



**Languages for Intercultural
Communication and Education**

Deep Culture

The Hidden Challenges
of Global Living

Joseph Shaules

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COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION 16**

Series Editors: Michael Byram and Alison Phipps

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LANGUAGES FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Editors: Michael Byram, *University of Durham, UK*

Alison Phipps, *University of Glasgow, UK*

The overall aim of this series is to publish books which will ultimately inform learning and teaching, but whose primary focus is on the analysis of intercultural relationships, whether in textual form or in people's experience. There will also be books which deal directly with pedagogy, with the relationships between language learning and cultural learning, between processes inside the classroom and beyond. They will all have in common a concern with the relationship between language and culture, and the development of intercultural communicative competence.

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Foreword

'People and things are increasingly out of place', James Clifford suggested in his book *The Predicament of Culture* (1988). In the twenty years since he wrote that, the tempo of movement has accelerated further. It has never been as easy as it is now to cross borders physically. More people than ever before are living 'away from home'. But at the same time, we are discovering that the most heavily policed frontiers are not physical but linguistic and cultural. These borders are embedded in the everyday life of ordinary people and we ourselves do more to police them than any security force could hope to achieve.

In this context, Joseph Shaules's book is a timely intervention in the field of intercultural communication and the forms of learning that underpin it. It takes issue with existing approaches that construe intercultural learning as a largely linear process and argues that things are considerably more complex. The extent to which a visitor resists, accepts or adapts to a host culture may vary considerably over time, but in ways that are neither homogeneous nor predictable. A great deal rests on the 'habitus' of individuals: the dispositions, attitudes and values they bring to an encounter. But intercultural relations are rooted in dialogue and interaction, where individuals have scope to choose the ways in which they will engage with their cultural environment. Long-term sojourners can thus shape their engagement, and familiarity may breed contempt as well as affection.

To a significant extent the responses to intercultural encounter are personal and subjective, easier to guess at than to analyse, and frequently discussed on the basis of anecdotes rather than evidence. Joseph Shaules has achieved valuable access to evidence, through detailed interviews with a sample of informants, and has teased out the patterns of intercultural development they reveal. In this way he has been able to delve beneath the surface of their behaviour and the way they themselves view it. His concept of 'deep culture' is a challenging one, designed to understand the processes going on in sensitive personal areas, without adopting an inappropriately normative perspective. As he demonstrates,

this understanding is an essential requirement for developing effective strategies of intercultural learning.

The approach developed here has clear theoretical groundings and is supported by detailed examination of the evidence. I have been happy and privileged to play a part in its gestation. Its value will be assessed by its ability to inform the process of learning and to provide people with the knowledge and skills to move around the world in creative and satisfying ways. It may thereby assist us in attaining a positive 'cultural footprint' so that the places in which we stay will be enriched by our sojourn there.

●

Michael Kelly
Southampton, March 2007

Acknowledgements

My interest in deep culture originated from reading the works of Edward Hall during studies at the School for International Training (SIT), in Brattleboro, Vermont. This interest was supported by Lou Spaventa with additional impetus provided by training at the Intercultural Communication Institute (ICI) in Portland, Oregon. The work of Milton Bennett and Janet Bennett, whom I met there, figure prominently in this work. Their openness and supportive attitude is greatly appreciated. During the writing of this book, the support of colleagues at Rikkyo University has been indispensable. Particular thanks is owed to Torikai Kumiko and Hiraga Masako. At the University of Southampton, Michael Kelly and Patrick Stevenson have been wonderful advisors and mentors during doctoral studies there. Thanks also to Alison Phipps for her encouragement to turn that work into this book. The Japan Intercultural Institute has been indulgent in allowing me to test out the ideas contained here in intercultural seminars. Thanks in particular to Nobuo Nishikawa, Takeshi Enomoto, Ellen Kawaguchi, Kanami Uchida and Valerie Hansford. Throughout 20 years of intercultural wanderings many people have provided inspiration and support. They include: Alma Church, David Shaules, James Shaules, Elizabeth Hamilton, Michiyo Oshiro, Steve Ziolkowski, Haruko Ishii and especially Estelle Bisch. Friends and family in the US, Mexico, Japan and France have enriched both my sojourns and my homecomings. Thanks to all.

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Introduction

At an intercultural communication conference not long ago, I heard a speaker comment that globalization was rendering the concept of cultural difference invalid. Some weeks later, during a reunion with a friend who had just completed an 18-month trip around the world, I asked about this assertion. My friend commented that to find cultural difference you have to 'get off the internet and get on a bus'. He went on to argue that often the intercultural contact we have in our 'global village' doesn't amount to us having 'intercultural experiences'. While globalization may bring diversity into our living room, we usually aren't required to *adapt* to it in any significant way. Even meeting people from other countries can be a relatively shallow experience if we don't need to change much about ourselves in order to get along. Living or traveling abroad, however, implies that we are obliged to go through a process of learning to function better in our new environment.

The distinction my friend made – that intercultural contact is not the same as intercultural adaptation – is important for understanding the goals of this book. It will look at the process of *cultural learning* that sojourners go through as they learn to function in a new cultural environment. Currently, an ever wider range of people are facing this challenge; whether as an expatriate employee, a student studying abroad, a volunteer working for a non-profit organization, a round-the-world traveler, or even as a tourist in a resort hotel. This book will argue that despite the wide variety of intercultural experiences, those who enter into a new cultural environment go through a learning process that is fundamentally similar, sharing a common need to respond to the adaptive demands found in their new environment. In facing these demands sojourners learn not only about their new surroundings but they may learn deeper, at times even transformative, lessons as well. This book will introduce a theoretical model to make sense of this process. It is hoped this will serve as a basis for intercultural training and education.

The title of this book, *Deep Culture*, refers to the unconscious frameworks of meaning, values, norms and hidden assumptions that we use to interpret our experiences. Cultural differences at this deep level are an often unnoticed obstacle to intercultural learning which trip up sojourners by letting them fall into ethnocentric judgments about their new surroundings. One of the 'dirty little secrets' of intercultural education is that experiences abroad don't always raise the awareness or tolerance of sojourners. They can also reinforce stereotypes, make sojourners critical or dismissive of the people they meet and cause them to denigrate differences. Worst of all, this usually happens without sojourners realizing it. In this book, for example, we will meet Australian students who, after having spent a year learning the ins-and-outs of a French university, conclude that as a rule 'the French are inefficient'. We meet a flight instructor whose experience with Asian students has convinced him that Asians have 'no survival instinct'. One French student, when asked if her attitudes towards Americans have changed after living in the United States for a year replies simply, 'Yes, for the worse'. Other sojourners, of course, have positive, even life-changing experiences. Some sojourners seem to be very positive about some parts of their experiences and negative about others. Fully understanding these varying reactions requires an in-depth look at the intercultural learning experience.

The goals of this book are ambitious: (1) to present a new model of intercultural learning that is both straightforward and theoretically sound; and (2) to focus attention on the importance of deep cultural difference. This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1 to 6) examines the cultural learning experience, while Part 2 introduces a formal model of intercultural learning. Part 1 first takes a detailed look at the concept of *deep culture*, including ways in which differences in deep culture create obstacles to cultural learning. It also anticipates some objections to the concept of culture itself. Currently, we have linguists who speak of a universal language instinct (discounting linguistic relativism), anthropologists who argue that culture is an anachronistic concept and communication specialists who argue that the way we speak is not primarily a product of our cultural background. Much of this debate is tied to changes brought about by globalization. I will argue that many interculturalists have lost sight of some fundamental insights about culture and culture difference. Using this work's conceptualization of deep culture as a starting point, Part 1 then also examines the process of cultural learning, negative learning outcomes and the goals of cultural learning.

The *Deep Culture Model* in Part 2 of this book draws on the theoretical knowledge from a variety of academic fields. In its broad outlines it is

simple. Cultural learning is seen as developmental – it involves (hopefully) an ever greater ability to construe the perceptual world found in a new environment. The development of this ability is driven by the need to respond to the gap between the internal competencies of the sojourner and the external adaptive demands of the environment. Yet not all sojourners accept the validity of the adaptive demands they face. They also may resist them. Sojourners' reactions to adaptive demands are not conceptualized in terms of behavior, but rather in terms of changes to the cognitive categories that sojourners use to conceptualize cultural difference. These reactions – *resistance*, *acceptance* and *adaptation* – are not absolute or exclusive. Sojourners may resist one element of their experience and adapt to another. This distinction between *surface* and *deep* cultural experiences is seen as central to understanding the complex and sometimes contradictory reactions that sojourners have to a new environment.

Throughout this work quotations from sojourners are used to illustrate the points discussed. This approach emphasizes the phenomenology of cultural learning and keeps theory grounded in the lived experience of sojourners. The quotations found in this book come from a research project involving interviews with approximately two dozen expatriates. The goal of this research was to compare the accounts of sojourners' cultural learning with existing theoretical models of cultural learning. Sojourners were asked about the challenges they faced in getting used to life in a new place, their foreign language ability, the types of relationships they had with their cultural hosts and what languages those relationships were carried out in. These sojourners are not necessarily a representative sample of sojourners around the globe. All of them chose to go abroad, generally under fairly advantageous circumstances. In this sense they represent a kind of 'best case' sample. Yet, even among this privileged group, deep cultural learning was often a difficult process. The understanding of this process gained from this research, together with contributions from existing cultural learning theory, have been integrated in the Deep Culture Model of cultural learning found in Chapters 7 to 12. For a full account of the research that led to this model, see Shaules (2004a).

As we will see, the way that sojourners talk about cultural difference can give us insight into their cultural learning process. When Jack, an American expatriate in Tokyo, talks about 'typical Japanese overpoliteness', he is passing judgment on the patterns of deference he has experienced. This judgment is not based on an assumption that Japanese patterns of deference are normal (for Japanese) but rather that they are excessive in some absolute way. On the other hand, Mayumi, a Japanese woman living in Korea with her Korean husband, finds interacting with her in-laws

stressful. She feels humiliated, for example, by the fact that her mother-in-law bleached the inside of her teapot while she was away. Yet despite these demands, she accepts that her in-laws are trying to be helpful and simply acting in accordance with Korean expectations. She manages to avoid the negative judgments that Jack makes. She *accepts* and *adapts* where Jack *resists*.

While it is clear that some sojourners react less constructively to adaptive challenges than others, we must not moralize about intercultural learning. Resisting change is a natural reaction to adaptive pressure. It is naïve simply to call for greater tolerance and assume that intercultural contact will, in and of itself, bring about greater *awareness* or some kind of *global identity*. We must recognize that it is also natural for intercultural experiences to engender conflict (at least sometimes), misunderstanding and denigration. Sojourners (and educators) need a neutral vocabulary of cultural learning as well as theoretical frameworks that allow us to talk about the full range of reactions to new environments. This work proposes such a vocabulary as well as a way to diagram the intercultural learning process using statements sojourners make about cultural differences. For an overview of the key terms of the Deep Culture Model, see the Glossary. In Chapter 13 there is a discussion of some of the educational implications and possible applications of this model.

The overall approach of this work has been heavily influenced by the intuitive understanding of cultural learning I have gained while growing up in the United States, learning Spanish and living in Mexico (3 years), learning Japanese during 14 years in Japan, and learning French and living in France (2 years). It has also been informed by 20 years of language teaching experience as well as experience in intercultural training and education. As an expatriate who has integrated fairly deeply into host communities where I have lived, I have long been interested in the question of why people seem to respond so differently to the challenges of living abroad. As a language teacher, I have been interested in the cultural barriers to effective communication in a foreign language. As a trainer, I have been involved with helping people prepare for their stays abroad and have puzzled over how to give prospective sojourners some help in coping with the challenges that await them.

It was fascinating to talk to the sojourners whose voices appear in this book. It was also a challenge to connect what they said to cultural learning theory. The learning model presented in this book was motivated in part by a desire to bring some clarity to the fragmented professional literature related to culture, cultural learning and the effects of globalization. Sojourners' stories are used to illustrate the contention that the deeper

elements of intercultural learning can be understood in relatively straightforward terms if we have the right conceptual frameworks to do so. They also reinforced my personal belief that deep cultural learning is an increasingly important issue in an age of globalization and the frequent crossing of cultural boundaries. While the total amount of cultural differences in the world may be decreasing, the number of deep intercultural experiences is increasing dramatically. Hopefully, this book will be of some use to the educators and sojourners that have to manage this largely hidden learning process.