

Intercultural Dialogue in Practice Managing Value Judgment through Foreign Language Education

by Stephanie Ann Houghton

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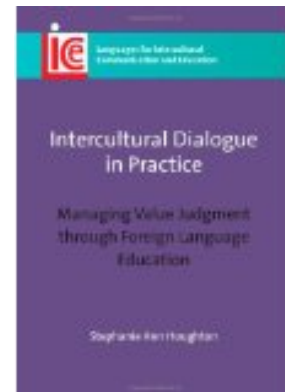
Reviewed by Katrin Volt at www.diversophy.com

How should foreign language teachers address prejudice? The primary focus of the book is to describe and analyse how value judgement should be managed in foreign language education.

It has two parts: Part 1 explores the roots of value judgment and its psychological roots theoretically, whereas Part 2 provides a model for managing value judgment in intercultural dialogue as well as details the management of value judgment in foreign language education. The approach is based on a complex action research case study carried out at a university in Japan. Student conversations and reflections are analysed with explanations and best practices for facilitating the intercultural dialogue process.

As educators we have a responsibility to managing value judgments amongst learners and making them aware of different viewpoints and alternative ways of approaching situations/people or ideas, since if we don't do that, who will? We can and should facilitate this change in learners, but how far each student is prepared to go in the process, is up to them.

The author has created an Intercultural Dialogue (ID) Model that takes Byram's model of five *savoirs* for intercultural communicative competence to another level. Houghton also explains the word dialogue, "a Greek word (διάλογος=conversation), as meaning an acceptance, by two participants or more, that they will compare and contrast their respective arguments to the very end". This then means creating common ground, understanding, and respect, as well as being curious about other people and their ways of doing things, leading to becoming an intercultural speaker with mediation skills, knowing when to use which skills and behaviours for successful interaction among diverse participants.



The 6-stage Intercultural Dialogue (ID) Model emphasises the importance of identity management in intercultural dialogue. The ID Model has the following stages:

1. Analysis of Self,
2. Analysis of other,
3. Compare and contrast the perspectives of self and other,
4. Evaluate the perspectives of self and other;
5. Select between alternatives/self-reconstruction;
6. Orient self to other.

The author has added *savoir se transformer* (see stage six above) – knowing how to become through interaction with others to Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

The author points out two options through which teachers can manage students' value judgments: either teachers can actively raise learner awareness of their own values, or can purposefully attempt to bring learner values into line with universal values based on democracy and human rights. The reviewer feels the concept of 'democracy' might not be the best touchstone, as it can be viewed and acted out very differently across cultures and, hence, not be a universal value. I also feel the second option above does not respect others' values.

What are values? Values are a set of innate concepts that determine what is important for us, most of the time unconscious, e.g. we might have a value for privacy or equality, etc., but how we act it out differs among cultures.

The author has used Schwartz & Sagiv, Schwartz et al., 1997) conceptual categories to reveal value difference between learners by using the following set of values that seem to be universal:

Power and Achievement; Benevolence and Universalism; Tradition, Security, and Conformity; Hedonism, Stimulation, and Self-Direction.

These values are illustrated in short dialogues, as well as in examples from learner diaries and interviews in which learners are asked to reflect on and discuss their own values with other learners.

One of the interesting observations from the research is that "students may find positive self-evaluation underpinning self-confidence and negative self-evaluation underpinning the desire

for self-enhancement”. The author points out that identification of evaluative standards is a key concern in this stage of the ID Model. Furthermore, negative self-evaluation and positive other-evaluation may be accompanied by the desire to change. The author also mentions possible Japanese cultural preferences for indirectness and ambiguity.

The author maintains that the key concern in the final stage of the ID Model is the selection of standards to apply when critically evaluating self and other (p. 136). The aim of intercultural dialogue in language education should be the development of critical perspectives to help learners respond to the culturally diverse world outside the classroom.

The conclusion of the book is sweet: the author refers to Petru’s secret shared with Paolo in Coelho’s (2008) story of his own pilgrimage along the road to Santiago in search of his sword, a few lines from it that spoke to me: “...It is a secret that has to be experienced to be understood... “The secret is the following,” Petrus said “You can learn only through teaching...In teaching you, I truly learned.” That is true, it is through trying to teach others that we learn what we know and don’t know and what works and what doesn’t. Things shift and we can change through the experiences we have.

The book is intended for researchers or professionals at tertiary level interested in intercultural competence development in education and foreign language education. Hence, the book has a strong academic feel and ideas are backed up with previous research in the field. Depending on the reader, this approach might fit and be of utmost relevance or it might be too theoretical. I appreciate the researcher’s effort (a 7-year-study) at tackling this important issue in foreign language education and suggesting the Intercultural Dialogue Model to facilitate what goes on in the classroom and outside of it in learners’ lives.