

Milton Bennett talks about the DMIS 2nd part

What are your plans for the future?

I see my work for the next few years as being with the *Intercultural Development Research Institute* here in Italy and in Oregon. The goal of that institute is to support constructivist and development approaches. But, more generally, what I'd like to spend my time on is addressing two issues that I think are of concern to us in the intercultural field.

One is the increasing diffusion of our conceptual boundaries. For various reasons it's becoming less clear who we are, not more clear. The field of intercultural communication or intercultural relations, whatever you want to call it, is experiencing a kind of diffusion into a variety of other disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, etcetera.

There are fewer and fewer programs at universities dedicated to intercultural communication and more and more an inclusion of an intercultural dimension to other programs. The effect is that the underlying assumptive base of the field is unclear; it tends to take on the base of whatever the discipline is, so the MBA takes on MBA assumptions and cross-cultural psychology takes on psychology assumptions.

And the original synthesis of anthropology, language and communication is, I would say, becoming more unclear. I'd like to compensate for that by clarifying those boundaries and I think we could do this by sponsoring meetings, incorporating the conversation into our SIETAR meetings and making sure it gets included in interviews like this one.

How does all this fit into the virtual world? It's going to be the theme of our next Congress in Krakow.

Like any educational enterprise, which interculturalism is, we need to deal with the fact that education is operating increasingly in a virtual environment. People expect virtual treatment of things and operations, such as multicultural teams, so the virtuality of those situations needs to be addressed in what we do. However, if we don't come to that conversation about extension into the virtual with a clear set of assumptions about who we are, and who we are not, then it will be nothing but an exercise in pop futurology.

I notice this among companies. They want to make virtual teams more effective in no time flat but they don't want to spend time and resources in a kick-off meeting, where the teams are physically together for three days.

Right, and if we in the field of interculturalism aren't clear about what we do and what we don't do, about who we are and who we aren't, we can't come into those kinds of situations with a clear vision of how to do this. We become effective by saying, "Here's what you have to do and here's what don't need to do."

And this raises a second issue: Techniques have overwhelmed theory. In our field there's been a faster growth of methodology--of technique, including measurements--than in the underlying theory of what we're doing and why we're doing it.

We interculturalists have spent a lot of time generating techniques, methods, procedures, implementation-strategies, applications. And we've spent relatively less time--in fact there may have been an active disinterest on the part of many people--on what the underlying conceptual structure is.

Another way of saying it is that we're reifying the techniques. We're treating the techniques as the thing we're teaching, rather than using techniques as a way to get people to attain understanding of something. The means have come to be substituted for the ends in many cases.

This is largely because people without much preparation are attempting to conduct intercultural education and training. They take one TOT (training of trainer) course and say, "Hey, this is a rather cool thing! Lots of fun and you can charge for it, too!" But they really don't know what the history of the field is or what the theoretical grounds are.

I don't know if our field is more susceptible to people like that. I suspect maybe it is, because interculturalists tend to confuse ethnorelativism with being non-judgmental. So they refrain from making judgments such as the one I just stated for fear that they are being bigoted or prejudicial. They engage in non-critical acceptance not just of cultural differences, but of every idea and practice. Yet intercultural sensitivity doesn't mean being non-judgmental, it means making judgments in a culturally-appropriate way. In the case of a field of study and practice such as intercultural communication, it is not only appropriate, but crucial to make judgments about one's own and others' professional competence.

What is your current thinking about using the IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory) as a technique for intercultural development?

The IDI was created as a measurement of the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*. The data derived from it was always interpreted in terms of DMIS theory, and interventions based on the measurement made sense in terms of the theory. In other words, it was a good example of theory into practice.

However, any measurement can be separated from its underlying theory. In general, this is called "reifying the measurement." Specifically regarding the IDI, reification occurs when a score generated by the instrument is interpreted solely in terms of the instrument without reference to the theory. An extreme case of

this in the IDI is when meaning is attributed to the “gap” between the raw score and the adjusted score. The “gap” is an artifact of the measurement itself – it does not have any existence in the underlying theory – so its use for diagnosis has no theoretical grounding.

Here’s the advice I give on the IDI: If you want to show *delta*, that is, if you want to show change associated with an intervention, the IDI is the best game in town and pretty sensitive. The power of IDI is that it can attribute statistical significance to change. For instance, it shows that if people do intercultural training they’ll learn more from a cross-cultural experience than if they don’t do training. To make that statement with statistical significance is very powerful.

However, the IDI is less useful as a diagnostic tool. For group diagnoses, it is problematic that the bigger the group, the more the profile goes to the norm, which is established to be minimization. You can effectively compare one group to another much as you can compare pre-test and post-test scores, but to say that a group is “in minimization” is more a statement about the measurement than it is about the group.

I think the IDI is more useful for diagnosis at the individual level than it is at the group level. But for an individual diagnosis to be useful, it needs to be positioned into the experience of the respondent as contexted by the theory. So, coming full circle, the practitioner of IDI diagnosis, like any practitioner of intercultural technique, needs to have a sophisticated grasp of theory and the ability to implement technique with consciousness and empathy.

What would you recommend to young people who want to get into a graduate program of interculturalism?

The general advice to someone who’s going to do graduate work is: Pay attention to *who*, not *where*. Rather than deciding you’re going to go to Oxford, say “Who is it at Oxford that I have something to learn from and what makes me think so?”

Good programs exist but are separated in different departments, which might be education, anthropology, psychology, linguistics. For instance, I can speak of an intercultural program I know, the University of Milano-Bicocca. It’s in a sociology department--not a communication or anthropology department-- and is associated with programs in social work and international cooperation. But it’s a very sophisticated intercultural program.

That’s the kind of thing someone needs to look into: Who’s associated with the program and what’s the depth of the intercultural dimension of that program? People who ask that question need to know the difference between *cultural* and *intercultural* because there are lots of programs out there that are essentially cultural. Or, even further removed, there’re political, like so-called “intercultural dialogue programs”.

Such programs are almost always attempting to reduce international or interethnic tensions -- prejudice-reduction.. That's a good thing, but the programs usually don't address the development of intercultural competence at all. So the term *intercultural* is being used to mean something like *cross-cultural*. There are two cultures involved but nothing about the process of creating inter-subjectivity or any of the other communication terms that we'd use.

So the student who's looking for a program needs to have done enough reading to know the difference between an intercultural and a "cultural" program?

Yes, that's right. Secondly, I'd recommend a young person to think about the following: Sophisticated theory generates powerful applications. By sophisticated theory, I mean having a coherent set of assumptions about culture, cultural identity, intercultural relations, and the development of intercultural competence. By powerful applications, I mean using those coherent assumptions to select and implement effective interventions in cross-cultural and multicultural situations.

Unfortunately, the usual case is application without underlying coherent theory -- the increasing tendency for intercultural practice to be separated from intercultural theory. While we always claim to be turning theory into practice, the reality is that we are usually elaborating practice with, at best, some theoretical rationalization.

I think the criterion for every technique we have--whether it be role-play, simulation, inventory measurement, or any other kind--should be, "How does this activity fit with other activities being offered in this program to enact a theory of intercultural competence?"

This mentality is something I've incorporated into the programs I've worked with, including the Master's in Intercultural Relations offered through the University of the Pacific and the Intercultural Communication Institute and most recently the IDRAcademy sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Institute.

So my advice to a young person is, "Know what you're looking for. Pay attention to who it is you're studying with, not just where you're studying." And, second, "Sophisticated theory generates powerful applications," so look for the former and the latter will follow.

Well Milton, on behalf of the members of SIETAR Europa, I would like to thank you for this most interesting interview.

My pleasure.