

Transformative Learning in Intercultural Education

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Abstract: Transformative learning is a major theory of adult education that can help us consider ways in which the study of intercultural communication is particularly suited to stimulating personal change. Intercultural communication studies offer continuous opportunities for students to learn new ways of making meaning, both subjective and objective, and transforming what Mezirow (1991) terms their meaning perspectives. The holistic pedagogical approach to intercultural education described here emphasizes reflection and self-reflexivity and bodymindfulness in order to promote integrative development of students as whole people, not just to focus on their intellectual growth. It is intended to help them to cultivate both their rational and extrarational capabilities and to exercise appropriate self-care during the process of writing their theses. If they can learn to welcome confusion as a transitory state between prior convictions and new meaning perspectives, they are more likely to experience transformative learning and new ways of being. As the reflective passages written by students in final papers suggest, they have responded to this holistic educational opportunity with enhanced self-awareness, new skills, and the recognition that they need to make the intention to continue learning throughout their lives.

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Putting Ourselves on Edge

Writing a dissertation has been provocatively described as a *liminal journey of the self* (Deegan & Hill, 1991). The use of *liminal* here refers to desires or needs that are smoldering below the threshold of awareness and may be barely perceptible to us. Deegan and Hill describe the liminal self as transitional. Graduate students who had been out of

school for some time may find writing master's theses to be similarly challenging to their sense of self although they may not be fully aware of their aspirations or the implications of them, at least not at the beginning of the process.

Adults who continue their education in degree programs are typically seeking change, but some of their new experiences may be unexpected, especially when studying intercultural communication. As scholar-practitioners, they will need to move back and forth between theory and practice as they learn and apply new concepts and skills in their work and their lives (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Schon, 1983). Most returning students desire to be able to work in new ways, perhaps in different types of work or at a higher level of proficiency and complexity; but they may not realize that the changes they will experience might include major shifts in worldview and ways of being. For example, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity created by communication scholar Milton Bennett (1993) postulates an increase in intercultural sensitivity to a qualitatively different level when moving across the paradigmatic divide that separates an ethnocentric outlook from an ethnorelative type of consciousness.

Although returning students may enroll in programs expecting to gain new knowledge and skills, they may also encounter other changes that they did not anticipate, particularly in their sense of self. Typically they are confronted with the reality of being a student after what may have been a considerable absence from the classroom: having assignments and deadlines in addition to an already full work and family life, needing to learn new technologies of information delivery and knowledge management, and having to formulate a research project requiring personal choice of topic and selection from an array of unfamiliar research methodologies. All this newness is likely to create uncertainty and confusion, which are particularly stressful and unwelcome when we are being graded.

If they are students proceeding on directly from undergraduate studies, they, too, might find some of these expectations challenging and may also feel overwhelmed by being in a classroom with people with so much life experience. The requirements of a demanding degree program may seem to exceed the capability that graduate students feel they have and might contribute to a nagging sense of inadequacy and self-doubt. Learning to manage this feeling of disequilibrium is important.

Although this feeling of being stretched beyond our capacity may feel uncomfortable and sometimes unsettling, it may be the most valuable part of our learning. It may ultimately result in expanded capabilities that can help us reinvent ourselves for what Bliss (2004) terms our *Third Age* and the years afterwards.

Inspired by the French term "Troisième Âge," ThirdAge refers to the concept of lifelong learning, self-development and fulfillment, and the period of life following young adulthood, yet preceding "seniorhood" and retirement. A time of life characterized by vital living, freedom, personal growth and enrichment. (www.thirdage.com/about/.2005, January 10)

The aspirations encompassed in this definition also seem to characterize an increasing number of Japanese adults who are enrolling in adult degree programs seeking a catalyst for change.

Studying intercultural communication exposes us to different ways of thinking, feeling, and doing. Our usual ways of being are likely to be called into question as we engage with people who speak different languages and have different ways of life. Our growing realization as we study other cultures that there is more than one valid and acceptable way to be human may provoke new and unsettling questions and open possibilities we never considered. For example, in “Reframing Conflict: Intercultural Conflict as Potential Transformation,” Beth Fisher-Yoshida (2005) explains how intercultural conflict can provide a constructive opportunity to engage with people we find different from ourselves.

The above-described types of educational and intercultural experiences are all indications that we may be nearing the outer edge of our comfort zone — our usual way of being and doing. Staying as close as possible to this edge where growth occurs can expand our consciousness, our worldview, and our ability to work and live in ways we had never previously imagined.

As an intercultural educator, I recommend to students that they recognize and embrace the potential for personal development, even transformation, that their educational choices can create. If we approach our new experiences as opportunities to cultivate our whole selves as instruments¹ of communication, we may increase this possibility for growth and also learn new ways of managing ourselves that facilitate the entire learning process. But we need to learn how to understand and live with the tension and discomfort that characterize being *on edge*, with all that that phrase implies about risk-taking and the accompanying exhilaration and anxiety.

My lived experience of this is expressed in the following passage that opened the introductory chapter of my doctoral dissertation, which was written at age 57.

I am a woman at mid-life who has lived more than half her life in a culture different from where I was born and raised. I have experienced a different way of communicating and relating, both verbally and non-verbally, and feel I have changed in fundamental ways as a result of my enculturation and socialization in Japan. While not fully embedded in my second culture (Josselson, 1996), I treasure the consciousness and qualities I have gained from living on the margins here (J. Bennett, 1993; Jordan, 2000). I have valued the opportunity to become more reflective and self-aware, more sensitive and considerate, a better human being than I suspect I would have been had I stayed in my own culture in the United States. I have tried to understand the differences I encounter as the opportunity for developing a broader definition of my own humanness, the entry point for increased consciousness, the source of a larger sense of humanity. I am a seeker of inner and outer peace. (Nagata, 2002)

Returning to school in my fifties was transformative partly because I was able to broaden my understanding of what I had experienced in my life by seeing it from the perspective of various academic disciplines and by reflecting on it at length in writing. Even more important was approaching these studies as an opportunity for self-integration with a desire to become more balanced and authentic in my interactions with the diverse other people who were part of my life.

In this article, I will introduce the theory of transformative learning and consider how the study of intercultural communication is particularly suited to stimulating it. When describing some of my pedagogical approaches that are intended to foster it, I will include the voices of students reflecting on their learning in final papers at the end of courses on theory taught in English.

Transformative Learning

This section will first introduce Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and then some of his critics who propose more holistic approaches.

Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning is an approach to adult learning that was introduced in 1978 by Jack Mezirow, now Professor Emeritus of Adult and Continuing Education at Teacher's College, Columbia University (Imel, 1998). His companion volumes *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (1990) and *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991) are valuable for both adult educators and adult learners, particularly those who seek to communicate across cultural boundaries.

Mezirow emphasizes that learning in childhood is a formative, socializing, and acculturating process, but adult education can be transformative and move "the individual toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse" (1991, p. 7). These qualities of mind are recognized as desirable for adults living in many contemporary societies, especially for people who study, work, or live cross-culturally.

Mezirow (1991) articulates what he terms *transformative theory* that emphasizes "meaning—how it is construed, validated, and reformulated" (p. xii). He notes that meaning is an interpretation that is formed through both perception and cognition and that meaning is made both unintentionally and intentionally. He proceeds to examine how adult education can promote understanding of the process of meaning making using two concepts: *meaning schemes* and *meaning perspectives*.

Meaning schemes are the specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions articulated by an interpretation. They are derived from earlier, often unreflective interpretations. Meaning schemes serve as specific habits of expectations. Meaning

perspectives are groups of related meaning schemes. (p. 35)

Meaning perspectives, or generalized sets of habitual expectation, act as perceptual and conceptual codes to form, limit, and distort how we think, believe, and feel and how, what, when, and why we learn. They have cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. These habits of expectation filter both perception and comprehension. (p. 34)

Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives shape how we understand our experience. There are three types of meaning perspectives: epistemic perspectives, sociolinguistic perspectives, and psychological perspectives. Becoming aware of meaning schemes and these three types of meaning perspectives can particularly help people who communicate across cultures to understand themselves as well as those from other cultures who have different ones.

Meaning perspectives are structures of largely pre-rational, unarticulated presuppositions; they are mainly out of our awareness and may result in views of reality that Mezirow describes above as distorted. They are based in prior learning that has remained unexamined. Transforming these limited meaning schemes or perspectives through examination and evaluation of fundamental assumptions is the essential task of adult learning. It is also vital for interculturalists, people who are committed to communicating across many types of differences.

Mezirow (1991) uses the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas as the sociolinguistic context of transformative learning. When examining the interacting domains of intentional learning: the instrumental and the communicative, he explains that instrumental learning is concerned with manipulating parts of the environment while communicative learning is concerned with understanding and being understood by other people. Instrumental learning produces technical knowledge, and communicative learning results in practical knowledge. Critical reflection is needed to examine the assumptions and premises of both types of learning, but “each domain has its own purpose, method of problem solving, and way of validating statements” (p. 97). A third type, emancipatory learning, can free us from “libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, and environmental forces that limit our options and our control over our lives” (pp. 97-98). Reflectively examining our assumptions is key for achieving this emancipation from limitations resulting from our earlier learning and for becoming empowered by our new understanding. “Emancipatory knowledge is knowledge gained through critical self-reflection, as distinct from the knowledge gained from our ‘technical’ interest in the objective world or our ‘practical’ interest in social relationships” (p. 87). Emancipatory learning results in self-knowledge, particularly understanding of our meaning perspectives. Self-knowledge is considered to be the most important kind of knowledge for intercultural communication competency (Martin & Nakayama, 2004). Some of the experiences described by students quoted below may have resulted in emancipatory learning.

Mezirow (1991) defines *reflection* as “the process of critically assessing the content,

process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). He discusses *nonreflective action* and *reflective action*. Nonreflective action has two types: *habitual action* and *thoughtful action*. Habitual action results from previous learning, often of the psychomotor type such as touch typing, which can be performed while our attention is focused somewhere else. Habitual action is sometimes described as *operating on automatic pilot*. *Thoughtful action* depends on higher-order cognitive processes that guide us when we do things like analyzing, discussing, or evaluating. Thoughtful action also depends on prior learning and remains within preexisting meaning schemes and perspectives.

Reflection may be needed to help us move through a series of actions or when we are having trouble understanding under new circumstances. *Reflective action* involves deciding or taking action based on the insights we gained from reflecting. Reflective action is *mindfulness* as opposed to the mindlessness of habitual action. Langer (1989) describes mindfulness as being aware of both content and multiple perspectives and being guided rather than governed by rules. Mezirow recommends reflective action or mindfulness because it is “associated with greater accuracy of perception of the unfamiliar and deviant, avoidance of premature cognitive commitments, better self-concept, greater job productivity and satisfaction, flexibility, innovation, and leadership ability” (p. 117). All of these outcomes are especially valuable for interculturalists. Communication scholar Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) associates mindfulness with all the components—knowledge, motivational, and skill factors—of her mindful intercultural communication model (p. 49).

Transformative learning results in perspective transformation, which Mezirow (1991) describes as follows:

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

The transformation process is theorized as occurring in 10 phases typically brought about by a *disorienting dilemma* which calls our fundamental beliefs and values into question (Mezirow, 1991). It is usually a significant personal crisis.

Transforming our own frame of reference, which Mezirow (1997) terms *subjective reframing*, is a three-part process: critical reflection on our assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action. Although most adult graduate students might be unfamiliar with the term *perspective transformation*, a major change in their way of thinking is what many of them are seeking when they go back to school. It is also what intercultural education should be fostering as both *subjective reframing* and *objective reframing*, that is, becoming critically reflective of the assumptions and frames of reference of others. Whether it is chosen by purposely enrolling in a challenging learning program or the result of a life crisis, perspective transformation represents a major shift in the way meaning is

made.

Holistic Transformation Theories

Although Mezirow's work has been foundational in the field of transformative learning, over the years a variety of critical responses has emerged. Taylor (1997, 1998, 2000) has been one of the most articulate of these critics. He argues that "transformative learning is not just rationally and consciously driven but incorporates a variety of nonrational and unconscious modalities for revising meaning structures" (p. 48).

Taylor (1997) reviewed the work of others who similarly critique Mezirow as relying too heavily on rationality and neglecting the role of context. He examined 39 empirical studies of transformative learning theory including five that explored the application of transformative learning as a model for intercultural learning. His own doctoral work on intercultural competency is one of the studies reviewed. The major finding of his doctoral research was that Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation partially explained the learning process of becoming interculturally competent (Taylor, 1994), but it did not address readiness for change based on the individual's personal history and goals nor the ongoing nature of the process of learning that was recursive rather than linear as Mezirow's 10-phase model suggested.

In calling for a reconceptualization of the transformative learning process, Taylor emphasized the significance of whole person learning by quoting the following: "awareness and use of all the functions we have available for knowing, including our cognitive, affective, somatic, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions" (The Group for Collaborative Inquiry cited by Taylor, 1997, p. 49). Like Taylor, Robert Boyd and J. Gordon Myers (1988), Patricia Cranton (1994, 2000), and John Dirkx (2000) have found that affective and other extrarational aspects of human experience have been neglected. They have all integrated depth psychology, particularly that of Jung, into their approaches to transformative learning.

These critics have been described as proponents of holistic transformation theories by Susan Lennox (2005) in her dissertation *Contemplating the Self: Integrative Approaches to Transformative Learning in Higher Education*. She notes that holistic transformation theorists have not reached a consensus on a definition of transformation, but "they tend to conceive of it as involving more of a whole person shift or a shift in consciousness that extends beyond mere ideation" (p. 32). She offers an articulation by O'Sullivan, Morrell, & O'Connor (2002) as a tentative definition of *integral transformative learning*:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awarenesses; our visions

of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (O'Sullivan et al. cited by Lennox, 2005, p. 32)

This definition resonates with my pedagogical intention to promote the development of interculturalists who are aware of using their whole selves as instruments of communication. When we communicate, all aspects of our selves—body, emotion/feeling, mind, and spirit—are involved whether we are conscious of them and use them skillfully or not. If, for example, we are unconscious of our feelings, our emotions may leak out in our paralanguage, facial expressions, or movements and send messages that contradict the verbal content of what we are saying. Similarly, if we are unaware of our bodies, our body language may reveal our thoughts and emotions in ways that are not congruent with the text of our speech. Because nonverbal communication is typically out of awareness, when we are sending mixed messages—conflicting nonverbal and verbal signals, people have a tendency to believe the nonverbal ones (Martin & Nakayama, 2004). The above definition of integral transformative learning is particularly relevant to my emphasis on bodymindfulness, the process of attending to all aspects of the bodymind in order to grasp the holistic personal meaning of an internal event and to use the resultant understanding to communicate skillfully (Nagata, 2004, 2005a, 2005b).

Lennox's (2005) literature review includes extensive consideration of the existing range of transformative learning theories, spirituality and spiritual development theories, and transformative pedagogy and pedagogical modalities. She details the contributions of educators, scholars, and researchers, such as those listed above, whose work in transformative education is intended to balance emphasis on the rational, cognitive, and objective with the extrarational, intuitive, imaginative, and subjective.

In the next two sections, reflections on some of my experiences of intercultural communication (Nagata, 2002) and work as an educator will be discussed as illustrations of a holistic approach to transformative learning.

The Transformative Potential of Intercultural Communication

Differences are often seen as problematic: the cause of separation, the flashpoint for aggression, the source of dissonance and suffering. Historically this has especially been the case in Japan. Encounter with differences, however, can be an invitation to develop higher awareness through intrapersonal and interpersonal work, an opportunity to increase consciousness and enlarge our sense of humanity and personal humanness.

One of the most positive aspects of differences—cultural, gender, or any other kind—is their potential for increasing awareness and expanding consciousness. Arnold Mindell (1990) is a Jungian psychologist who works on global conflict resolution, and his understanding of consciousness is particularly helpful for promoting it.

Consciousness refers to being aware of your awareness. You know who is here and

who is not here. Consciousness means knowing with whom you identify, knowing whom you keep out. . . . One of the characteristics of consciousness is that you are able to work with your life process. . . . You feel like a multi-dimensional person. If you work with the conflicts between the processes, you will notice another aspect of consciousness: the experience of freedom. (p. 121)

Mindell describes three aspects of personality, three processes that illustrate how this can work:

1. “a primary process with which you identify yourself most of the time,”
2. “secondary considerations and disturbances which are normally not united with, i.e., congruent with your doings. A secondary process reacts to and makes it difficult to pay attention to what you are doing.”
3. “a sort of ‘fair observer,’ a metacommunicator who, when she or he is awake, can observe both the primary and secondary processes as if from above . . . and is able to talk about these insights and perceptions.” (p. 19)

The metacommunicator can work on the total personality process.

Mindell (1990) describes the aspect of the metacommunicator that appeals to me as an interculturalist seeking a larger view of self and context when he writes “the more you work on yourself, the less you will identify with only one part, and the more you will metacommunicate” (p. 85). Working to strengthen this ability has often helped me to step outside my cultural confusion, frustration, and attendant misunderstandings that were grounded in identifications and assumptions that were unconscious until I stumbled over them.

When formulating his theory of culture as nonverbal communication, a *silent language*, the cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959, 1992) recognized that psychoanalysis and anthropology shared emphasis on the contrasting concepts of conscious/unconscious, explicit/implicit, and overt/covert. My immersion in intercultural communication has provided daily opportunities to bring my assumptions into awareness and unremitting encouragement to attend to how I was fitting or not fitting into the context of my new lifeworld.

Whether they are intercultural or intracultural, differences experienced in intimate relationships have special intensity and power because they are more likely to get closer to our core being and show us our own limitations if we are willing to see them. Mindell (1990) describes these limitations as the place to engage in working on ourselves if we want to grow beyond them.

Edges are names for the experience of confinement, for the limitations in awareness, for the boundaries of your own identity. . . . Thus, going over an edge is always an immense experience, you feel that your identity is changing, confused, lost or challenged. (p. 71)

You meet the part of yourself which is hypnotized: the edge is generated by a

belief which does not correspond to objective reality. (p. 73)

Our edges are marked with unusual energy that can promote the learning that occurs when we go beyond them. It may help to think of them as our growing edge (Berger, 2004). As advocated by Mezirow and Associates (1990), critical discourse with others to validate our reflective insights into the assumptions that bound and bind our current identity can help us to see ourselves more objectively and to free us to move beyond ways of making meaning that are no longer serving us well.

My life in Japan relentlessly, often painfully, confronts me with my own edges; and I find it necessary to deal with them in order to stay. Working at and with our edges offers the possibility of personal integration and expansion. "An edge is reached when a process brings up information which is difficult for you to accept" (Mindell, 1990, p. 67). When we encounter significant differences, we are given the opportunity to develop awareness and to go over our edges, our own limited self-definitions, to an expanded sense of our humanity. "Integration of any content or process alters consciousness by bringing new aspects of the personality to awareness" (p. 33). We grow in a way that may make a particularly important change in our lives, but the process typically involves considerable emotion and sometimes pain and illness (J. M. Bennett, 1993; Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, In press; Paige, 1993; Taylor, 1994).

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Realizing this, we need to be sure to monitor how much we are expecting of ourselves at a particular time and engage in adequate self-care by considering the importance, interactive nature, and needs of all aspects of our bodymind. Recognizing the protective function of the anxiety and fear that are generated as we approach our learning edges can help us to manage them. At such moments, we need to practice sensitive self-care when deciding whether it is time to push ourselves harder to go beyond what we conceive of as our limitations or the right moment to be gentle and kind to ourselves and accept the gradualness of most transitions.

Transformative Pedagogy in Intercultural Education

This section will include examples of some of my pedagogical practices that, taken together, are intended to promote integral development by emphasizing both rational and extrarational aspects of transformative intercultural education. Students are continually reminded that our whole self is involved in the process of communicating and that these two components overlap and interact; they cannot be strictly separated. Passages written by students in English in final papers will be used as illustrations.

Reflection and Self-Reflexivity

Educators Michael Nakkula and Sharon Ravitch's *Matters of Interpretation* (1998) has been a guide in teaching students to uncover their assumptions and biases and to put their reflections to work in doing their research and pursuing their professional practice. Early

in the semester I introduce Nakkula and Ravitch's explanation of philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical circle as diagrammed below. It is useful in understanding the cycle of action and reflective interpretation for application in human relations.

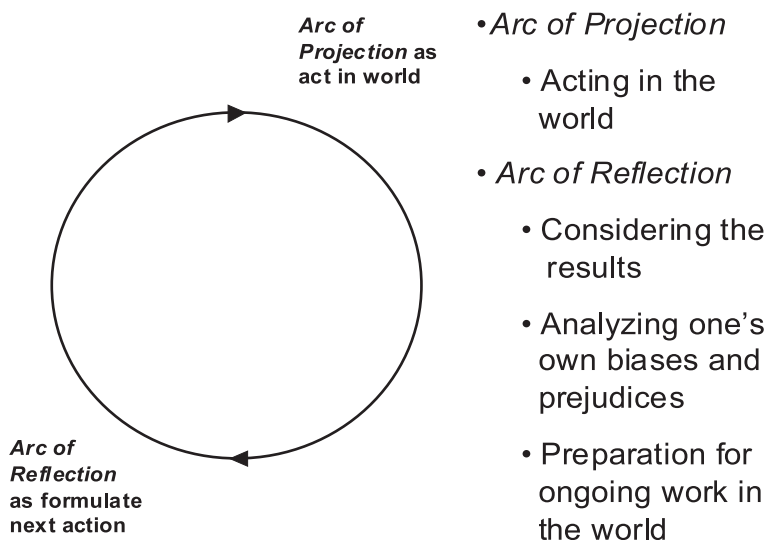


Figure 1. Gadamer's hermeneutic circle applied to human relations.
Adapted from Nakkula and Ravitch, 1998.

In the Arc of Projection one acts in the world without realizing the assumptions, biases, and prejudices one is projecting into the situation that is the context for one's action. In the Arc of Reflection, there is the opportunity to consider the results, to analyze one's own biases and prejudices, and to prepare for ongoing work in the world. This is certainly a recognizable cycle for interculturalists. (Nagata, 2003, p. 33)

Reflecting on action is an iterative approach to processing our lived experience for increasing self-awareness and skillful future self-management and communication. It is a concept that scholar-practitioners can easily grasp and apply in the reflective writing that is required throughout my courses in feedforward² sheets after every class, suggested journal questions, and assigned papers. As one of the students observed in a final paper reflecting on the learning gained in a theory course, "I think the most important thing is not only to know, but to be an interculturalist by applying this knowledge." Another student wrote

For me, an interculturalist is limited and eager to learn. First, what I mean by being limited is that one can never become an omnipotent interculturalist. I used to think that I was tolerant enough towards other cultures. However, I learned throughout

this class that I have strong biases and I can only think through my own culture. Thus, my attitude changed to be a little more humble than before. I also learned that with the knowledge that my competence as an interculturalist is limited, I can challenge others when they show determinist ways of thinking of culture. That is why for me, a true interculturalist knows the limitation of his/her competence.

The power of this hermeneutic process particularly comes from cycling through acting to reflecting. Once patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior have been identified through reflective writing, they can be spotted when in play during relationships. Because intercultural communication involves encounters with different rules of communicative interaction, understand what is taking place is often especially challenging. The link between theory and practice is self-reflexivity, a type of self-awareness which I conceive of as an accelerated form of hermeneutic reflection that has been ingrained by ongoing effort (Nagata, 2005b).

Although the intrapersonal effort or inner work is similar, self-reflection is after the fact; self-reflexivity is in the moment; and feeling is likely to have more immediacy so it may be easier to grasp its role (Fisher-Yoshida & Nagata, 2002). To be reflective is to sit and think about what took place after it is completed: our role in it, others' reactions, and our responses to them. This can be done through thinking, writing, or speaking with another person. One goal of engaging in reflection is to learn from our experiences with the aim of improving the quality of our interactions with others in future encounters.

Since intercultural communication is typically practiced in the moment face-to-face, self-reflexivity can be even more valuable than self-reflection. Cultivating the ability to be self-aware of feeling and its impact on thinking, then adjusting what we are doing and saying right at that time, may confer immediate benefits. If we can defer acting when confused and upset, it may be possible to use our inner resources skillfully and to find an effective approach to communicating in that situation.

One student described how she was trying to put into practice what she was learning in this regard.

I should keep learning about myself (through communicating with others) by reflecting upon myself and being more sensitive to my own inner state. I have learned to allow time during or at the end of the day to reflect on the day's learnings by journaling. I noticed that intercultural misunderstandings do not necessarily happen across cultures but also happen within the same culture. People carry with themselves their own history and family culture and thus communicating with any person can be intercultural. We go across gender, age, class, region and religion every day. Being attentive to what is happening in daily communication and writing about it to further understand and clarify emotions and findings will allow me to understand myself better and help me grow. Should we be able to listen more carefully to our inner selves and to those whom we encounter, the world may slowly begin to become a

better place.

She sensed the potential transformative power of the self-awareness she was cultivating.

Promoting Bodymindfulness

I identified three components that have been incorporated into promoting self-reflexivity in my teaching (Nagata, 2005b): bodymindfulness (Nagata, 2004), metacommunication (Mindell, 1990; Wood, 2004), and communicative flexibility (Bolton & Bolton, 1996; Merrill & Reid, 1981). I will discuss bodymindfulness here as an example of the extrarational component of my educational approach.

Bodymindfulness is a word I coined (2002). The term *bodymind* emphasizes the systemic, integral nature of lived experience, and mindfulness is a Buddhist concept and practice of cultivating awareness. Awareness has two components: attention and intention (Chopra, 1994). Awareness includes a flow of biological information that can help us relate more skillfully (Young, 1997). Bodymindfulness can be used to attend to this type of information, somatic-emotional sensations that are often out of awareness (Pert, 2000), especially during an interpersonal interaction when our attention may be focused on another person or on a group of people. Typically words grab our attention, and bodily experience drops into the background.

Bodymindfulness applies to recognizing information that comes from all aspects of the self and how the various kinds may interact, but I have emphasized somatic-emotional sensations because they underlie our intrapersonal experience and are typically subconscious and neglected. Although much of our bodily experience is out of awareness most of the time, we can become conscious of it if we focus our attention on it (Pert, 2000).

Nakkula and Ravitch (1998) offer a very thoroughgoing method of clarifying bias and overcoming blind spots that affect our human relations. As Ravitch's chapter "Becoming Uncomfortable: Transforming My Praxis" (1998) details, efforts at significant personal development often begin with recognizing discomfort. Cultivating bodymindfulness has been my emphasis in helping students to recognize the prelinguistic basis of the information that they can gain by focusing on the sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise when they encounter experiences that challenge their values, assumptions, and ways of communicating, both verbally and nonverbally. Bodymindfulness can help us to access and to understand the prerational structures of our meaning perspectives.

My classes begin with encouragement to students to pay attention to their internal states and their overall state of being. *State of being* refers to the phenomenon other people sense as our energetic presence, which I think is based in what neuroscientist Antonio Damasio terms *background emotions* (1999). Background emotions are internal states that are engendered by ongoing physiological processes and/or interactions with the environment, which are experienced with feelings of fatigue, energy, excitement, wellness, sickness, tension, relaxation, surging, dragging, stability, instability, balance, imbalance, harmony, and discord. Damasio uses the metaphor of a musical score to describe various levels of

conscious behavior. His diagram starts from the bottom with wakefulness and rises through background emotions, low-level attention, focused attention, specific emotions, specific actions, to verbal report at the top. Background emotions are part of the bass line of somatic tonality, and specific emotions add varied higher notes. *Somatic tonality* is a term I coined (Nagata, 2002) for the message our state of being communicates, especially when we first encounter each other.

Energetic presence is our living presence and the message it communicates, whether or not we are conscious of it (Nagata, 2002; Palmer, 1999). This is variously described as the atmosphere we create, the vibes others get from us, or the field or aura surrounding the personal space around the body (Feinstein, 1998; Leonard, 1986, 1997; Nagatomo, 1992; Yuasa, 1993). Integrative educator and aikido instructor George Leonard (1997) refers to this as our “own personal electromagnetic signature” (p. 14).

When discussing the rhythmic, synchronic process of entrainment that occurs within and between people, Hall (1983) writes, “Rhythmic patterns may turn out to be one of the most important basic personality traits that differentiate one individual from another” (p. 164). Students are repeatedly reminded to pay attention to their own energetic presence—and those of their classmates and teacher—as it provides a subtle and important foundation for verbal communication. One student described his understanding of the intrapersonal component of this as follows:

The first thing I learned is to ask myself. I ask myself why that is happening or why I am so happy (nervous) or what I am thinking about or whether it is good and so on. To understand myself and the current state of mind will be the first step to communicate interculturally.

I use the Quaternity model of human development that I have adapted from Carl Jung (McLaren, 2000; Nelson, 1993; Schwartz-Salant, 1995) to describe the components of presence that are the expression of the state of being of the human bodymind (Dychtwald, 1986; Pert, 1997, 2000; Wilber, 1996). The model uses a circle to represent wholeness, the totality of our potential consciousness. The words near the circumference are labels for four aspects of human being. When these four are differentiated and ordered in proper relation to each other as shown here, our state of being can become integrated, and we may achieve a synthetic unity on a higher level (Schwartz-Salant, 1995). When introducing the Quaternity, I emphasize that a model is only a tool for understanding and that my intent is to promote an ideal for integral functioning, not fragmentation, of self.

The definitions used as starting points in presenting this model to the students are as follows:

- **Consciousness:** a person’s entire inner experience: thoughts, sensations of the body, emotions, visions of the spirit (Nelson, 1993)
- **Being:** sometimes called *self*; the integral state of all aspects of the self; may be

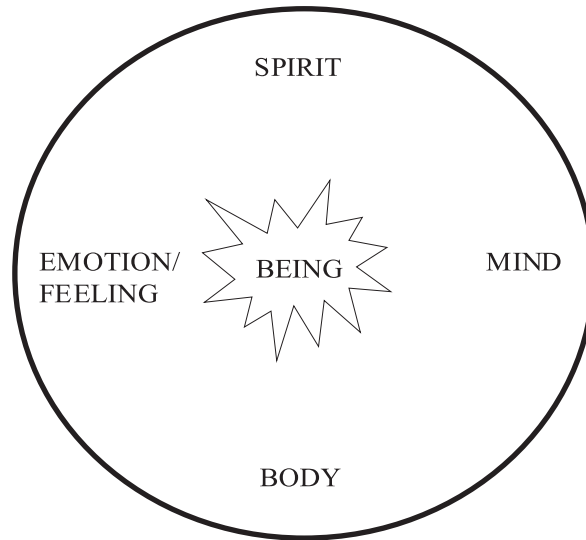


Figure 2. The Quaternity model of the bodymind.

Adapted from C. G. Jung in N. Schwartz-Salant, 1995; K. McLaren, 2000; A. Nelson, 1993.

cultivated to a higher than usual level of human functioning

- **Mind:** the part of a person that reasons, thinks, imagines, feels, wills, perceives, judges, and so on; the part of us that pays attention
- **Body:** a person's physical structure and material substance; the body gives bounds to the personality
- **Emotion³:** a complex collection of chemical and neural responses forming a distinctive pattern, an automatic response to a stimulus, that changes the state of the body proper and the state of brain structures that map the body and support thinking. The result is to place the organism in circumstances conducive to survival and well-being (Damasio, 2003).
- **Feeling:** the perception of a certain state of the body along with the perception of a certain mode of thinking and of thoughts with certain themes. "Feelings let us mind the body" (Damasio, 1994, p. 151).
- **Spirit:** incorporeal, transcendent aspects of human being; connection with a larger creative source of meaning, the universe, or the divine

Face-to-face communication is an integral expression of all aspects of our bodymind—body, emotion/feeling, mind, and spirit. We need to be mindful that we use our whole self when we communicate. To be an effective intercultural communicator, it is necessary to develop consciousness of all aspects of our bodymind so that we can use all of our inner resources skillfully, even when we are not speaking. Cultivating bodymindfulness through conscious breathing promotes being present in the moment and experiencing connections between these four aspects of being.

Attention to and care for our bodymind affects our internal state. Breathing consciously is the simplest, most fundamental way to tune into our current state and to care for and to calm ourselves. Cultivating bodymindfulness with conscious breathing also helps us to recognize the interaction and mutual influence that body, emotion/feeling, mind, and spirit have on each other (Pert, 1997). I use the following figure to introduce these ideas prior to teaching an exercise for self-attunement that I call the *Bodymindfulness Practice*.

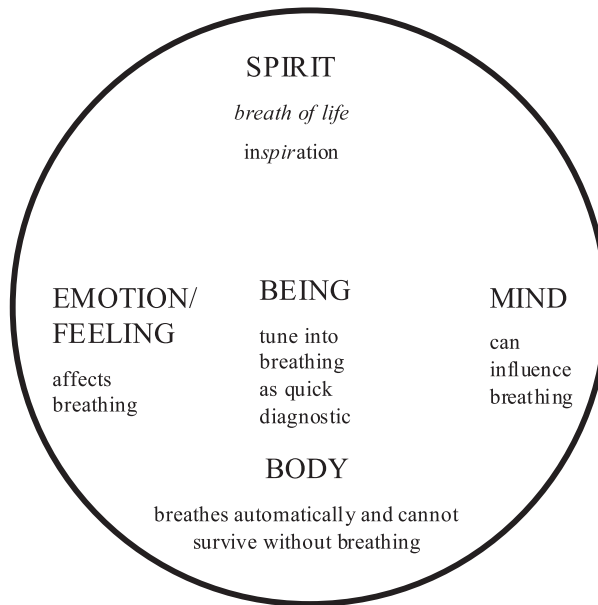


Figure 3. Breathing as the connector of the aspects of being of the bodymind.

I begin classes with a seemingly simple exercise, the Bodymindfulness Practice, that clears a space for turning attention inward and making contact with our own energy. It promotes development of awareness of our *bodymindset* — the existing pattern of being in our bodymind (Nagata, 2002) — and offers a means of shifting it so that our presence is more poised and effective in conveying a desired message congruently.

Bodymindfulness Practice

- Presence requires being present in the moment: *Be here now*.
- Tune into your breathing and see what it tells you about your current state of being.
- Breathe more deeply and evenly.
- Set your intention for your participation here.
- Use bodymindfulness to **Be here now!**

The Bodymindfulness Practice is intended as a means of diagnosing our own internal states, attuning to our sensations, feelings, thoughts, and inspirations, and then shifting them if deemed desirable. It is a distillation of Asian practices that can be done anytime,

anywhere, at no cost, and in the complete privacy of our own bodymind. No one else needs to know that it is needed or being performed. I repeatedly encourage students to use the Bodymindfulness Practice on their own each time they enter a new space or begin to interact with someone outside the classroom. It can provide an orientation to the context of that moment. Ideally it becomes a means of ongoing self-monitoring and attunement, which are both essential for self-reflexivity in the varied situations interculturalists may encounter.

The philosopher Allan Watts (1995) described the characteristics and appeal of the disciplines on which the Bodymindfulness Practice is based.

The nub of all these Oriental Philosophies is not an idea, not a theory, not even a way of behaving, but a way of experiencing a transformation of everyday consciousness so that it becomes quite apparent to us that this is the way things are. (p. 19)

The Bodymindfulness Practice is intended to help us to clear a space, take a moment, and consider what we are experiencing and what we want to do about it. It can be the foundation of self-reflexivity and promote skillful communication.

Often students reported that they had reviewed past experiences and came to new understandings, which they could carry forward into future interactions.

The first thing I decided to do when I started taking the Intercultural Communication Theory course at Rikkyo Graduate School of Intercultural Communication Studies was to take back my memories that had been lost. I thought that I could never be a competent interculturalist if I kept turning my back on painful memories. It was a very difficult task for me to accomplish, but I think I achieved success. As a result, I could come up with my own definition of a competent interculturalist. I believe that a competent interculturalist is a person who can productively learn from any painful intercultural experiences.

This kind of inner work had a significant somatic-emotional component. Another student also recognized that she was reconsidering her earlier experiences on a deep level.

It was very valuable for me to reconstruct intercultural experience that I had been having so far, and to see how much I have learned from those cultural experiences. Also, it took me to a deep [place] inside of myself to think about identities—what kind of identities I had been having, also how I want to integrate these identities to create a new identity to be a better interculturalist. With this review of myself, I'm now ready to interact with more people in intercultural settings, and to see how my new identity being constructed responds to the situations.

These types of realizations suggest emancipatory learning. They were integral and had

holistic implications for the students' future ability to communicate as whole people.

Bodymindful Self-Care

As they pursue their thesis research and writing, I continually remind students that they are a bodymind, not just a mind. If we expect our minds to concentrate for long periods without breaks to refresh them, they will probably grow dull and inefficient. If we are totally preoccupied by what we are thinking when we are doing something that requires using our senses to pay attention to the world around us, we may have accidents. If we ignore our body's need for proper nutrition and rest, we are likely to fall ill. If we do not recognize our feelings and act on them in an appropriate and satisfying way, we may expect too much or too little of ourselves, especially in regard to relationships with people who are important to us. If we neglect inspirations that suddenly occur to us, we may not connect with our deeper motivations or be able to summon the energy to persevere when we are discouraged or exhausted. If we want to deploy the various intelligences that the different aspects of our bodymind possess, we need to cultivate and care for all of them.

The quality of the qualitative research that any of us can produce is dependent on the quality of our consciousness and how we use ourselves as instruments of communication as we conduct our research projects (Nagata, 1999). Our sense of ourselves and what we are capable of is constantly being tested during the process of our research; the intellectual, psychological, and physical effort required is enormous. *Rombunbyou* (thesis disease) is the humorous name I have coined for the psychosomatic toll that producing a thesis may take. Using this term, students seem to recognize symptoms more easily and joke with each other about the difficulties they encounter as they work at the edge of their comfort zone and sometimes slip over it. Realizing that our greatest learning is likely to be in the liminal space just beyond what we think are our limits can motivate us when we most need extra energy. If we can learn to welcome confusion as a transitory state between prior convictions and new meaning perspectives, we are more likely to experience transformative learning and new ways of being.

Conclusion

Intercultural communication studies offer continuous opportunities for students to learn new ways of making meaning, both subjective and objective. The pedagogical approach to intercultural education described here emphasizes reflection and self-reflexivity and bodymindfulness in order to promote development of students as integrated, whole people. It is intended to help them to cultivate both their rational and extrarational capabilities. As the reflective passages written by students quoted above suggest, they have responded to this holistic educational approach with enhanced self-awareness, new skills, and the recognition that they need to make the intention to continue learning throughout their lives.

In the spirit of honoring the realm of the imagination and its inspirational role, I am

closing with a poem by the multicultural, surrealist poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, that has often inspired me, hoping that it will be similarly inspiring to others.

Come to the edge the voice said softly
 No they said it's too high
 Come to the edge the voice insisted
 No she said it's too dangerous
 Come to the edge the voice demanded
 No he said I might fall
 Come to the edge the voice commanded
 Reluctantly, I came to the edge
 He pushed me off
 And I flew.

—Guillaume Apollinaire, 1870-1918

Notes

- 1 The concept of *use of self as an instrument* was introduced to me by organizational development specialist, Charlie Seashore, in a Fielding Institute workshop in July 1996. I have recently come across an earlier reference to it (McCracken, 1988).
- 2 *Feedforward* is a term coined by Marshall Goldsmith to emphasize the expansive and dynamic possibilities people have in the future rather than focusing on their limitations in the past. It seems more appropriate than feedback for students who are oriented to putting what they are learning to work.
- 3 Damasio's distinction between *emotion* and *feeling* as defined above is particularly useful for interculturalists. Emotions are actions or movements that precede feelings. Many are public and perceptible by others as they occur in the face, the voice, and specific behaviors. These displays provide particularly valuable cues for interculturalists, especially when they are learning new nonverbal codes. Feelings are always hidden, like all mental images necessarily are, the private property of the organism in whose brain they occur (Damasio, 1999, 2003). Ting-Toomey (1999) recommends perception checking as a way of avoiding misunderstandings that arise when we think we know what others are feeling without asking them.

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