The Digitalization of Intercultural Training

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The Digitalization of Intercultural Training

Back in the late 1960s, researchers at the U.S. Department of Defense developed a prototype software that allowed multiple computers to communicate on a single network. This was the beginning of the Internet. Back then, no one could imagine how this innovation, originally meant for the military, would radically transform all aspects of our lives.

Today, the Internet is rewriting the way we behave — online shopping, YouTube, Zoom, video games, digital newspapers. Work is shifting to where people live instead of people commuting hours a day to work. And the Covid-19 crisis has certainly accelerated this change.

We see this today in the way we do our training. Online teaching, that was to have been implemented over a course of years, was telescoped into weeks, if not days! We interculturalists have been thrown into a turbulent sea of change and online learning has hijacked in-person teaching.

SIETAR Europa conducted a survey to see if online training was working for you and how you were coping with it — co-editorialist Kirsten Wächter summed up the results (starts on page 9). And I have written about our experiences with this ongoing information revolution (starts on page 13).

No one will dispute that travel widen horizons; it’s a way to step away from the daily routine. And new countries, with its challenging events and ordeals, rewire our neurological pathways to the point of transfiguration. Our interviewee, Eithne Knappitsch, is quite the traveler herself. Raised in a remote village on the northern tip of Ireland, she went to Austria to study German as a university student. Some years later, fully integrated into that culture, she has become an intercultural authority in both the academic and professional worlds. Her experience of this journey can be found in our interview, beginning on page 3.

As the pandemic shows no signs of slowing and we scramble to adjust, it’s sometimes good to step back and reflect on why we are all here. Columnist Dan MacLeod channels Jean-Jacques Rousseau as he looks at the path each life takes as we travel through time (see page 15).

Lastly, the U.S. presidential election is coming up and we thought a humorous, historical British perspective might provide some relief from what threatens to develop into a bizarre and disturbing contest (starts on page 16).

Enjoy the reads.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
Interview with

Eithne Knappitsch

A discreet and divine interculturalist

Anyone who has travelled to Ireland will tell you, it’s a wonderful country full of romanticism and eternal optimists. You can see it in the bright eyes and warm smiles, the love of language, learning and laughter. It’s no wonder that Ireland has become a desired travel destination.

Likewise, the Irish are ardent travelers. In fact, one reoccurring theme in Irish culture is emigration. Whether it was forced, as during the potato famine of the 1840s, where one million left, or of artists like Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, who found their voices and achieved recognition abroad, the Irish have continuously roamed the world, making valuable human contributions with their sense of exuberance and festivity.

Continuing in this tradition is our interviewee, Eithne Knappitsch. Raised in both Gaelic and English on the northernmost peninsula in Ireland, she took up French and German at university. Upon graduating, she went to Austria to teach English and perfect her German. It was supposed to be a one-year stay, but fate would have it that she’d stay and help create one of the most dynamic and innovative intercultural management programs in all of Europe at the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences. She is now its director.

Additionaly, she is President of SIETAR Austria and curator of TEDx Klagenfurt. Her Irish spirit, discreet brilliance and professionalism clearly stand out in her YouTube video series “Thriving Thursdays: Mindfulness Matters” (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9r3Tvk_dHi3rPSqIAxB6iA), where she has organized a series of online talks with some of the top minds in the field. Her ability to bring out the best in people is uncanny, somehow reminded me of Mozart’s gift for melody. With that in my mind, I began my interview.

How did your interest in intercultural relations begin?

I have often thought about this in the past and for me, there are so many key experiences. For one, I grew up in Carndonagh, a small town of 2000 people on the Inishowen peninsula, which is at the very top of the Republic of Ireland, farther north than British Northern Ireland. Even the Irish Tourist Board sometimes mistakenly thinks it’s not part of the Republic. It was a rural and secluded location, with a relatively homogeneous community. America was on one side of the peninsula and the other side, if it was a good day, the islands of Scotland. As we didn’t travel much then, I was always interested in what lay beyond that.

I remember as a young kid going to the beach and being told that part of the Spanish Armada had gone down nearby and that some of the Spanish sailors made it to the coast, interacted with the locals, and contributed to the prevalence of...
black hair, darker skin and brown eyes among the population. There was no clear DNA component behind the story but I thought all this was fascinating.

I also remember being very much affected by stories from my grandmother, about some of her family leaving to go to America and never coming back, particularly how two of her brothers living in America said that they could never come back because they were so heart-broken to have left.

I was brought up in a very strict Catholic family. There was a clear division of who was Catholic, who was Protestant because there were so few Protestants. But there was a small Protestant school. We had féis competitions; these are community-based festivals established to preserve Irish traditions. It’s very typical in Irish life. Young people would enter these competitions to do Irish dancing, recite poetry and storytelling. I also remember comments I couldn’t understand at the time: “Oh, that girl there is Protestant, you know from her name and because she’s wearing a particularly nice dress”. There was this perception that “they” were wealthier and had specific training.

When I was a teenager, we used to cross the border into British Northern Ireland and go to the biggest town nearby, Derry (or Londonderry), a 30 minute drive. It was always an exciting experience as we engaged in all sorts of smuggling – sitting on an Easter egg, a bottle of whisky, an electrical appliance. This was a sort of excitement, not too threatening; the worst thing that could happen was the goods could be taken. Also, there was a very strong military presence at the border, associated with violence in the area.

I went to the University of Ulster in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. For the entrance interview, my father drove me to Belfast. It was pre-GPS days and he didn’t feel comfortable going into the city because his number plates were clearly from the Republic, meaning you were a Catholic. If you asked for directions, you might be given the wrong information and you couldn’t park in certain streets because your tires might be punctured or worse.

All these associations impacted my interest in the intercultural world — identity, religion, politics, language, social interactions. Why did you go to Northern Ireland for your studies? It was simply for practical reasons. I was 17 and my parents didn’t want me to be too far away; Coleraine was relatively close. And, from a financial perspective, it was simply much cheaper.

And what did you study? I was a fluent Gaelic speaker, so I started my studies in ap-
Eithne Knappitsch — continued

The question of the Carinthian Slovene minority — language, culture, politics — was the basis of her PhD thesis.

plied foreign languages — French, German and European studies. Basically, I chose this program because there was a compulsory year abroad and I wanted to travel and experience life elsewhere.

Because my German wasn't as good as my French, I decided to come to Austria as an English-language teacher. I remember my German professors telling me, “Forget Austria for your German, it's a completely different language. The only place worse is Switzerland!” Despite their objections, I ended up in Klagenfurt in the province of Carinthia. It was a historical moment because of the political situation and election of the far-right Jörg Haider to Austrian Parliament.

Shortly after arriving, people from Northern Ireland who'd been watching the news were phoning and asking if I was safe! For me, it was another ha-ha moment of context, perception and media influence. It was then that I became interested in Carinthia — its history, politics, language and interactions, which eventually became my PhD thesis.

I got a job at the university in Klagenfurt lecturing on the subject, “Cultural Aspects in Northern Ireland”. I was quite young at the time, only 21, and was surprised that I could lecture at an Austrian university with just a Bachelor's. And often the students were older than me, which was quite an interesting challenge and great opportunity at the time.

Because of my job, I didn't want to move back to Northern Ireland. So I started my part-time PhD with the University of Northern Ireland. My thesis dealt with continuity and change in Carinthian politics and its impact on the Slovenian minority from 1972 to 2005. It was a combination of looking at the serious conflict around the issues of topographic signage, language rights, political instrumentalization of identity, and borders.

After finishing your PhD, did you continue teaching?

No, I actually went back to Belfast with my husband for a year and worked as a researcher at the Northern Ireland parliament. I ended up doing a lot of private bill research for the politicians. One in particular was on a possible Irish language Act for Northern Ireland. It was extremely interesting, obviously, because of tense interactions between politicians.

After that, my husband and I moved back to Klagenfurt because of his work, and there was an opportunity for me to lecture at the Fachhochschule Kärnten (Carinthia University of Applied Sciences) where I could combine my interest in intercultural communication, conflict and negotiations, and cross-border interactions within a business environment.

It seems you were the right person at the right place, at the right time. Intercultural themes were the big issues then. Is it still true today?
When I started, intercultural communication was very much valued. But today, it has sort of been diluted and incorporated into other courses or reduced to a four-hour workshop in the corporate world. There are these fads of intercultural or unconscious bias training where, all of a sudden, it’s an executive decision — everybody needs it, all the employees have to do it — but there’s little coherence or theory behind it, or depth to it.

I run a three-year program. I face a lot of questions around “what’s the value” for students who have a degree in intercultural management. The study of intercultural management has the potential to increase consciousness. It’s an incredible area to work in and it covers so many aspects.

I point out that if you are in a position of power, particularly if you have decision-making power, such as interviewing candidates, or assigning tasks and responsibilities, it is essential that you become aware of your interactions and manage these effectively. The more conscious your communication is, the more effective your decision-making becomes and the less likely you fall into the bias trap. That, in itself, makes a huge difference.

You mention unconscious bias and it touches on the fascinating field of how the brain functions. The latest research, using MRI technology, indicates strongly that we automatically create “in” and “out” groups, a form of tribalism, certainly not conducive for development of intercultural sensitivity. However, the evolutionary biologist Mark Pagel made an interesting statement about human nature, namely “prosperity triumphs over tribalism”. Would you care to comment on this?

I agree in part with this observation. There’s a lot of truth in the fact that economic prosperity reduces the conflicts we have around social, cultural, interracial and interreligious issues. Prosperity impacts on the psychological element of well-being. Health systems also depend on general prosperity and causal relationship with mental issues. If we think about economic crisis, unemployment, and how they impact particular sectors of the society, there are increased issues of fear, anxiety and trust. These are the processes that influence the brain’s search for similarity and amplify stereotypes.

I remember taking part in an interesting lecture in 2007 while working in the Northern Ireland Assembly. There was an American economist discussing how to increase foreign direct investment in Northern Ireland. One problem was the economic issues the country was facing, such as extremely high unemployment. This, in turn, manifested itself in increased intergroup tension, destabilizing the political situation. All this had an impact on foreign direct investment. One of the things we see when we have flows of migrants, particularly among communities, where there is high unemployment, is increased intergroup tension. That’s very difficult to deal with on any level.
How has the Covid 19 affected the teaching at your school?

At the School of Management we moved straight into online teaching. All courses moved online with the support of the IT department, who were wonderful and seemed to work round the clock to help colleagues with less experience in the online environment. I've been working with Barbara Covarrubias Venegas on a Global Case Study Challenge (https://www.globalcasestudychallenge.com) which we've run for two years in an online environment. This meant that I was already quite experienced in online teaching but I still had to totally overhaul most of my courses to make them effective in an online context.

While some staff resorted to virtual frontal teaching, others became very creative with online course design. We tried to keep close contact with the students, many who returned to their homes across the globe and others who remained here in Villach. Initially the students coped very well. We offered mindfulness sessions twice a week, some informal meet-ups just to check in with students, and the sports club provided online activities. The main problem seems to have been that most lecturers did not reduce their teaching content and therefore the workload for the students was very high. Students appreciated courses that included interactive methods but at the end of the semester, they were exhausted. Students who choose Intercultural Management are very communicative and enjoy engaging with others and they particularly missed the social contact.

Next semester I'm planning to move to hybrid teaching across the entire ICM program — onsite and online combined. I fear that a number of students will not be able to return for the start of semester, so I feel this is the only real option available. We have new technical equipment now to facilitate this. I think that in future we will make much better use of a combination of online and offline education and training, but I feel that we sometimes underestimate this a little and there's a definite need to also focus more on the didactics of taking our courses online.

Another area of your research and work is cross-border relations. How has the Covid 19 crisis affected the interactions of people in border areas?

We have been doing some interesting work with the project “Cross-Border Challenge 2020” (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/developing-key-competencies-working-across-cultures-case-svetla-buko/). One part of the project is studying the bilingual Slovenian-Italian city of Nova Gorica, or Gorizia as it is called in Italian. Svetlana Buko, an intercultural colleague, and I used this area for our students to look at intercultural, multilingual issues. Transalpina Square is right in the middle of the city; it’s where the two cultural communities meet, a symbol of European union integration created after World War II.
It was supposed to remain open during the Covid 19 crisis until different behaviors became problematic. Italians were going to the Slovenian bars, creating concerns about health issues. The two mayors got together to try to resolve the issues, but eventually a physical border was set up across the square. This was quite striking considering the square is a symbol of European unity. A lot of grass-roots protests developed and people were re-discussing this idea of the border — does it represent a line of separation or a point of unity. One of the local doctors put up drawings done by children in the hospital, illustrating that we are all in this together. The fire brigades created symbolic rainbows of unity. Both parts of the city began to offer online Italian and Slovenian language courses and they were overwhelmed by the demand. It was amazing. We used the situation to have students research and document what was happening in the Austria-Italy-Slovenia cross-border region in this time of crisis.

I then joined on the team of 30 people preparing these once-a-year events. Last year, I was asked to head the team, which I didn’t initially want to because of time pressure. But I thought to myself, I teach these things. It is an absolute honor and a fantastic new opportunity. So I am now curator, taking up the challenge to continue these wonderful encounters with international speakers and the people of Klagenfurt.

I thought it’s wonderful for promoting interactions, discussions and networking. I’ve been a member of SIETAR Austria for many years. I see a number of issues that need to be addressed, above all how we can make it more transparent, effective, and how to attract and include more young people.

Nonetheless, I think SIETAR Europa has so much potential in promoting the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas in business, science and society. In times of internationalization, SIETAR has become an important forum, locally, nationally and globally. Now in Covid-19 times, I hope we can work towards becoming more effective in enacting positive change across all our societies.

What do you think of SIETAR, how do you see its future?

I noticed that you became the curator of TEDx Klagenfurt in 2019. How did that come about?

TEDx Klagenfurt has been running for the last eight years. The first time I attended an event, I was amazed by the generosity of the speakers with their ideas, their time and willingness to interact, which is similar to the intercultural world. It’s run in English and I was surprised by the fact that you can engage with the speakers and the communities.

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What do you think of SIETAR, how do you see its future?
What is the situation we are facing?

When the lockdowns began in March to battle the spread of COVID-19, many intercultural trainers saw their world being turned upside down. Courses were cancelled completely or moved online. Many clients were reluctant to do the latter as they could not imagine how an online workshop would work.

Suddenly, trainers were working on multiple fronts: trying to keep clients and teaching assignments; boosting their own technical skills to use different online platforms; tweaking and adapting activities to make them work online; learning about the teaching features and opportunities that different platforms offered, and learning to manage their classes and participants in a virtual classroom.

The editorial committee of the SIETAR Journal saw these changes happening all around and now that practitioners have endured the frantic first stage of moving courses online, we asked them in a questionnaire, “What is working for you? What do you miss?” In this article, I will summarise our respondents’ answers and comments.

This inventory-taking will hopefully benefit you in your own online teaching. Responses were, of course, mixed and represent the range of experience a lot of us made, for example, how easy or difficult it was to move online classes (see chart), or who we teach, i.e. one-on-one or in small to medium or even large groups, and in which format, ranging from seminars or tutorials and webinars to workshops. Quotes from the respondents are used as headers (in italics).

What exactly do we mean by teaching online?

“When designing for online learning, cognitive learning is best delivered asynchronously and emotional and behavioural learning through synchronous delivery.”

Teaching online entails a number of things: firstly, instead of direct contact, encounters happen through a technical medium. Secondly, there are synchronous and asynchronous components. Synchronous components are live sessions in which you have immediate contact with your participants, sharing exercises and materials and getting them to collaborate and discuss. These can be called “virtual classrooms”.

The asynchronous tasks of teaching lessons are those where participants study on their own with the help of videos, prepare texts or presentations, or do research to prepare a live online session.

Which platforms do teachers work with?

“Platforms need to be intuitive, easy to navigate, and have multiply security settings.”
How has the Covid-19 crisis affected our intercultural teaching?

The most popular platform among our respondents is Zoom, used by more than 90%, followed by MS Teams (50%). Many trainers use multiple platforms as requested or required by the clients or teaching institutes. So trainers, especially when working freelance, need to embrace flexibility in order to meet those needs.

The platform may also be pre-installed in the environment, e.g. a company or university. Other important selection criteria are bandwidth and connectivity, accessibility and reliability, as well as user-friendliness and familiarity. If you work freelance, then another factor to be considered is the price if you offer the platform as a trainer to your students.

How do participants benefit from online teaching?

“The online workshop situation is also great to focus on the intercultural differences in the online communication – I’ve added this topic to my workshops as this is a new situation for my participants who teach multicultural groups of students online.”

One advantage that several trainers mention is that removing travel and distance barriers helps them reach a wider audience. Teaching online, services are not limited by travel expenses or organising the logistics of getting participants into one physical place. They can all attend the same class online, provided the time zones allow that. In addition, respondents comment that working with virtual teams in a virtual environment makes the preparation for this kind of work more realistic.

Participants often join online classes from home and therefore seem to be more relaxed and less distracted by work issues. Trainers use breakout rooms and other tools, such as brainstorming on a whiteboard, that allow for group work and engaging their students. These tools were cited as benefits. In an online gathering, it is especially important to vary activities in order to keep participants involved and to provide a sense of connection with the group.

Once a strong connection has been established, open discussion and dialogue with active contributions seem to be possible. Although this seems similar to a face-to-face classroom, trainers report that participants often behave differently online: While some participants shine, interact easily, and love seeing others (and themselves) on video, others hide and feel uncomfortable with the video on. The latter group, according to some trainers, seem to contribute more when they feel unobserved. This insight highlights the challenge of how to handle the video feeds.
How has the Covid-19...
— continued

As in a f2f (face-to-face) classroom, involvement and variety seem to be the key, either by making extensive use of what the platform offers, or by bringing in external apps: There are a number of tools that can be used for polls and questionnaires, and drawing and writing tools to draw participants’ responses and ideas. You may find that you can recycle your materials online with a certain amount of creativity, or have to design completely new workshops.

What are we missing when teaching online?

“Online is more of a low context setting, so high context factors are missed. This is very limiting in the intercultural context.”

Despite all the advantages that online teaching can provide, there are also setbacks. Quite a few respondents state that they still prefer face-to-face training for a number of reasons.

Often, they miss the casual communication, feeling the vibes in the room, the informal exchange with the participants and getting their reactions in between sessions. One major disadvantage is that it is not so easy to pick up on all the nonverbal and personal cues and read people’s level of engagement. Often, face-to-face exchanges are seen as richer as pointed out by one respondent.

The lack of physical movement and presence, especially when required by some activities, is another downside. Some interactive activities just don’t work online and respondents comment that they had to skip tasks where the goal is the actual interaction, e.g. when experiencing social distances.

How to manage yourself as an online trainer?

“The online medium influences the teaching and facilitating methods. You have to be aware that factors like participants’ technical know-how, facilities, and openness to online ways are relevant. You need to plan more time (technical questions), make clear what you want them to do, and use feedback methods.”

As we need to give more instructions, we have to slow down the pace and use more functional language to check if people follow. That might change the natural free-flowing participation, and, in addition, people can get too focused on getting most of this valuable screen time and forget to take breaks. This fact can lead to fatigue and exhaustion among the trainers as well as the participants.

Thus think carefully about the timing of your sessions: ninety minutes can be a long time online. On respondent recom-
How has the Covid-19...
— continued

Online teaching can be quite satisfying if well prepared.

mends that “is better to organize courses that last 3 hours per day tops, all-day-long courses are very tiring especially for the trainer.”

Remember that for you as a trainer it can be very stressful to be ‘on’ all the time: allow participants to engage with each other and share – there is no need to be in the driver’s seat the whole time. Particularly in longer sessions, you might want to appoint a co-moderator to take care of the chat or a scribe for collecting ideas on a whiteboard.

Assigning group work, you can allow yourself to switch off your camera for a few minutes. And while you might be very excited by all the new features and functions offered to you, bear in mind that participants might feel overloaded with all those functions – select tools carefully to suit your purpose.

How to master the transition from f2f to online?

“Participate in some online courses prior to running your own course, especially if you do not have much online experience, maybe in a seminar or online meeting with other trainers who are running online intercultural trainings to exchange ideas and tips.”

COVID-19 is not going to disappear quickly. Although f2f sessions and workshops will become possible (again), a lot of teaching will be done online in the future because clients have seen that it works and that it saves them considerable effort and resources. Therefore, I would like to close with some advice that our respondents provide to colleagues who are just starting to teach online.

First of all, trainers need to invest in their own training. Update your virtual skills, learn about the settings, and experience your platform from the participant’s perspective. Do not underestimate the time and effort the transition requires. Run a test session, preferably with other trainers.

Becoming an online trainer should involve preparing your environment well (the platform, your background and appearance) and the tools and activities you are going to use. It also seems useful to keep a balance between interactive activities, e.g. polls, word clouds, chat, and breakout rooms, and time for reflection and integration during the workshop or webinar.

Beware that while you need to practice using the technology, you may also want to think of a back-up plan in case technology fails: do not assume everyone has stable internet and a laptop.

In the end, remember that teaching should be fun: don’t lose your sense of humour and collaborate with your students (who can often help with the technical issues, too). Technology will not do the teaching for you, but it can help you to become a better teacher if you use it wisely.
My first experiences with Online Teaching

by Patrick Schmidt

Before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out last March, I, like most facilitators, had little experience with online teaching. This is not to say we haven’t been indirectly exposed to its potential — all of us have experienced online conversations or meetings with colleagues, using Skype or now, Zoom. These are nice mediums for communication, a step up from e-mail. But I never gave serious thought to using them for teaching.

The pandemic turned everything upside down. Suddenly, my company clients informed me that one-to-one trainings would be done online with either the MS Teams or Zoom platforms. Because these communication tools were in many ways like Skype, I quickly learned the ins and outs for a simple intervention. And after several one-day trainings, I found that these platforms worked almost as well as in-person teaching. A pleasant surprise for me.

But would you have the same result with an intensive, block course for university students? I’d been teaching a class, entitled “Intercultural Communications: U.S.A. and Germany” at the Karlsruhe Institut für Technologie. This was a three-day seminar, spread over two weekends with about 15 students.

When the lockdown began in Germany, I was told that I’d have to conduct it online and had three weeks to make the transition. I was thinking, “How will I keep the students’ interest for three days?” This was a completely different ball game compared to a one-day course for one or two people. Nonetheless, I decided to take up the challenge. It was a good way to keep up with new technology and a chance to see teaching with fresh new eyes.

The institute offered a two-hour virtual training for the MS Teams platform. It was a speedy introduction and, as one can imagine, the outcome was less than satisfactory. Additionally, there were too many lecturers (60) listening in, so no one could acquire any real skills for working in a virtual classroom.

I realized I’d have to learn on my own. Fortunately, my daughter had just received online training for Zoom at her school and I ended up receiving five 30-minute private lessons from her and was able to reach some sort of technical mastery. Zoom was now my preferred platform.

That was just one part of the challenge; there was also the content aspect. As I had never “performed virtually” in front of a group, I was afraid that I might be boring, which in my mind would make the course a complete fiasco. It was then I began to re-think the meaning of teaching in virtual terms. It was sort of like becoming a “stranger” in my own classroom, examining and reflecting on my teaching strategies as if it were the first time.
Communicating virtually meant developing a new form of empathy — what’s it like for a student to sit in front of a computer and listen to a lecturer? I found myself re-viewing and rewriting group exercises and role-playing, adapting them to Zoom’s innovative “breakout room”. It allows teachers to send students into separate virtual rooms to work on tasks together.

One exercise I transformed was “Building a Tower with Spaghetti and Marshmallows”. I’ve used it over the years as an effective (and humorous) way for students to understand the importance of intercultural sensitivity — students receive different cultural roles and then negotiate within the group on how to build a tower. Obviously, spaghetti and marshmallows couldn’t be used in a virtual setting.

But Zoom has a “whiteboard” feature which permits people to write or draw their ideas. I instructed each group to think out and draw a futuristic tower for the university. Although it didn’t have the same effect as handling spaghetti and marshmallows, the cross-cultural discussions and crazy designs generated lots of laughter and interest. More importantly, people experienced what it was like to work in a multicultural group.

Another task that worked well with the breakout room was international negotiations. I split the class up into two groups — American and German — and each received a cultural briefing, then designated one person to be the negotiator. The ensuing exchange played out extremely well...better than I’d expected.

At the end of the seminar, I asked the students to write about what they learned in terms of intercultural competence. The commentary was overwhelmingly positive — nobody had been bored and they were highly satisfied with the class, compared to their other on-line courses. This may be due to the fact that most of their courses are in engineering, a line of study that is not easy to humanize in the classroom.

Despite these initial positive experiences, I still have lingering doubts on whether this form of instruction is the future. In my mind, effective teaching is carried out via the Socratic method, a form of argumentative dialogue between teacher and students designed to stimulate critical thinking. Even more importantly, we all have a yearning to be inspired by someone. Personal contact with teachers plays an inordinate role in inspiring individual intellectual development.

The computer screen is no substitute for genuine human contact. We should never forget that.
Il était une fois...

River

by Dan MacLeod *

The river looked back on its own trajectory and was astonished to have travelled so far, even as it continued on.

Trajectories. There were so many leading to now leading to next, so many changes in direction.

North and south and sideways, up then back down and on and on.

A river ignores gravity for spontaneity the way a human ignores chronology in favor of the present moment, both nonetheless destined to follow their inevitabilities.

Hesitations, turn-backs in as a maze, a rivulet going nowhere until it does...and brings the river with it, an object in motion, gaining in strength, in depth and width and weight and speed and sound and fury.

Rock-slides and beaver-dams and storms and floods, as in a life, human or river. Seasons that freeze or free.

Peaceful stretches where the water flows like a song, as natural as natural, the universe unfolding.

The sky flowing overhead is part of the river, is its surface. The river carries within itself a reflection of the planet spinning, the cosmos of tides and rivers running to the sea, to their death in the sea.

The river is water and the water is everything it’s been through, the residue of its life even as that life bubbles and foams onward...

*In this piece, the author was inspired by the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who developed the idea of the relative malleability of man. It’s a theme that has become more relevant in today’s fast changing world of identity, multiculturalism and human rights.
A humorous look at British-USA cultural differences

A Message from the Queen

Over the years, many, many Americans and Brits have contributed online to this funny piece.

To the citizens of the United States of America, from Her Sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

In light of your failure to nominate competent candidates for President of the USA, and thus to govern yourselves, we hereby give notice of the revocation of your independence, effective immediately.

Her Sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will resume monarchical duties over all states, commonwealths, and territories (except North Dakota and Utah, which she does not fancy).

Our new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, will appoint a Governor for America without the need for further elections. Congress and the Senate will be disbanded. A questionnaire may be circulated next year to determine whether any of you noticed.

To aid and ease the transition to a British Crown dependency, the following rules are introduced with immediate effect:

1. The letter 'U' will be reinstated in words such as 'colour,' 'favour,' 'labour' and 'neighbour.' Likewise, you will learn to spell 'doughnut' without skipping half the letters, and the suffix '-ize' will be replaced by the suffix '-ise.' Generally, you will be expected to raise your vocabulary to acceptable levels. (look up 'vocabulary').

2. Using the same twenty-seven words interspersed with filler noises such as 'like' and 'you know' is an unacceptable and inefficient form of communication. There is no such thing as U.S. English. We will let Microsoft know on your behalf. The Microsoft spell-checker will be adjusted to take into account the reinstated letter 'u' and the elimination of '-ize.'

3. July 4th will no longer be celebrated as a holiday.

4. You will learn to resolve personal issues without using guns, lawyers, or therapists. The fact that you need so many lawyers and therapists shows that you’re not quite ready to be independent. Guns should only be used for shooting grouse. If you can’t sort things out without suing someone or speaking to a therapist, then you’re not ready to shoot grouse.

5. Therefore, you will no longer be allowed to own or carry anything more dangerous than a vegetable peeler. Although a permit will be required if you wish to carry a vegetable peeler in public.

6. All intersections will be replaced with roundabouts, and you will start driving on the left side with immediate effect. At the same time, you will go metric with immediate effect and without the benefit of conversion tables. Both roundabouts and metrication will help you understand the British sense of humour.
7. The former USA will adopt UK prices on petrol (which you have been calling gasoline) of roughly $10/US gallon. Get used to it.

8. You will learn to make real chips. Those things you call French fries are not real chips, and those things you insist on calling potato chips are properly called crisps. Real chips are thick cut, fried in animal fat, and dressed not with catsup but with vinegar.

9. The cold, tasteless stuff you insist on calling beer is not actually beer at all. Henceforth, only proper British Bitter will be referred to as beer, and European brews of known and accepted provenance will be referred to as Lager. South African beer is also acceptable, as they are pound for pound the greatest sporting nation on earth and it can only be due to the beer. They are also part of the British Commonwealth - see what it did for them. American brands will be referred to as Near-Frozen Gnat’s Urine, so that all can be sold without risk of further confusion.

10. Hollywood will be required occasionally to cast English actors as good guys. Hollywood will also be required to cast English actors to play English characters. Watching Andie MacDowell attempt English dialect in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was an experience akin to having one’s ears removed with a cheese grater.

11. You will cease playing American football. There is only one kind of proper football; you call it soccer. Those of you brave enough will be allowed to play rugby (which has some similarities to American football, but does not involve stopping for a rest every 20 seconds or wearing full body armour like a bunch of wimps).

12. Further, you will stop playing baseball. It is not reasonable to host an event called the World Series for a game which is not played outside of America. Since only 2.1% of you are aware there is a world beyond your borders, your error is understandable. You will learn cricket, and we will let you face the South Africans first to take the sting out of their deliveries.

13. You may retain the U.S. dollar, but you must replace the faces of American revolutionary rebels, such as George Washington, with Her Majesty’s.

14. An internal revenue agent (i.e. tax collector) from Her Majesty’s Government will be with you shortly to ensure the acquisition of all monies due (backdated to 1776).

15. Daily Tea Time begins promptly at 4 p.m. with proper cups, with saucers, and never mugs, with high quality biscuits (cookies) and cakes; plus strawberries (with cream) when in season.

God Save the Queen!

*PS*: Only share this with friends who have a good sense of humour (NOT humor)!
This book is a collection of firsthand reports, stories of how particularly challenging situations and conditions in the lives of expatriates and their families have been experienced and dealt with in unfamiliar cultural contexts. Many of those contributing to this volume are “serial expats”, namely those whose organizations or occupations involved them in multiple moves, often a few years here and there.

Many of my colleagues and I have been long engaged in offering orientation to departing or arriving expatriates. Often the largest cultural challenges are faced by the trailing spouses and family members. What is often missing is ongoing coaching in the new environment, and it is mostly left to individuals to find their cultural informants, particularly when surprised by unexpected conditions that create emergencies as well as ongoing challenging situations.

As an independent contractor who has lived more than half of my life abroad, without spouse or children, and conducted expatriate training on request, I vacillate between isolation and ignorance when it comes to these as “extraordinary experiences” as most are either not revealed in our relatively brief exchanges or emerge after we have had our sessions. Questions related to these should be a standard part of the intake inquiries made by training providers and practitioners.

Many of those recounting their stories of extraordinary experiences had some support from their sending organizations in facing unexpected circumstances, but the challenges of illness and disabilities often lie in culturally different approaches to assessing and managing them in the countries of expatriation, some of which may even lack the infrastructure and resources to understand and work with them.

The stories are quite articulate and well written—several of the authors being successful writers—often openly introspective in such a way that the reader can connect with the experiences in an empathetic way.

The book does not teach approaches to extraordinary experiences but first-person reports on how people faced and managed them raise consciousness and are instructive. They can point us in the direction of managing and expanding our self-awareness, self-management and enabling a broader empathy for others.

The storytellers’ accounts often reveal the reactions of those around them to their experiences, perspectives that are often missing in the expatriate stories we hear. It is my opinion that we need much more actual accounting, perhaps a new genre of reporting about how others observe and interpret us from their cultural, professional and personal points of view, both insights as well as stereotypes that may affect these. This book provides a good starting point.

Reviewed by George Simons
When it comes to Africa, my school geography and history classes failed me entirely. So, the opportunity to read and review Benoît Thery’s latest book delightfully filled a lingering desire to illuminate the darkest corner of my interculturalist’s mind.

Existing stereotypes of Africa and Africans will be quickly dislodged by page after page of plainly stated factual evidence. How is this massive continent shaped, how should it be defined, who and whence its peoples and what are their stories? That Africa appears to some to be without movement and history, ignores its enormously diverse and torrential past and says more about our lack of knowledge and interest than it does about continent itself.

What can beginners like myself learn from reading this book? Above all, we can acquire a new perspective shaped by the abundance of facts it relates. First, it addresses how we define and what we believe about Africa and its peoples. This is then enriched by a detailed historical panorama of the kingdoms and empires, over the centuries, as they developed and changed as well as disappeared due to both internal factors as well as conflicts with neighbors. It also traces the social effects and cultural impact of the numerous invasions from without, starting from antiquity onward, up to and including the details of the European colonization story which is not over, and we start to wonder over the Chinese chapter that is now being written.

In the second part to Management Adaptation in the African continent. The author explores how the dimensions of contemporary life, social and political structure, demographics, linguistic and cultural groupings and their diversity, pose intercultural challenges.

While many interculturalists may find the author’s use of the classic Hofstede dimensions a bit problematic, the rough comparisons that they provide at least give some focus on where to look for adaptation in managing and conducting business in a variety of African contexts. Several detailed case studies that follow this analysis, however, offer more context-rich awareness of dynamics involved in cross-cultural situations and lead to some considerations for comprehending them—adjusting our mentality—in order to respond and behave both appropriately and effectively.

Much wants more, of course. News media such as CNN and BBC have for some time now been offering regular programs portraying the African renaissance, in business, social progress, culture and the arts, which succeed to a degree in raising our consciousness. However, this book implicitly but clearly poses the deeper question about what is needed for the success of the African renaissance, how we see it, respect it, support it and even participate in it. The appearance of this volume coincides with SIETAR Europa’s initiation of a Special Interest Group on Africa and thus provides a vademecum for those interested in perusing these questions and filling what is a neglected area of knowledge and know-how for many in our profession. 

Reviewed by G. Simons
CALL FOR PAPERS AND ARTICLES

For 11 years, the SIETAR Europa Journal has been sharing inspiring insights and interviews that give readers a behind-the-scenes look into the ever-changing field of interculturalism.

The Journal aims to share and promote the work of academics, researchers, trainers, consultants, and teachers in the intercultural field. We want to know more about you and we want our readers to know more about you.

You are invited to submit your unpublished and original work to the SIETAR Europa Journal.

Topics of interest include:
Training or teaching experiences
Academic research, both in-progress and complete
SIETAR activities
Training tips and tools
Online learning

Submission guidelines
Submit your work as a Word or Write document
Limit texts to 1300 words
Include a human perspective

Process
Articles will be reviewed by the editorial committee, preference given to SIETAR members
Accepted authors will be notified one month before publication.

Send submissions to: communication@sietareu.org
SIETAR POLAND Congress 2020

Identities in the VUCA World

The theme of this year’s congress calls attention to the challenges and opportunities of managing and negotiating identities in today’s rapidly changing and unpredictable environments.

By including the acronym ‘VUCA’ in our conference theme we would like to invite you to join our comprehensive discussions and reflect on the conditions of ‘volatility’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘complexity’ and ‘ambiguity’, which characterize our modern-day cultures. In particular, we want to explore how people are adapting to the age of change and acceleration and how the demands placed on them by growing inter-connectivity and technological advances affect their personal, business, political and social identities.

Date: 18th to the 21st of February, 2021
Where: Krakow

For more information, click on http://sietar.pl/spl-congress-2020/

Digital diversophy® is here for you!

Our entire range of over 80 intercultural games is now available in simple PowerPoint format for use on Zoom & other meeting platforms. To obtain the games you need, to participate in free sample sessions online or receive facilitation coaching from our team, visit us at

www.diversophy.com or contact us at service@diversophy.com.
Dear SIETARians,

We invite you to share your knowledge and discuss your burning questions in our virtual events! Become a webinar speaker or join one of our highly interactive CCC Breaks to share insights, learn from other SIETARians and connect with the greater SIETAR community.

Once again in 2020 our events are proving to be very popular among SIETARians and interculturalists. In our webinars, we welcomed on average 150+ participants and covered topics ranging from gamification and neuroscience to Chinese culture. You have a topic you’re working on and would like to present within the 2021 SEU webinar series? Check out our past webinars in our SIETAR Europa YouTube Channel and submit your own proposal via this SIETAR Europa 2021 Webinar proposal form by October 6th, 2020.

You are asking yourself what does CCC Break stands for? Well, it is a Cross-Cultural Coffee Break: every participant grabs a cup of coffee (cappuccino, latte macchiato, espresso, you name it) and dives into a vivid exchange on an intercultural topic. And the best of all, IT IS YOU who decides what topic is going to be discussed. Every CCC Break is designed for the max. number of 10 participants in order to allow the maximum of interaction between our participants. Learn more about CCC Breaks 2020 (https://www.sietareu.org/events/cross-cultural-coffee-breaks/#event-list) and submit your burning question through this google form by October 25th, 2020.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Your SIETAR Europa Virtual Events Team
Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Webinars
Sept. 15, Wed 18.00 - 19.00 CET
"U.S. cultural values and the 2020 Presidential election"
Speaker: Melissa Hahn

Sept. 23, Wed 18.00 - 19.00 CET
"Take another look at the rear-view mirror" (Anti-racism learning series)
Speaker: Susan Holm

Oct. 15, Thurs 18.00 - 19.00 CET
"Skills 4.0 — Soft, but hard to get: Impact of digitization on training and leadership"
Speaker: Nina Dziatzko

Nov. 12, Thurs 18.00 - 19.00 CET
"How history builds values: Delivering culture-specific training — a focus on Brazil"
Speakers: Mariana de Oliveira Barros, Adrienne Sweetwater

CCC - Breaks
Sept 2, Wed., 11:00
“How do you handle ethical challenges in the client negotiation process taking into account the cultural perspective?”
Moderators: Maria Barbieru and Joanna Sell

Oct 27, Tues., 11:00
“How do we teach Artificial Intelligence not to discriminate in the recruitment process?”
Moderators: Camilla Deghert, Gradiola Kapaj

Nov 25, Wed., 11:00
“What are your experiences of conducting cross-cultural workshops for the social media generation?”
Moderators: Kalaivani Mattern and Camilla Deghert

SIETAR Deutschland Webinars
Sept. 23, Wed 17 - 18:30
"Sprechangst in interkulturellen Kontexten"
Speaker: Alexandra Jandausch
https://sietar-deutschland.de/rg-westfalen-online-treffen-22-09-sprechangst-in-interkulturellen-kontexten/

Sept. 24, Thurs 18:30 - 20:30
"Open Online Catalogue of Intercultural Tools for Vocational Education and Training"
Speaker: Simona Fabellini
https://sietar-deutschland.de/rg-muenchen-24-09-webinar-zu-open-online-catalogue-of-intercultural-tools-for-vocational-education-and-training/

Nov. 23, Mon 18:30 - 20:30
"Deep Culture Learning" Speakers: Matthieu Kollig und Anna Schwark
https://sietar-deutschland.de/rg-muenchen-23-11-webinar-deep-culture-learning/

Bath, United Kingdom
21-25 September, 2020
Designing and delivering intercultural training
This is a more advanced course for experienced intercultural trainers. Information at:
www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

Switzerland
23 October to 28 November, 2020
SIETAR SWITZERLAND CONGRESS 2020 GOES VIRTUAL!
It will be “dispersed”, with sessions spread from October 23rd to November 28th, 2020. More information at:
http://sietar.ch/congress-2020-program/

Ireland
5 - 7 November, 2020
SIETAR IRELAND CONGRESS 2020 (will be virtually dispersed)
Theme: Bridging our intercultural experiences and identities. Click at:
http://sietarireland.wixsite.com/sietarireland/events

Krakow, Poland
18 - 21 February, 2021
Identities in the VUCA World
The SIETAR-Poland congress calls attention to the opportunities of managing and negotiating identities in today’s rapidly changing world. More info at: http://sietar.pl/spl-congress-2020/

Dec 15, Tues., 11:00
“What creative methods could we use in the intercultural training evaluation process for the full illustration of the ROI?”
Moderators: Gabriela Weglowska and Gradiola Kapaj

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europa group, discussing Tackling Unconscious Bias
on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession. To join, click here:
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2740568

For more information, contact George Simons at diversophy@gmail.com

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SIETAR Europa
637 bd de la Tavernière
Residence l’Argentière - Bât E
F - 06210 Mandelieu la Napoule
Tel.: +33 4 93 93 36 59
communication@sietareu.org
www.sietareu.org