means that my main interest is in the question of pedagogy, and my main ambition in this paper is to articulate the contours of a pedagogy for intercultural communication that in a sense may 'liberate' intercultural communication from too much culture and too much ethics. What this means and entails is what I seek to explore in the sections that are to follow.

In my explorations, I will consider three 'perspectives' (albeit that, halfway, I will also raise some fundamental questions about perspectivism and the very idea of 'having a perspective'). I distinguish between [a] a third-person perspective where things are looked at from the 'outside', for example in order to generate explanations of phenomena such as 'culture' and 'identity'; [b] a first-person perspective, which has to do with how each of us engages with the challenges we encounter in our life by trying to figure out what there is to do for *me*; and [c] a second-person perspective, which is the perspective of the teacher who stands in a triadic relationship between student and world, and who ultimately must leave the scene¹ (on these three perspectives and the triadic structure of education see Biesta 2021). My ambition throughout this paper is to push back against third-person perspectives, both from explanatory sciences such as sociology and psychology, and from explanatory branches of philosophy such as ontology. This pushback is not meant to be anti-intellectual but is intended to make visible how such third-person explanations can get in the way of first-person encounters and second-person pedagogical possibilities.

There are a number of themes in what is to follow. The overarching theme of the paper is the distinction between a pedagogy of empowerment and a pedagogy of disarmament, as suggested by Masschelein (1997). Whereas a pedagogy of empowerment seeks to prepare students for their encounter with others, a pedagogy of disarmament seeks to open students for the encounter itself, so to speak, on the assumption that too much empowerment may get in the way of the encounter itself. I pursue this line of thought through a discussion of five key-concepts: preparation, culture, the other, time and pedagogy. Readers familiar with the literature on intercultural communication and intercultural communication pedagogy will most likely recognise my critique of particular

'framings' of culture and interculturality and particular approaches to education and pedagogy, although I hope that the distinction between empowerment and disarmament may provide a productive 'opening' in ongoing – and from my perspective in a sense rather repetitive – discussions about intercultural communication and its pedagogy.

Such readers may perhaps be less familiar with some of the more theoretical and philosophical 'moves' in the paper, particularly those about the other and about time. My discussion of the work of Emmanuel Levinas is particularly intended to push back against too much ethics and a too 'moralising' tone in intercultural communication pedagogy, one that would see the main task of such a pedagogy as that of telling students that they should behave in an ethical manner *vis-à-vis* cultural 'others'. The main suggestion I present in the paper – a suggestion which, I hope, will bring something new to the discussion – is to think of the encounter with 'others' not as *cultural* (not least, as I argue, because 'culture' runs the risk of explaining the other rather than encountering the other) but rather as *temporal*. The challenge this brings to the fore – which is at the very same time theoretical, political, educational and practical – is what it might take to try to exist in the same time or, as I put it in the title of this paper, what it might take to become 'contemporaneous'.

While I am not able to spell out all the detail of what this shift entails, I do hope that the paper provides the groundwork for a temporal turn in intercultural communication pedagogy and thus can provide an outlook for new educational thought and practice.

On preparation

I would like to start my exploration with the question of pedagogy and the common pedagogical trope that education is a matter of preparation: preparation for work, preparation for life, preparation for more education, preparation for citizenship, preparation for eternity but, in all cases, preparation for something that will occur *later*. Of course, there is always John Dewey with his belief that 'education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living' (Dewey in his 'pedagogic creed' from 1897). This is, however, a bit of a false opposition, also because it does not really tell us what kind of 'process of living' education is or is supposed to be. After all, while work in the mines or the cotton mills may have been 'an education' for many children in the 19th century, it probably was not that much of a life.

One problem I wish to highlight with the idea of education as preparation – which we find again and again in the mantra that education should empower children and young people with 'knowledge, skills, and dispositions' – is that it seeks to *arm* the new generation, that is, provide them with 'equipment' (Kenneth Burke's term; see Rivers and Weber 2010) that would make them ready for 'something' that may or may not happen in the future. In some domains and with regard to some matters this is, of course, entirely reasonable and legitimate. Future car mechanics should be equipped to become good car mechanics; future dentists should be equipped to become good dentists; future bakers should become equipped to be good bakers. But where it concerns human matters and interhuman encounters, such a strategy of empowerment may be problematic.

This is first and foremost because a focus on empowering students for their encounters with 'others' can all too easily turn these 'others' into a threat and a potential enemy and

thus can quickly move the self to a position where the first concern becomes that of its own survival. If education is about building up our students' power, that is, strengthening them and literally harnessing them, then the chance that anything may still 'come in', the chance that anything may still be able to touch them (see also Biesta 2017a), will be significantly reduced. Perhaps rather than just investing in our students' empowerment, education might actually also need a 'strategy of *disarmament*', as Masschelein (1997) has put it (bearing in mind, of course, that 'strategy' is still a concept from the battlefields).

That these concerns are not merely theoretical, can be glanced from the rather widespread literature on intercultural communicative competence (see, e.g., Byram 1997; Dearsdorff 2006; Huber and Reynolds 2014; Council of Europe 2016). One often used and widely repeated definition of intercultural competence is that it is 'the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other language and cultural backgrounds' (see, e.g., Byram 1997). From this starting point, scholars then construct shorter or longer lists of what this requires, which often includes qualities such as empathy (understood as 'an understanding of other people's behaviours and ways of thinking'); respect (understood as 'genuine admiration and appreciation of different ways of thinking and communication'); tolerance (understood as 'the ability and willingness to accept and acknowledge different behaviours and ways of thinking, the existence of opinions or behaviour that one does not necessarily agree with'); sensitivity (understood as 'the awareness and responsiveness to other people's behaviours and ways of thinking'); and flexibility (understood as 'willingness to adapt and be open to change and different ways of thinking').

One problem with such lists, and with the definition they expand upon, is that they are no more than an idealised version of a very particular 'kind' of intercultural encounter, and also that they are an idealised version 'after the event'. Put differently, when someone, in an encounter with 'an other' (I will come back to this below), has acted with empathy, respect, tolerance, sensitivity and flexibility, that may, of course, be fine – or not; in the abstract this is difficult to say. But there is no reason to assume that *all* encounters with *all* 'others' would require these qualities. And there is also no reason to assume that all encounters that are deemed to have been 'effective and appropriate' – again two notions that raise more questions than that they answer – would have been the result of the mobilisation of empathy, respect, tolerance, sensitivity, and flexibility. Such lists are at the very least misleading as accounts of actual encounters. And they become problematic when they are translated into educational agendas, first and foremost because there is a fundamental gap between the ideal and the real (see also Dervin and Simpson 2021, chapter 6).

What is also problematic about these particular approaches, is that they envisage the whole question of intercultural communication from the perspective of the self who in some way is going to encounter 'an other'. What is strange about such a depiction, is that it puts the self in some kind of sovereign position from which he or she then can decide whether or not to encounter this 'other' and whether or not to engage in communication with this 'other' (see also Dervin and Simpson 2021, chapter 4). After all, what if this 'other' bumps into me? What if this 'other' takes the initiative? What if this 'other' asks me a question? What if this 'other' puts me in question? Or what if this other just puts up a middle finger in front of my face?

All this therefore also raises the question of context because encounters between selves and others are never abstract encounters. They always take place between 'real' people, if that adjective adds anything, within real contexts with real histories, under real political, social, and economic conditions, and where those involved in the encounter may have very particular and specific intentions or agendas. It makes all the difference, therefore, whether intercultural communication takes place on a train, in a garden, in a shop, in a classroom, in a hospital, on the internet, on a battleground, in the 'first' world or the 'third' world, during an invasion or special military operation, and so on – the list is endless. And as soon as the question of context arrives, the biggest 'blind spot' of idealised accounts of intercultural communicative competence comes into view, namely whether this 'other' is actually worthy of my empathy, respect, tolerance, sensitivity, and flexibility – or perhaps just deserves a bullet?

On culture

Within the field of intercultural communication and intercultural communication pedagogy there is an extensive body of literature that has raised critical questions about how culture is conceptualised and understood (see, for example, Holliday 2011; Ferri 2018; Dervin and Jacobsson 2022). Questions have been raised about the so-called 'one-nation, one-culture, one-language equivalence', that is, the idea that 'culture' smoothly maps onto nation and language and, in all cases, does so in the singular: *one* nation, *one* culture, *one* language. Questions have also been raised about monolithic, static and abstract notions of culture, where culture is considered to be 'fixed' and all-encompassing. And questions have been raised about the assumption that 'culture' can simply and straightforwardly be linked to 'identity', as in the idea of 'cultural identity'. Such work is, of course, important for the field, because all research on intercultural communication, all attempts at improving intercultural communication and preparing students for intercultural communication all rely on particular notions and understandings of the idea of 'culture'.

It is not just the critics of the idea of 'culture' in intercultural communication and intercultural communication pedagogy literature who raise questions about its meaning. Those who have a more favourable view about the possibility and desirability of intercultural communication and the competences needed for this also warn against simplistic, one-dimensional understandings of culture. The Council of Europe's document, 'Competences for democratic culture' stresses, for example, that culture is a difficult term to define, largely because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous and embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often disputed, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways' (Council of Europe 2016, 19). Hence, they work on the assumption that 'cultures are internally heterogeneous, contested, dynamic and constantly changing and that intercultural situations arise due to the perception that there are cultural differences between people' (21).

The authors argue that cultures 'may be construed as having three aspects', namely 'the material resources that are used by members of the group (e.g., tools, foods and clothing), the socially shared resources of the group (e.g., the language, religion and rules of social conduct) and the subjective resources that are used by individual group members (e.g., the values, attitudes, beliefs and practices, which group members commonly use as a frame of reference for making sense of and relating to the world)' (Council of

Europe 2016, 16). 'The culture of the group', as they put it, 'is a composite formed from all three aspects', which also means that 'groups of any size can have their own distinctive cultures', bearing in mind that 'even the boundaries of the group itself, and who is perceived to be within the group and who is perceived to be outside the group, may be disputed by different group members – cultural group boundaries are often very fuzzy'.

In addition to the fluidity and ambiguity of cultural groups, the authors also highlight that the 'cultural affiliations' of individuals are 'fluid and dynamic, with the subjective salience of social and cultural identities fluctuating as individuals move from one situation to another, with different affiliations – or different clusters of intersecting affiliations – being highlighted depending on the particular social context encountered' (Council of Europe 2016, 20). Nonetheless, the authors of this particular document tend to think that cultural 'categories' are helpful when encountering 'other' people, for example, in understanding 'why another person is behaving in the way that they are' (Council of Europe 2016, 20).

While there are many provisos, then, about the idea of culture, many discussions nonetheless give the impression that culture in some way exists and that the main theoretical challenge is to get culture 'right', so to speak. And this is perhaps first of all visible in the very idea of 'intercultural communication' as communication *between* 'cultures'.

I would suggest that what is remarkably absent from many of these discussions, is the acknowledgement that culture is neither a 'thing' nor a 'reality', and that it is also not simply a concept to 'name' aspects of reality. Rather, 'culture' is first of all an *explanation* and, more specifically, *an explanation of (the experience of) difference*. To name or categorise a particular difference – which is always a difference from me and where I am, or from us and from where we are – as 'cultural', is to explain this difference on the basis of a distinction between what is cultural and what is *not* cultural. This, more often than not, goes back to the distinction between what is natural (and thus in some way shared by everyone) and what is cultural, as the particular way in which what is natural has become cultivated.

To say that a difference is cultural, thus in one and the same move *acknowledges* this difference *as* cultural and *eradicates* the difference by putting it in a particular explanatory frame. It says, in other words, that your difference (from me) is 'merely' cultural or, to put it differently, it says that I claim the right to explain your difference from me within and through my particular explanatory 'dispositif' (on the latter term see Foucault 1980). Whether *you* buy into this 'dispositif', whether *you* live in a world that operates on the distinction between nature and culture, is maybe a problem for *you*, but it is definitely not a problem for me. Culture-as-explanation thus reveals itself as a colonial gesture, in that it puts an explanatory 'raster' over any encounter with difference, locating the power of explanation on the side of the one explaining the difference, thus running the risk, to put it mildly, of explaining the difference *away* rather than encountering the difference (see also Dasli 2019).

According to Martin Heidegger (see Heidegger 2002), this explanatory gesture is profoundly modern. The very idea that our relationship with the world and other human beings within that world is a matter of having a perspective on and an image of the world is, itself, a modern configuration. In such a configuration, human beings appear

as 'interpreted', as Heidegger puts it (Heidegger 2002, 68) and 'culture' is one way to 'mark' individuals in this way.² The overarching point Heidegger makes, is that this configuration itself is what characterises the modern age. It is not, therefore, that we can distinguish a 'modern' worldview from, say, a pre-modern one. The idea of a worldview or perspective on the world, the idea of 'the world grasped as picture' (Heidegger 2002, 67), only emerges in the modern age, which indicates that the idea of cultural explanation and even the very possibility of cultural explanation has a very precise, specific and local history, rather than that it can be understood as a universal option.

I have already mentioned that if we provide an explanation of 'an other', for example, by highlighting how the difference between me and this other is the result of culture, we are, in a sense, explaining this other away by pulling them into our own explanatory 'dispositif'. The idea that I can tell someone else what is really going on in their life (for example, by explaining why their behaviours or actions are 'typical' of 'their culture') is not confined to the domain of cultural explanation and intercultural encounter, but also plays a central role in critical approaches to emancipatory education (for a detailed discussion see Biesta 2010a, 2017b), and in Pierre Bourdieu's idea of 'misrecognition'. Central in these discussions is the idea of false consciousness, understood as consciousness that is unaware of its determination by power, thus leading to beliefs about self and world that are a 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu) of what is actually going on.

On this account, the task of emancipatory educators is seen as that of replacing false consciousness with true consciousness – something known in the literature as 'demystification' – by providing individuals with an explanation of their 'misperceptions' and 'misunderstandings', so we might say. In some cases, this makes sense. It is helpful to know, for example, that supermarkets will put the products that make the highest profit at eye level and will put the cheapest products on the bottom shelf. But there is also something very worrying about the idea that someone else may be telling you the truth about yourself – a truth not accessible to you – because in one stroke this invalidates what may well be some of your most cherished beliefs. To be explained by someone else, then, for example, in terms of culture – such as in 'Your belief in shamans is just something peculiar of your culture', or maybe also as in 'Your belief in market capitalism is just something peculiar of your culture' – may therefore not feel as empowering as it pretends to be (see Ellsworth 1989).

While I will be drawing my conclusions at the end of this paper, these considerations begin to suggest that intercultural communication pedagogy may want to move *beyond* culture by taking communication itself more seriously without immediately or necessarily labelling it as cultural. Would such a move result in a more prominent role for the ethical dimensions of encounters? This is the question to which I will turn now.

On the other

A key insight from the line of thought I have pursued so far, is that when an encounter with 'an other' is framed in terms of culture – as an intercultural encounter or as intercultural communication – the relationship is conceived as one where I view the other. I am, in other words, an observer of a cultural other. This is, for example, what the authors of the document on 'Competences for democratic culture' have in mind in their

idea of 'intercultural situations'. These, according to them, arise 'when an individual perceives another person (or group of people) as being culturally different from themselves' (Council of Europe 2016, 20). As a spectator of an other, I am a bit like a birdwatcher, and just as a good birdwatcher needs knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to become a better birdwatcher, gaining more competences will thus turn me into a more competent 'other-watcher'.

The possibility for the other to become an object of my observation and for me to become an observer of the other has something to do with the emergence of perspectivism in the visual arts – drawing and painting – towards the end of the Middle Ages (see Gruwez 2009, 47), where this very possibility was discovered (or perhaps better: invented). What is interesting about a perspective, is that it implies a specific standpoint for the observer and a 'field' in which that what is being observed is positioned and has a position. A perspective thus creates a distinction between the observer and the observed – between the seer who sees and the seen that is being seen. One could argue that this, rather than the Cartesian mind-body dualism, is the defining dualism of modernity (see also what I said above about Heidegger). Here, the I becomes subject in relation to observable objects, which also means that the perspective from which the I/eye observes becomes subjective. What is important about the emergence of perspectivism, is that it creates a clear position for the I. One could say that precisely in this way the I gains a kind of freedom. I refer to this as a kind of freedom because the freedom the I gains is the freedom of world-observation, so to speak. The I arrives, in other words, as a spectator of the world, which means that the I is put at a distance from the world, just as the world – natural and social – is put at a distance from the I.

It is in light of this, that the work of Emmanuel Levinas is important, albeit it not in the way in which it is often presented, namely as an ethical turn in which it is argued that everyone should be responsible, that is, should act ethically towards 'the other'.³ Rather, what is at stake in Levinas's work, is precisely a critique of the 'egological' worldview – and, following the discussion above, I am inclined to say that the very idea of the world as something to view is by its very nature egological as it puts the ego in the centre and makes the world into an object of the ego's gaze. Levinas's work is precisely a critique of a 'set up' in which it is assumed that the ego comes *before* the world, both in space (the world as an object of the ego's gaze) and in time, that is, that everything starts with an ego or consciousness who then (once it exists), becomes aware of the world outside of itself (see Levinas 1994).

However, Levinas is not simply arguing for a reversal of this set up, for example in the form of a social or sociological theory of the origin of the ego, as that would simply mean exchanging one third-person theory by another third-person theory. Levinas rather proposes what elsewhere I have referred to as an 'ethics of subjectivity' (Biesta 2008). The idea of an ethics of subjectivity hints at a double shift. It first of all indicates that Levinas seeks to approach the question of human subjectivity through ethics rather than through knowledge. There is, in other words, no *theory* about the subject, no cognitive claim about what the subject *is*. Yet this also implies, and this is the second shift, that Levinas's writings should not be read as a traditional ethical philosophy or theory of ethics that seeks to describe or prescribe what being ethical and acting ethically are. What is at stake in Levinas's ethics of subjectivity is the question of human subjectness, not the question of ethics; what is at stake is the question what it means to exist as subject.

Rather modestly – particularly compared to the rich flow of language through which Levinas tries to capture something of the mystery of human subjectness – Levinas writes that he ‘describe[s] subjectivity in ethical terms’ (Levinas 1985, 95). Key in this effort is his suggestion that responsibility is ‘the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity’. Levinas emphasises, however, that responsibility here ‘does not supplement a preceding existential base’. It is not that the subject *first* exists – as a self-sufficient, egological subject – and *then* encounters a responsibility or takes a responsibility upon itself or decides to act responsibly. He suggests that ‘the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility’. Responsibility, in the remarkably concise formulation of Zygmunt Bauman (1993, 13) thus appears as ‘the first reality of the self’. It is the moment where the self finds itself, so to speak. Or to be even more precise: it is the moment where the self *matters* because in its responsibility the self is ‘non-interchangeable’ (Levinas 1985, 101).

All this does not mean, to make the point one more time, that we, as human beings, cannot escape our responsibility and also not that our alleged ‘ability’ to respond is primary. Responsibility, so we might say, is objective: it simply exists and in our lives we can encounter it. When we encounter it, we encounter the fact that there is a question for *me* and that *I*, and no one else, will need to figure out what to do with this question. The encounter with responsibility thus makes me aware of my freedom and makes me aware of myself. It puts my self ‘at stake’, so to speak, and in precisely this way the encounter with responsibility is the ‘moment’ where my self ‘enters’ the world. All this is not theory, it is not a third-person perspective, but fundamentally a first-person matter. With his ethics of subjectivity, Levinas thus provides and performs a ‘phenomenology of the I’, in the literal sense of phenomenology as the study of what appears – in this case, how my ‘I’ appears to me and how my ‘I’ appears or shows up in the world.

The reason why this ‘ethical turn’ matters for intercultural communication and intercultural communication pedagogy is not, then, because it would suggest that in intercultural encounters there is a duty to care and take responsibility for the other. On the contrary, the ethical turn that can be found in Levinas’s work – also, for example, in the idea of ethics as ‘first philosophy’ (see Peperzak 1996) – is first of all important because of the turn, where the self or ego is no longer in the centre but rather in the spotlight, so we might say (see also Biesta 2021, chapter 7). The turn is one where it is no longer *me* who encounters ‘an other’ (and then uses all kind of cultural ‘framings’ to make sense of and understand this other), but where this other encounters *me*, puts me in question, so that I become a question for myself. Here I encounter my freedom, but not as the ‘freedom of signification’ (Levinas 2008), that is, my alleged freedom to make sense of the world around me, but rather as the freedom to do what only I can do and ‘nobody else can do in my place’ (Levinas 1989, 202). In precisely this sense, then, Levinas’s ‘ethical turn’ is *not* a turn towards ethics, that is, not a call to infuse the intercultural encounter with morality, but rather is a turn that puts my freedom into (my) view.

On time

It may seem as if the question of intercultural communication is a question of bridging between cultures here and now. Although such bridging may take time – for example, the time needed to ‘understand’ or ‘make sense’ of ‘an other’ – time itself does not seem to be an issue in the encounter. In his fascinating book ‘Time and the Other: How Anthropology

Makes its Object' (Fabian 1982), Johannes Fabian does indeed argue that communication requires a shared time and even suggests that communication is ultimately about *creating* shared time (see Fabian 1982, 30–32). Fabian refers to this with the term 'coevalness', which he proposes for capturing the meaning of two German words: 'gleichzeitig' (an adverb) and 'Gleichzeitigkeit' (a noun). Fabian explains (31) that the 'unusual coeval, and especially the noun coevalness, express a need to steer between such closely related notions as *synchronous/simultaneous* and *contemporary*', where he takes synchronous 'to refer to events occurring at the same physical time' and contemporary as asserting 'co-occurrence' in 'typological time', that is, time understood in terms of 'socioculturally meaningful events or, more precise, intervals between such events' (23), for example, 'pre-literate vs. literate, traditional vs. modern, peasant vs. industrial'.

While the details of Fabian's analyses matter, the point I wish to bring to this paper is his claim that anthropology and the ethnographic techniques it makes use of, are precisely characterised by a '*denial of coevalness*' (Fabian 1982, 31; *emph. in original*), that is, '*a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*' (*emph. in original*). Fabian refers to this denial as 'allochronism' (Fabian 1982, 32) which he distinguishes explicitly from 'anachronism'. He explains:

Anachronism signifies a fact, or statement of fact, that is out of tune with a given time frame; it is a mistake, perhaps an accident. I am trying to show that we are facing, not mistakes, but *devices* (existential, rhetoric, political). (*emphasis in original*)

One of the devices Fabian discusses – actually as a strategy to circumvent (the question of) coevalness – is that of cultural relativity (Fabian 1982, 38–52). That is, the claim that all 'others' should be understood *in* their own terms (interestingly Fabian distinguishes this from treating other societies *on* their own terms – Fabian 1982, 39). This is exactly what cultural explanations do, in that they explain 'others' by placing them in their 'own' culture. Precisely in this sense, then, we could say that cultural explanations of 'others' – of other individuals or other cultures – are allochronistic, perhaps not because they simply place 'others' in a different time, but because as soon as the encounter with another is captured in terms of culture, that is, as an intercultural encounter, we begin to deny contemporaneity. This is particularly a problem when the other appears as an object of my gaze. But it is also a problem when the other appears as an object of my care or ethical action.

Therefore, rather than suggesting that the challenge of the encounter is to become a more competent observer of the other or a more ethical carer for the other, it could well be that the first and in a sense most urgent challenge that follows from these considerations is the challenge of trying to become *contemporaneous*. This is what Fabian sees as the main challenge – and also the main possible future – for anthropology, where 'the anthropologist and his interlocutors only "know" when they meet each other in one and the same cotemporality' (Fabian 1982, 164). However, the challenge of becoming contemporaneous – which also means the challenge of becoming contemporaries – is not just a methodological challenge for the field of anthropology. 'Beyond' culture and 'without' ethics it is perhaps also, and maybe even first and foremost, a human challenge and perhaps the key human challenge of our time (see Gruwez 2009) – bearing in mind

that the whole idea of ‘our time’ is precisely what is at stake rather than that it can be taken for granted.

On pedagogy

So far, I have hinted at problems with third-person perspectives – explanatory accounts that come from the ‘outside’ – in intercultural communication and have highlighted the significance of a ‘turn’ towards first-person accounts. As suggested, the importance of Levinas’s ‘ethical turn’ does not lie in the ethical part of it, but in suggesting a turn towards *me*; a turn that puts me in the spotlight rather than at the safe centre of interpretation. While third- and first-person accounts try to say something about intercultural encounters themselves, the focus of this paper is not on such encounters as such, and also not just on those who encounter each other in such encounters, but is on the question of education and, more specifically, the question of pedagogy. The question of pedagogy brings into view the role and position of the teacher.

The teacher, so I wish to suggest, is not the one who explains the intercultural encounter, and in this regard the teacher does not occupy a third-person perspective. But the teacher is also not the student, and in this regard also does not occupy a first-person perspective. Perhaps, as I will explore in this section, the teacher occupies a kind of second-person perspective which is both essential for education – there is no education without a teacher – but also should become superfluous because, as mentioned, teaching should always be aimed at a future where students can act and think for themselves, without the help, support, or encouragement of the teacher.⁴

Rather than approaching the question of pedagogy through its agendas, that is, through all the desires that individuals and groups project onto education – a gesture that often amounts to wishful thinking rather than acknowledging the possibilities and impossibilities of education (see Donald 1992) – I take inspiration from the work of the German educationalist Klaus Prange and his insistence on the importance of taking the *form* of teaching seriously (see Prange 2012a, 2012b; see also Biesta 2022).

Prange argues that the fundamental and distinctive form in which education is enacted is through pointing (in German: Zeigen). Prange goes as far as to argue that without pointing there is no education (see Prange 2012a, 25).⁵ When teachers point to something – which can be an object, a phenomenon, but also a text or textbook – they try to direct the attention of their students onto what they are pointing at. Prange maintains that teaching is an attempt at focusing the student’s attention onto something and suggests, more strongly, that teaching actually *demand*s the student’s attention. But Prange emphasises again and again that teaching can never *enforce* the student’s attention – in this regard teaching is fundamentally a weak practice (see Biesta 2010b) – nor can teaching *control* the student’s attention.

There are two more points that are important with regard to Prange’s analysis of the form of teaching. One is that pointing is a double act, in that it always points (out) *something* to *someone*. The gesture of pointing is not just a ‘Look there’, but always is a ‘You, look there’. It therefore always entails an appeal to someone to pay attention to something. This also reveals that teaching has a triadic rather than a dyadic or dialogical structure, since teaching always involves a teacher, a student and something that the

teacher is trying to focus the student's attention on (Prange calls this the theme; in my theory of world-centred education, I refer to this as the world. See Biesta 2021).

We might say then, that the work of teaching is to bring teacher, student and theme into conversation or, with a term from Herbart (1776–1841), into articulation. Prange highlights that all this means that teaching is first and foremost a form of manual labour (in German: 'Handwerk', that is, the work of the hand), as pointing needs a finger (see Prange 2012b). This is, of course, not the moralising finger of 'I told you so!' but the finger that gently points away from the student, signalling a 'Hey you, have a look there as I think that there may be something there that may be worthy of your attention'.

One intriguing question that follows from Prange's explorations is what students should do once their attention has been (re)directed onto something. At a very fundamental level, the only answer to this question is that this is entirely up to them. We, as educators, may have hopes and expectations, but we cannot force them upon our students, precisely because we are calling them to *their* attention, not to *our* attention. For Prange this means that the gesture of pointing entails a concern for the freedom of the student. This is, of course, not the neo-liberal 'freedom of shopping' (Biesta 2019), that is the freedom to do just what you fancy doing. Rather, it is the freedom to attend to the world and do what only I can do in encountering the world, which, as discussed, is entirely a first-person matter – a matter for me in which no one else can replace me.

The point of pointing, I argue, is that of attention – of directing the student's attention or redirecting the student's attention. Yet the point of (re)directing our students' attention is not to spur them into learning. The 'demand' of pointing is not that they learn *about* others (which quickly ends up in cultural explanation). The demand of pointing is also not that they learn *from* others (because in that case the other is quickly turned into an instrument for *my* learning). The point of attending to something or someone is rather to open oneself to what this other is asking of me which, in my view, is the far more productive educational question than the contemporary obsession with learning (see Biesta 2006, 2018). The question of what 'this' is asking of me, is not a question of responsibility and ethics, but actually is a question that is after my freedom; a question that wants to hear from me, and no one else. This question cuts through my power and empowerment and in this regard disarms or at the very least has the potential to disarm. It calls me to engage, that is, to step in(to) time.

Conclusion: a pedagogy of disarmament

In this paper, I have tried to say something about intercultural communication pedagogy. I have argued that pedagogies that focus on empowering students for the intercultural encounter run the risk of producing a shield around the student - I have used the image of the harness – so that *less* can come in rather than more. I have also argued that framing the encounter as cultural runs the risk of replacing the encounter itself with an explanation of the encounter, which puts the other at a safe distance from me – already explained before any encounter can take place. This, as I have suggested, has something to do with the idea of perspectivism, where the relationship between self and other becomes one of the observer and the observed – a distance in space which, in a sense, is also a distance in time.

The way out of these predicaments, I have suggested, is not to reframe the intercultural encounter in ethical terms and definitely not as a demand for students to engage responsibly with others. The so-called ethical turn rather highlights that an encounter may not start from me, but from what or who speaks to me, appeals to me, questions me and puts me in question. And such appeals are not after my responsibility or my care, but after my freedom. They are, in other words, after *me*, and contain an invitation – some might say, more strongly, an imperative (see Lingis 1998) – to lower my guard, to lay down my arms, and be guided by what I encounter. In other words, it is an invitation to ‘walk along’ and try to meet each other ‘in one and the same cotemporality’ (Fabian 1982).

The teacher occupies a special and in a sense rather mysterious place in all this, because the teacher is not the other of the student, is not the one who issues the appeal. If teachers can do anything at all, it is to point away from themselves towards the world. Pedagogy thus interrupts the student’s attention – it is, in this regard, literally a redirection of attention. If such interruptions are to have any educational significance at all, they require that teachers provide students with the time to encounter what comes to their attention – which is the slow time of the school. And all this suggests that teachers should provide students with sustenance, that is, with the visible (or barely visible) support and encouragement to stay with what they encounter, whether it is joyful or difficult, so that they can figure out what the world may be asking of them.⁶

Is all this new? In the age of educational empowerment in which educators and their policy makers want to ensure that students are equipped with the ‘right’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and competences, the suggestion that such equipment may get in the way of the encounter, that labelling the encounter as ‘intercultural’ may create distance, and that the call for responsibility and ethics may miss the point too, may sound unproductive and, in a sense, anachronistic – out of time. But perhaps much of what I have tried to explore in this paper comes down to trying to respond to this simple and in a sense age-old question: ‘Who is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10:29).

Notes

1. ‘Every teacher must learn how to stop teaching, when the time comes. That is a difficult art. Only a few are able, when the time is right, to allow reality to take their place’ (Brecht 2016, 98).
2. Heidegger also notes that ‘the fact that human action is understood and practised as culture’ is a typical modern phenomenon (2002, 57).
3. The reason why I do not adhere to this apparent convention to write ‘other’ with a capital ‘o’ when discussing Levinas’s work, is that this convention relies on a possible misunderstanding. The reason why in English translations of Levinas we find the word ‘other’ with and without a capital ‘o’ is simply to find a way to denote in English the difference between the words ‘autre’ and ‘autrui,’ where the first refers to everything that is other whereas the second refers to other human beings. For a helpful discussion on this see Large (1996) and Galetti (2015).
4. I wish to emphasise that this doesn’t necessarily or automatically imply that the task of the teacher is to prepare and equip the student for his or her own existence as subject. The point is just that the role of the teacher is limited; that at some point teachers need to stop teaching and step aside.
5. In German: ‘Wenn es das Zeigen nicht gibt, dann auch keine Erziehung.’
6. On interruption, suspension, and sustenance as the three ‘modalities’ of pedagogy see Biesta (2020).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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