

This is an edited transcript of the first talk in the 'Distinguished Speaker' series, by Professor Mike Byram, chaired by Dr. Mirjam HJauck. It includes contributions from Dr Stephanie Schneider and Dr QIAN KAN.

MIRJAM HAUCK

Over to you Mike.

MIKE BYRAM

Okay thank you very much for your invitation this afternoon. I'm going to go straight into my topic, and I've got two key words: 'interculturality' and 'internationalism', and perhaps the third key word is 'introductory', because that's all I'm going to try to do this afternoon.

So, to begin, to give you a quick overview. I'm going to look at the two notions of 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural communicative' competence. Then I'll introduce the idea of internationalism and then consider briefly how these two might be related and what the implications of these might be.

If we look at intercultural communication, I have an example. As Mirjam said, I started my professional life as a schoolteacher and adult education teacher, and I've imagined the situation - which fortunately I've never experienced, but the situation which can happen - where something illegal, some event has taken place in a school in an English school, and we have two people talking about how to handle this particular event.

On the one hand you've got somebody who's come into the school, 'Mr Smith', who is a lawyer, and you've got somebody in the school, 'Miss Jones', who is a teacher, and they're going to be talking about this. And in that situation what we've got is the lawyer Smith and the teacher Jones talking to each other. They're not talking as individuals, as individual personalities as it were (although that can never be completely out of the question and eliminated) but they're there in their positions as lawyer and teacher. And what you think, what I think, will happen here is that you've got these two people talking from their different positions and they are talking from their different languages and cultures. And I say languages, not just cultures, because each of them has got their discourse, their way of talking, their professional way of talking that they've learned. We teachers - people like me - are not very aware of the fact that you've got this special discourse until you meet someone who doesn't understand all the terminology and the discourse that you've got. And similarly, the lawyer has got his discourse, which we might find strange and difficult to understand. So, in that situation then we've got two people with two languages, two discourses if you prefer the word, and two ways of seeing the world from their professional position as a lawyer and a teacher.

If I now add to that a further dimension - and again, this is the sort of thing that can unfortunately happen, where you might have a student exchange from France. A French

teacher bringing a group of students to an English school and where again, there might have been some kind of illegal incident. Again, you've got a lawyer, the same lawyer Smith, and again, you've got a teacher, but this time it's Marie Leroy, and you've got that extra dimension that lawyer Smith is the *English lawyer* Smith, as seen by the French teacher Leroy, and the teacher is not just a teacher, as seen by lawyer Smith, but a *French teacher*. And again, they will come to this situation with their two perspectives, their two discourses, their two cultures and languages. The *personal identity* represented by John Smith and Marie Leroy would not be very prominent. What you've got prominent here are *social identities*, which are prominent or salient, and the personal identity is to some extent, 'irrelevant'.

What we've got then are two situations where there is interculturality, where people are wanting to talk to each other and resolve some kind of problem in this case. But in both cases there are different languages. In both cases there are different professional cultures and ways of thinking. In both cases they will bring to the situation stereotypes and prejudices and other things which prevent them successfully interacting, or might get in the way of successfully interacting, because we all have stereotypes about lawyers, don't we? We've all seen courtroom dramas on television or film or whatever, so we've all got certain beliefs and, of course, lawyers will have their beliefs and stereotypes about teachers, and so those things get in the way.

In order to overcome those things and to overcome what is present in both situations - a linguistic matter, but in the second situation a starkly and obviously linguistic - a potentially linguistic - barrier, because in the second situation one person, Marie Leroy is speaking a language, a foreign language for her, whereas for lawyer Smith, let's assume he's speaking his first language. All of this then takes place in both situations. Both situations are examples of intercultural communication.

But I would then want to make a distinction between what they need in the first situation and what they need in the second. So, in the first situation these two people need intercultural competence, where they're using 'the same' language, English, despite having different discourses. And in the second situation you've got intercultural *communicative* competence where you've got not just those salient identities, social identities, and the languages and cultures present, but also a very obviously different language, which is a foreign language for one or both.

Those are then two perspectives on intercultural communication, and two perspectives on what is needed in both situations. There's a lot of common ground in both situations, but then there's that extra dimension in the second. They need competences these people, they need competences, which we've defined at the Council of Europe in terms of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, or knowledge and understanding, in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges, and opportunities that are presented by a given type of intercultural context such as the ones I've just been describing. The important thing here is that these competences, these intercultural competences, or intercultural communicative competences, are not just skills. They're attitudes. They're knowledge and understanding.

They're values.

In order to get a little further with that, what we've done over the years, many of us, and many people from many different perspectives have tried to model, to create a model which would help us to understand these complex situations in more effective ways. All models, as George Box said, are wrong, but some are useful. They're wrong because they're always simplifications of the situation or, in this case, of the competences needed. It's just these models - I'm going to show you two briefly - are simplifications. That makes them wrong. But at the same time we need simplifications in order to better understand and to respond to how to teach, in this case, these competences and in that sense then models are useful.

I wrote a model twenty or more years ago for language teachers which was a simplification and I'm not going to go over that in any detail, but it was a simplification, which was modelled on being an ethnographer, that language learners should be taught and helped to learn how to be, as it were, ethnographers. People who can, in a given situation like the two examples I've given, have the skills, attitudes and values which will help them to interact with the other person, whether lawyer or teacher, whether French or English. But I'm going to show you a different model. This is much more recent, and in a sense is more comprehensive because it's not just for language teachers.

What's interesting and important here is that, as I said a moment ago, competences are not just skills, of course. There are all kinds of skills which are useful in intercultural communication: linguistic and communicative skills, cooperation skills, conflict resolution skills and so on. But there are also values and there are attitudes: openness to cultural otherness, respect, civic-mindedness and so on. And there's also knowledge: knowledge about how the world works, knowledge about oneself, knowledge about how one's own discourse community and language community and their culture that they have, how they work. If I'm more aware of my culture as a teacher then I'm also more aware of how to make that accessible to someone like a lawyer, who doesn't really understand what teachers do. It's called a 'Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture' from the Council of Europe. That's the official title, but within that there's a lot. Originally the title was about intercultural competence as well as democratic competence, but this shorter title was invented to be more telling as it were. But within that framework, within that model - a model which is intended to help all teachers across the whole curriculum - within that model there are fifteen of the twenty competences which are what I and the people who were part of the project group would call intercultural competences and they include values, they include attitudes, and of course they include skills. But they also include knowledge and understanding of self and of other ways of thinking about the world.

Internationalism. Briefly, internationalism is the readiness to act on the assumption that mankind as a whole is the proper society to have in mind for matters that cannot with safety or with such good effect be left exclusively within the domain of smaller social groups such as nations. Nations are small social groups in the world today. That's what I mean by internationalism.

There are different kinds of internationalism. I don't mean internationalization by the way. I mean internationalism as a way of thinking, as a way of life, almost as a culture. There are different kinds, and I'm focusing upon liberal internationalism:

'An optimistic approach based on the belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals can, through greater interaction and cooperation evolve towards common purposes. Chief among these would be peace and prosperity.'

That definition is by Fred Halliday.

Why do we need it? Because as Elvin said, we need to deal with things which are too big for the nation. In the past – and this is where liberal internationalism arose - it was in response to wars: World War One, World War Two, the League of Nations, the United Nations. In the present, it's a response to other kinds of matters too big for the nation, and the obvious example is the pandemic. And that, if you like, is where the parallel to the League of Nations and the United Nations is the World Health Organization. Because we need that, because national governments are nationalists and becoming ever more so, and during the pandemic we saw medical nationalism: people buying up, countries buying up vaccines for us and devil take the hindmost. If you didn't get the vaccines, if you didn't get in first, then we don't care about you. And so we got this medical chauvinism as well. Phrases like, 'we have a world-beating track and trace system', 'we will be the first to have a vaccine' etc. etc. Chauvinism which amounted to jingoism.

On the other hand, I'm glad to say that researchers have remained internationalists in their way of thinking. What is an internationalist? What does an internationalist do? The key word is someone who cooperates for common purposes. That was the phrase in the previous quotation. The obvious examples today are the environment and the pandemic. It's somebody who cooperates, but it's also somebody who identifies with a larger group than the nation, with a group which is bigger than the nation. They may well have a national identity and in addition to that they will have an international identity of some kind. And the national identity then disappears into the background. People working together don't see themselves as French, British, Japanese or any other such national identity, but working together, whatever it is, whether as environmentalists or Covid workers and researchers, they have a new identity. And that's what we can try to do in the workplace. I say this somewhat hesitantly because I'm an educationist and all my applications of this thinking have been in schools and universities, but we've tried to combine the competences of intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence with internationalism, with the skills and the attitudes and the identities which come from working together at a higher or bigger, greater level than national ways of thinking.

Perhaps then - and this is where I hope this might be a little bit of an introduction, these are just my introductory thoughts - that in an intercultural international workplace, whether it is intercultural in my first sense, even where everybody thinks of themselves as speaking the same language and from the same country. Nonetheless there are bigger issues than what the country can deal with, or in a workplace which is like my second example, where there are

people coming together from different countries with different national identities, creating and using new identities for common cooperative purposes. That's what I hope that the course that the OU is developing might well be a way forward.

MIRJAM HAUCK

Okay, so I think we move on to part two of this hour, which is a brief introduction to our new short course, which is in itself an introduction to intercultural competence in the workplace. It is one of those short courses offered by the University's Open Centre for Languages and Cultures. The author of this short course is Dr Stephanie Schneider. So, if you would now like to share your screen, Stephanie, and I hand over to you.

STEPHANIE SCHNEIDER

I'm just going to introduce the new short course from the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures to you. I'm not going to go into too much depth, I'm just going to give you a short overview of what we have written in the past year.

The course is called 'An introduction to intercultural competence in the workplace' and it's part of a variety, a series of short courses that we have. On the top of this slide you can see the landing page of the Open Centre, and you can see on here that we offer courses on Chinese, French, German, and as of last year, we also have courses on communication. For instance 'Artificial intelligence matters' or 'Chinese business culture essentials', and also, 'An introduction to intercultural competence in the workplace'. You might notice it's called 'an introduction' so it will ideally be part of a series of courses - this is just the first one we've written so far - in which we want to cover multiple different particular workplaces. But this one is more general.

What I would like to do in the next few minutes is show you our attempt of how to teach intercultural competence. Our audience for this course is not necessarily the university student who is interested in more theoretical concepts, but we would like to invite learners who are in their workplaces, and who want to develop skills, a skill set, for working in a diverse environment.

It's a short course, that means we don't want you or the learners to invest the same time as you would for a full university module. People can study this in their own time. I don't know how many of you have studied with the Open University before - the interface is very similar. You can see here the landing page, you can see the first four units of the course, what it would look like on the website itself. Altogether we have ten different units that focus on different aspects of intercultural competence. Each unit takes about four hours. It's an interactive way of learning: you have different texts, videos, audio that are relevant for each topic. You'll be exposed to academic concepts, but most importantly you'll see how these can be applied to real life situations.

If you take the course, there's no real-time online attendance. You can study this in your own

time within forty hours. There is a forum, as you can see on the top, where we have a learning advisor who manages the discussion, comments on things that you share, and makes sure that the interaction between different learners who study this at different times is continuing. I'll show you an example for this in a second.

Just to start off, I want to talk for a few minutes about what this course is based on, because there's no shortage of companies that offer cultural training to companies. They send a consultant to a workplace for a workshop for two days where they receive information about people from different national cultures. They get a list of behaviours to expect, what people are like, and this is exactly what we are *not* trying to do. In this course we are not teaching about different national cultures, because first of all, we don't understand culture as, we don't equate culture with, nationality. Culture is seen as complex, as dynamic, as fragmented, and as so much more than just somebody's ethnicity or nationality.

We are trying to teach competences and skills that Mike Byram has just mentioned. So, at the heart of the course lie one's attitudes. So, as you can see, the model here is not called 'intercultural communicative competence', simply because this course doesn't focus so much on language learning it's really more a generic approach on how culture can matter in interactions at work. What's really central here are somebody's attitudes. We want learners to reflect on how they see the world and educate them a bit on what kind of attitudes and what outlook you need in in order to really have an ethno-relative perspective, which means that if you are confronted with behaviour that's not familiar, that we resist, that very human tendency of seeing something strange as inferior, we keep an open mind, we stay curious.

One other aspect of the course is knowledge. As Mike just said, knowledge isn't everything. This is not about learning country facts. This is about socio-linguistic awareness. This is about partly deep cultural knowledge, but also about self-awareness. And something else that's really at the heart of the course is the ability to change your frame of reference, to be aware that your perspective isn't the norm, it's just your subjective way of seeing the world, and thereby being able to also see the world through somebody else's eyes.

So this is the concept, this is the theory, and obviously one of the main aims of the course is that we want to equip learners, or we want to help learners, to be able to articulate what skills they already have that are part of intercultural competence, and what skills they still need to acquire. So there's an awareness of what we've already got and what we still need.

I'm just going to show you two units now, screenshots from the units, so you see what I mean by this very abstract idea. So, Unit 5, for instance, is on norms of politeness and impoliteness. Now if you've studied intercultural communication before, which I'm sure most people in this session will have done, you will have an idea of what politeness means and how we study it. So, for instance, there's the concept of 'face' that's always very central, and this is, of course, also part of this course because it facilitates a bit in understanding what politeness is, what we mean by it. Do we mean, as in this anecdote you can see here, a list of etiquette rules? What is impoliteness? Is it just the opposite of politeness? What's behind it? So we give examples of how culture can have an impact on politeness norms and how this is reflected in multiple

different situations at work.

One example is small talk. Learners learn about different approaches to small talk, are asked to imagine what they are in workplace situations, what they are comfortable with and what other people might be comfortable with. What we also do - because like I said culture isn't nationality - we also look at culture in terms of age and in terms of gender. We talk about, or we teach about, unconscious biases: how do unconscious biases that we hold affect the way we talk to others, the way we see others? So, there is, for instance, an 'implicit association test' that students can take to see, 'okay so do I have unconscious biases?' Because they're unconscious so we're not aware of them. What types are there? We expose them to examples of, for instance, benevolent sexism at work or gendered communication styles, just as an example.

Another unit that moves away a bit from the workplace, and applying this to the workplace, and more to attitudes and world views is Unit 9 about reconsidering 'the East' and 'the West'. We ask students to circle on a map what countries are western, what cultures are western, and then we ask them to reflect on what makes them western, just to then highlight how the terms 'west' and 'east' are tools to think with and that they are not neutral terms but subjective terms. Students learn about the concept of 'orientalism', read text examples of orientalism and then look at examples of how this school of thought is still pretty much alive and well today and how it creates a barrier in workplaces, but also in society in general. One example that we use in the course, for instance, are the Romani, or the Roma people, in Europe. People - or learners - are asked to follow this link and to review different examples from the media where Romani characters are depicted, and they are asked to see if any of the stereotypes that arose from orientalist thought are reflected in those roles. They then reflect on how this limits the ability of people to be more than just a stereotype, and they are also shown what initiatives there are in order to overcome these barriers, what traits of thought there are in order to overcome these old thinking schemes.

So like I said, this is just an example. These are all screenshots from the course. So, if you are curious about the course there will very soon be a free taster course on OpenLearn. It's not on yet but is coming very soon.

If you have any questions about the course, obviously, ask me now, but you can also send me an email to: Stephanie.Schneider@open.ac.uk.

Thank you very much.

MIRJAM HAUCK

Okay, before we conclude, because we are coming to the end, I want to give the mic back to Mike Byram.

MIKE BYRAM

Thank you. There's a workman just appeared next next door. I hope he's not going to make too

much noise! You've given the word back to me?

MIRJAM HAUCK

Yes, for some concluding remarks.

MIKE BYRAM

Awesome. Okay! [Laughter]

Well, it's interesting what Robert has just said and the interaction between the two and three of you was very significant, I think. Inevitably, I've probably made some similar kind of simplifying remarks to what I said earlier on because in a short presentation - as with models - we simplify. Sometimes that's useful but it's always wrong, and I think the important thing is just to see how what I distinguished somewhat crudely between the academic study of intercultural communication etc. and training in intercultural communication skills, knowledge etc., how those two can be brought together.

I can remember a long time ago some attempts made to do that and they were completely unsuccessful. I hope that things will have changed since then because there were misunderstandings on both sides, which is somewhat ironic when you think that both sides were trying to deal with intercultural communication.

But there is work to do there, I think, and it's certainly something which I don't feel I can add very much to. But somebody like Robert certainly could. I don't have that workplace experience. My workplace - it is a workplace too - but my workplace has always been in schools and universities. So, there's a lot to do. It's very interesting and useful and important that you're offering this kind of course because, I guess - and again Robert will probably know better than I - that there will be interest wherever there are people trying to look for a more 'innovative' academic perspective as well, rather than just the sometimes rather short, necessarily short, training courses that they're allowed and exposed to.

So, all I can say is, congratulations on thinking about this and I hope that everything now continues successfully and well into the future.

MIRJAM HAUCK

Thank you Mike!

We are almost at the end of the hour so let me use this opportunity to say thank you to everybody who has come along, thank you to everybody who has contributed in the chat, and live, synchronously.

I would also like to use this as a little forward organizer for our next 'Distinguished Speaker' talk. It is going to be on the 8th of April and I think my colleague Qian is here, because we are going to have a colleague from China talking to us on the 8th of April. Qian, if you want to

quickly grab the mic and say something about our next distinguished speaker.

QIAN KAN

Yes, our next distinguished speaker is Professor Gu Yueguo. He will be talking about Chinese faces: the concept of face and how that has been evolved and changed over the centuries, so exploring from the historical perspective even tracing back to when the term was first used in the English text, and then how that permeates through the Chinese culture, including the business setting.

MIRJAM HAUCK

So watch this space! We will send out the description, all the further details, very soon.

And on that note, I think it's a wrap, and thanks again for everybody who turned up and who stayed on. We had a good turnout, and we are very, very happy with this first event in our 'Distinguished Speaker' series.

[Multiple voices] Thank you! Thank you, Mirjam! Bye! Bye everyone! Bye everybody! Bye!

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]