Intercultural competence for language teachers in Japan: Melding theory to practice

Sean Collin Mehmet
Shinshu University

This paper is loosely structured into two sections. The first section, which comprises the lion's share of the discussion, highlights some salient theories in the field of intercultural competence. These theories include A.J. Kraemer's research into parochial worldviews; C.I. Bennett's five assumptions for intercultural competence; Hanvey's concept of transpection; Triandis' culture assimilator paradigm; Gudykunst and Kim's analysis of the intercultural person; as well as E.T. Hall's concept of high context and low context cultures, in addition to his recommendations for effective cross-cultural pedagogy. The second, far more practical, section of this paper aims to offer readers some cross-cultural classroom activities, as well as some suggestions for safeguarding intercultural harmony in the workplace. These activities and practical suggestions stem from the theories of the first section. Bafa Bafa, perhaps the most widely-known intercultural simulation in use today, is an example of one classroom activity discussed in this paper. Other practical suggestions referred to include: the careful creation a cross-cultural awareness manual, one that avoids the omnipresent pitfalls of overgeneralizations and stereotypes; an employee language exchange program; a "teacher of the month" awards program; as well as the suggestion to be vigilantly aware of one's auditory volume, kinetic movement, and body language when speaking with colleagues from different cultures.

　　この紙は緩く2つのセクションに構造化されます。最初のセクション(議論の最も大きな部分を包括する)は異文化間の能力の分野のいくつかの顕著な理論を強調します。これらの理論は教区の世界観のA.J.クラーメルの研究を含んでいます；　　異文化間の能力のためのC.I.ベネットの5つの仮定; Hanveyのtranspectionの概念; Triandisの文化assimilatorパラダイム; Gudykunstとキムの異文 化間の人の分析; E.T.Hallの高度のコンテクストの概念と有効な異文化間の教育学のための彼 の推薦に加えた低度のコンテクスト文化と同様に。2番目、はるかに実用的です、この紙のセクションは、いくつかの異文化間の学級活動を読者に提供するのを目指します、仕事場に異文化間の調和を保護するためのいくつかの提案と同様に。これらの活動と実用的な提案は最初のセクションの理論に由来します。Bafa Bafa(恐らく今日の使用中の最も多くの広く知られている異文化 間のシミュレーション)はこの紙で議論した1つの学級活動に関する例です。 示された他の実　用的な提案は:慎重な創造a異文化間の認識マニュアル、過剰般化の遍在している落とし穴を避けるもの、およびステレオタイプ; 従業員言語交換プログラム;「月の教師」はプログラムを 与えます; 用心深く人の聴力ボリューム、運動の運動、およびボディー・ランゲージを意識している異文化から同僚と話すときの提案と同様に。

CHALLENGING
LOOKING IN
LOOKING OUT
ASSUMPTIONS

An inquiring mind could easily be forgiven for questioning the need for research into intercultural competence in a country that has, traditionally, been homogenous to the point of being insular. After all, anyone with even a passing interest in Japanese history will know that contact with the outside world was strictly prohibited during the Edo period. More recently, however, many ELT teachers in Japan, especially in the field of private sector English conversation, will know that there is not usually an abundance of cultural diversity in such classes.

So, are the ensuing paragraphs just another example of a researcher, clearly divorced from reality, holed up in the ivory tower of academia? The answer here might well be in the affirmative, were it not for the fact that in public schools nationwide, native speaking Assistant Language Teachers team-teach with Japanese Teachers of English on a daily basis. In addition to this, though, even in tertiary level language departments, there is more often than not a mixture of native speaking (NS) and non-native speaking (NNS) teachers. Given this, then, the field of intercultural competence can be viewed as one that does indeed have at least some relevance to Japan. This is especially true if one is of the opinion that the shrinking birth rate and the ageing population may well mandate increased levels of immigration to Japan, in the not-so-distant future.

Selected theories of intercultural competence

On page 286 of *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory And Practice*, C. I. Bennett defines "intercultural competence" as the ability to interpret intentional communications (such as language, signs, and gestures), some unconscious cues (such as body language), and interpersonal customs that are different from those one is normally exposed to (Bennett, 1999). The two dominant tenets of intercultural competence are empathy and communication. As well, Bennett has observed that intercultural competence includes recognition of the fact that communication between people from different cultures can be hindered by preconceived assumptions, or stereotypes, about the other's culture (Bennett, 1999).

A.J. Kraemer, for instance, has written that people can become so parochially immersed in their own culture that they simply cannot comprehend a communication based on a different set of norms, and cannot understand why a supposedly self-evident communication from them cannot be understood (Kraemer, 1975). The image that comes to mind here is of an English-speaking tourist in an Asian country raising her/his voice, convinced that this will somehow help the indigenous resident acquire English language proficiency.

In marked contrast to such a scene, Bennett has determined that there are five assumptions which relate to cross-cultural effectiveness. These are: 1) that language is the heart of culture and cognition; 2) that intercultural competence is enhanced by development of the ability to recognize cultural influences on their own cognition; 3) that there are modes of human communication which transcend cultural barriers; 4) that there are some facets of the diverse cultures within a larger society that can be identified, defined, and taught; 5) and lastly, that people can achieve a psychological balance between cultural pride and identity on the one hand, and an appreciation for different cultures on the other (Bennett, 1999). Paraphrased, this fifth assumption posits that once

people understand how their own language, experience, and cognition relate to their own culture, contrasts can be made with different cultures.

Eventually, such individuals might be able to attain a level of **transpection**, which is what R. Hanvey defined as "*the capacity to imagine oneself in a role within the context of a foreign culture*" (Hanvey, 1975). Nine years after this, Gudykunst & Kim (1984) characterized intercultural competence in terms of "the intercultural person." Such persons were ones who had achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural. They had cognitive, affective, and behavioural characteristics that were open to growth beyond the borders of any one culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984).

As with Bennett's list of the five assumptions that intercultural competence rests upon, Gudykunst & Kim have produced a list of the five characteristics of intercultural persons. Thus, intercultural persons have: 1) lived through experiences that challenge their own cultural assumptions, a prime example of such an experience would be culture shock, and that give insight into how their world has been formed by their culture; 2) intercultural persons can serve as facilitators for contacts between cultures; 3) they come to terms with the origins of their own ethnocentrism, and achieve an objectivity in viewing other cultures; 4) they develop a "third world," or third party, mentality which allows them to evaluate intercultural encounters more accurately; 5) and finally, they show cultural empathy and can "imaginatively participate in the other's world view" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). The literature that has been reviewed for this proceedings paper appeared to concur

that empathy is a crucial component of cross-cultural effectiveness. That is, it is one thing to develop knowledge and awareness of human similarities, yet quite another to develop empathy. Knowledge, while being an important factor, is an insufficient attribute—it does not automatically lead to intercultural competence. This will probably not come as a shocking surprise to many children's English teachers in Japan. After all, there is usually a correlation between children's opinions of their English teachers, and their opinions of the English language generally.

Now, H. Triandis (1975, 1989) has pioneered a paradigm for cross-cultural training called a culture assimilator. Simply put, Triandis designed this model to increase understanding between people from two different cultures. So, how does it work? Participants are given various culturally-relevant scenarios to read about, and as they work their way through these written passages they learn what aspects of the scenarios need to be attended to, and what details can be ignored. These scenarios, or "episodes," are chosen in such a way that they expose participants to situations which highlight the salient features of social events (Triandis, 1975, 1989). The intent is for participants to learn to discriminate and recognize the key features of various social situations. The reading passages are chosen to give participants contrasting experiences with situations that differ sharply. The cultural assimilator model emphasizes the distinctive features of interpersonal events, features which make the various situations very different from parallel ones participants have already experienced in their own culture. So, how can ELT practitioners in Japan make use of this culture assimilator paradigm?

The immediate response to this question is that the culture assimilator paradigm shares significant common ground with perhaps the most widely-known intercultural simulation in use today, Bafa Bafa. So, why should language educators consider using Bafa Bafa here in Japan? For starters, this simulation can help build awareness of how cultural differences can profoundly impact people in a school, be it private or public. As well, Bafa Bafa can motivate participants to rethink their behavior and attitude toward others. Thirdly, Bafa Bafa can serve to allow participants (students) to examine their own bias, and to focus on how they perceive differences. Fourthly, it can allow learners to examine how stereotypes are developed, barriers created, and misunderstandings magnified. Fifthly, Bafa Bafa can help identify diversity issues within a school, issues that need to be addressed. Note that these diversity issues do not relate solely to ethnicity, but may also include differences in socio-economic status, previous educational attainment, and other ascribed characteristics. Thus, Bafa Bafa could be of great pedagogical merit even in classes which are entirely homogenous.

In a nutshell, Bafa Bafa is premised upon the interaction of two different cultures, Alpha and Beta. Three representatives, or ambassadors, from each of the two cultures are exchanged. These representatives are on a fact-finding mission to learn about the other culture. All other members of the two cultures are to interact with the three "strangers," except for female members of the Alpha culture, who are prohibited from interacting with people they don't know. The three representatives then return to their original cultures, and report their findings. These findings are invariably the same: the diplomatic envoys felt lost, confused, invisible, alienated, *et cetera*, in the other culture.

After this, all students are encouraged to respond to these negative feelings. They discuss how cross-cultural communication problems were solved during the simulation. Typically, some students withdraw, others get angry, some seek revenge on the other culture, while some totally discount this "rival" culture's values. Finally, teachers should emphasize that if participants merely focus on solving these problems (i.e. withdrawal, anger, revenge, or cultural discounting) the cultural differences will usually appear to be greater than they really are. However, when Bafa Bafa participants are able to discuss the common intercultural problems that they all shared (i.e. how to feel welcome, competent, or valued when interacting with another culture) they then draw closer together. They can then embody & personify Gudykunst and Kim's five characteristics of intercultural persons.

Now, in N. Dresser's *Multicultural Manners: New Rules of Etiquette for a Changing Society,* a model somewhat similar to Bafa Bafa is used as the organizational framework. The book has three sections: 1) common blunders that occur when people from different cultures interact; 2) blunders that could arise when they holiday or worship together; and 3) common blunders with multicultural health practices (Dresser, 1996). As per Triandis' paradigm, specific case studies and real-world scenarios with post mortem, written debriefings serve to instruct readers in what needs to be attended to, and what can be ignored. However Dresser, in contrast to Triandis, does not attempt to search out the "cultural principles" shared by the thematically grouped

scenarios of her three sections. Note that these cultural principles will be examined in the next paragraph. Dresser, then, has configured this "how to" guide as a thematically organized, prescriptive cross-cultural resource. Given that it refrains from searching out the cultural common ground shared by different groups, this resource may be of only limited use for those ELT educators interested in intercultural awareness.

Returning briefly to the culture assimilator model, as participants receive more training in its various scenarios, they generally become increasingly able to glean the common features shared by all the scenarios. Such shared commonalties are what Triandis called cultural principles (Triandis, 1975, 1989). After a participant has proceeded through approximately six scenarios dealing with the same cultural principle, she/he is presented with a summary sheet, a sheet in which the principle is stated as a conclusion (Triandis, 1975, 1989). Thus, if a participant has not "clued in to" the cultural principle by this point, it would simply be given to her/him.

To illustrate this paradigm, Triandis has provided the grossly, perhaps carelessly, overgeneralized example of "black/white subcultural differences" (Triandis, 1975, 1989). The somewhat surprised reader learns that "Black subjects have a tendency to assume that all white persons are prejudiced against blacks" (Triandis, 1975, 1989, pp. 70-71). Triandis goes on to explain how a cultural assimilator model could be utilized to bridge this cultural gap, and to show African Americans that not all Caucasians are racist! Granted that Triandis wrote this before the age of political correctness, but eight years into the twenty-first century

few would contest that he would do well to replace this questionable example with one that is less of a sweeping generalization. After all, this researcher alone has met more than a few persons of African descent who were not convinced that all Caucasians discriminated against them!

In E.T. Hall's article "Unstated Features of the Cultural Context of Learning," not only does the author put forward another paradigm for cross-cultural effectiveness, but he also makes five recommendations for such intercultural competence. However, the first section of this article concerns itself with contrasting low context cultures with high context ones. Low context cultures are ones in which meaning is assembled from parts, like words which are themselves meaningful (Hall, 1985). Meaning changes with the selection of parts, as well as their arrangement. For example, "The man bit the dog," versus "The dog bit the man" (Hall, 1985, p. 164). Examples of low context cultures include North America and Western Europe.

On the other hand, meaning in high context cultures is not so much assembled by the selection of component parts as it is extracted from the specific environment that surrounds one. High context cultures inhabit a "sea of culture" that is collectively shared (Hall, 1985, p. 164). All, or most, of the component parts of meaning interrelate to make the environment meaningful (Hall, 1985). Examples of high context cultures include the Pueblo, many indigenous African cultures, the Russians, and the Japanese.

In their *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* article "Silence in Japan and the United States," Hasegawa and Gudykunst have done a commendable job of summarizing E.T. Hall. They write that, according to Hall, low context

communication involves making direct and precise statements (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998). In contrast, high context communication involves the use of understatements, indirect statements, and interpreting pauses in conversations (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998). Not surprisingly, low context communication is a feature of individualistic cultures, while high context communication is emphasized in collectivistic ones.

Simplified, Hall's building block approach to meaning-making allows for meaning to be faithfully translated from low context to high context cultures, and *vice versa*. This paradigm, then, acts as a bridge spanning the chasm separating the construction of meaning in low context and high context cultures. Now, it has been seen above how the number five appears to be a special one for intercultural communication theorists, and Hall is no exception. Thus, he lists five "important microcultural topics," or influences, that impact upon his building block model: 1) rhythm patterns ranging from those at the kinesic (body movement) level in the classroom to work and activity patterns for the day, month, and year; 2) differences in listening behaviour which signal attention and deference; 3) group pressures that result in reluctance on the part of the individual to exceed the performance level of the entire group- this is especially true in Japan; 4) differences in accepted voice level and kinesics on the part of educators; 5) and finally, awareness of unconscious racism and ethnocentric bias (Hall, 1985).

In terms of recommendations for effective cross-cultural pedagogy, Hall, maintaining consistency, posits five of them. The first of these relates to the commonalties shared by all human cultures: the term that he uses for such commonalties is "interfaces" (Hall, 1985). Next, he recommends that indigenous education systems be encouraged and increased, and that these build on past successes. As well, Hall makes the controversial recommendation that outstanding educators be rewarded. The fourth recommendation is that cross-cultural education needs to be highly aware of different learning styles; while the final recommendation advocates a wider recognition of the importance of "the microculture of education" (Hall, 1985, p. 170). In the increasingly cross-cultural Japan of the year 2008, language educators need to understand the differences and similarities amongst the various cultures represented in their classrooms.

While the conclusion that more research into intercultural competence, what Hall terms "cultural interface," is needed is a valid one, certain elements of the article did appear to be somewhat dated. Examples of this would include his repeated use of the terms "white" and "Indian"; his assertion on page 171 that foreign journalists in Japan are assisting it by using television and the cinema to spread the use of English; as well as his observation, on page 170, that while it is commonly believed in the West that all children learn the same way, this is not actually the case. Of course, Howard Gardner's widespread popularity has made all educational stakeholders keenly aware of multiple intelligences and different learning styles. Moreover, the internet revolution has also had a profound impact on the intercultural competencies needed by language teachers from Hokkaido to Okinawa.

Intercultural competence theories and the daily practice of language teachers

Although stereotypes and shallow over-simplifications are a definite danger to be avoided, the drafting of a cross-cultural awareness manual for teaching environments where native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) work together could help reduce intercultural friction. With little doubt, such a manual would have to adhere to C. I. Bennett's two *sine qua non* facets of intercultural competence: empathy and communication (Bennett, 1999). Specifically, the manual could begin by relating Bennett's five assumptions of intercultural competence to the specific teaching environment. It has been seen how the first of these assumptions posits that language is the heart of culture and thinking (Bennett, 1999). Given that many NNS teachers and administrators would like their foreign staff to acculturate to Japan as quickly as possible, this provides theoretical proof for the idea of implementing a weekly employee language exchange. Such a language exchange program could last from one hour to two hours per week- in Utopian cases, perhaps even longer.

Now, the second of Bennett's assumptions stipulates that intercultural competence is enhanced by the development of the ability to perceive the cultural influences on one's own cognition (Bennett, 1999). Accordingly, a stereotype-free, intercultural awareness manual would do well to examine, and discuss, how many Western cultures have been informed by a pluralistic Judeo-Christian heritage; whereas Japanese culture has been influenced by a Shinto and Buddhist, more homogenous heritage. Specifically, the key tenets of these world religions would be compared and contrasted.

Since the cultural influences on a population could quite easily constitute the subject matter of several monographs, it must be noted that, in addition to religious history, the mass media, the political *milieu*, the economy, social norms, etiquette, music, drama, poetry, not to mention the visual arts, all influence an individual's cognition. Of course, the social composition of a culture, that is whether it is more individualistic or more collectivist, will also impact upon how its denizens think. Given this, it is at best doubtful to think that an awareness manual would be able to do justice to the full cornucopia of cultural influences. Instead, priority could perhaps be given to the cultural influences that are more pertinent to the specific working, and teaching, environment. Apart from religious history, examples here would include social norms, etiquette and behavior, as well as the social composition of the target cultures.

Bennett's third assumption concerns the modes of human communication that transcend cultural barriers (Bennett, 1999). Although a seemingly inconsequential triviality, conscientious NS language teachers in Japan would do well to smile as much as possible! They should also be encouraged to refrain from whispering to each other in front of NNS staff members; to be active listeners; to keep their office doors open whenever possible; to speak interculturally in soft, courteous tones; and to engage in inviting, non-threatening, body language when conversing with NNS colleagues. Three more esoteric examples of human interaction that are common, for example, to both the West and Japan include treating colleagues with kindness and respect; placing a high value on personal integrity and honesty; as well as placing a high value on hard work. These

last points would definitely be important principles for any cross-cultural awareness manual. And, even though Japan has not had a conspicuous Christian heritage, "doing unto others as one would have them do unto oneself" is a major cornerstone of both cultures.

While some of these suggestions are clearly more feasible than others, they never-the-less share the quality of being able to transcend cultural barriers. As such, they are all worthwhile entries for any self-respecting cross-cultural awareness manual.

The fourth assumption of intercultural competence concerns defining and learning the elements of a culture that are specific to it (Bennett, 1999). This is exactly what N. Dresser has accomplished in the above-mentioned 1996 publication. Moreover, the above discussion on E. T. Hall revealed how many western democracies are **low context** societies, and Japan a high context one. What features are unique to each? The culturally unique elements of Japan, and to a lesser extent Western democracies, have already been covered in the preceding discussion. Although, it is worth revealing that cultural predispositions tend to be generalizations. As such, they are replete with numerous exceptions.

Bennett's fifth and final assumption, the one dictating that once a person understands the influences on their own culture they can better appreciate other ones, can be readily applied to many Japanese language teaching situations (Bennett, 1999). That is, NS educators in Japan can remain proud of their ethnicity, and still fully appreciate Japan at the same time. Presumably, there would perhaps be less intercultural friction in many workplaces if NS staff

members were more receptive to Japanese culture. This once again leads into Triandis' culture assimilator paradigm, since these NS educators would do well to search out the cultural principles, what Hall terms interfaces, common to both Western democracies and Japan. Not only is there common ground shared between these five assumptions, then, but the link between Bennett, Triandis, and Hall bares witness to some theoretical common ground, as well.

Given that this particular researcher has spent a good portion of his life overseas, he is convinced that nothing makes an individual more aware of the forces acting on her/his own culture than being removed from it. As an example, Canadians often feel most in tune with the elusive Canadian identity when they are abroad! As a result of this heightened awareness of their own cultural heritages, Bennett's fifth assumption would posit that the NS staffers at Japanese educational institutions are in a prime position to appreciate the host culture. So, why is this not always the case?

One factor here might be the unequal treatment meted out to the NS teachers at many private "*eikaiwa*" and cram schools, and the resulting bad blood between them and their NNS counterparts. If such cram schools, and franchised "*eikaiwa*" schools, offered a working environment which was more egalitarian, the permanent teachers might feel less animosity towards the more transitory foreign instructors, who would then be in a better position to realize this fifth assumption. Most regrettably, it is not clear when this unbalanced *status quo* will change.

Both the idea of a cross-cultural awareness manual, as well as the related idea of intercultural competency workshops, would have to include Gudykunst and Kim's

(1984) five characteristics of the intercultural person. Especially relevant here would be Gudykunst and Kim's third and fifth characteristics. To reiterate, characteristic three held that intercultural persons are able to come to terms with their own ethnocentrism, and objectively view other cultures. So, NS language teachers need to be acutely aware of their own cultural biases, and to not expect everything in the host country to be as it was back home. Similarly, the Japanese, or NNS, staff should perhaps try to be more cognizant of the fact that Western democracies are often low context societies, and thus their citizens tend to be unique individuals. According to Fanjoy (1999), not all the NS teachers walking through an institution's front doors will be as similar to their predecessors as they would have been if they were all Japanese.

NNS educators also stand to benefit from adherence to Gudykunst and Kim's fifth characteristic of intercultural persons. If all educators, regardless of ethnicity, could walk the proverbial mile in the other culture's shoes, presumably the intercultural conflict would be decreased. This is because cultural discrimination is usually rooted in some form of ignorance, and walking a mile in the other's shoes clearly makes one more knowledgeable about that other. This fifth characteristic relates to Bennett's assertion that empathy is one of the two crucial traits of intercultural competency. After all, it would be difficult to see through another's eyes without accruing empathy for them.

In terms of the five microcultural components of Hall's building block model, which itself facilitates smooth interrelations between low and high context cultures, there are three that are particularly pertinent to many language

classes in Japan. The second component of this model advises those who would bridge cultural gaps to be aware of differences in listening behavior, which can signal attention and deference. Given that Westerners can often be more vocal listeners than the Japanese, it is conceivable that policy makers and administrators have perceived such "vocality" as a lack of suitable deference. Since the vertical stratification of Japanese society derives from Confucianism, wherein employees always defer to supervisors, it is strongly possible that this "vocality" could exacerbate intercultural friction. For instance, many NS teachers this particular researcher has encountered over the years are not shy about complaining directly to school administrators about having to work on Christmas day.

Hall has further observed that individuals in high context societies are generally reluctant to exceed the performance level of the whole group. At many language schools here in Japan, even disgruntled Japanese staff members are reluctant to complain openly for this reason, as well as for fear of being singled out. The final element of the building block model to be discussed here has to do with differences in accepted voice level and body movement. The former has been remarked upon in a preceding paragraph- one covering the third assumption of intercultural competence. Yet again, the theoretical common ground in this field has been highlighted. Now, since occidentals generally communicate with more auditory volume and kinetic movement than the Japanese, it is possible that some NNS language teachers perceive this to be somewhat confrontational, or even quasi-antagonistic. As psychotherapy has shown, even if an individual is aware of certain cultural traits on a

conscious level, and accounts for them consciously, there is still the possibility that these may be negatively received on a subconscious level. In this light, the foreign teachers would do well to moderate their voices and minimize physical gesticulations when conversing with their Japanese colleagues. This needs to be included in cross-cultural awareness manuals, as well as in related training sessions.

A final, practical application of the preceding theories concerns a "teacher of the month" awards program. Such an initiative could strengthen intercultural relations, in the sense that it would serve to unify all staff. This is because such an awards program would recognize teachers solely for their personal effort and diligence, rather than their ascribed characteristics. Hypothetically, such awards could foster increased communication between NS and NNS educators, which ties in directly to the work of Bennett (1999); they could, ideally, increase awareness of cultural principles, as envisaged by Triandis (1975, 1989); they could ideally lead to cultural interface, as envisaged by Hall (1985); and finally, they could also provide opportunities for the two target cultures to participate in the other's worldview, which touches upon the work of Gudykunst and Kim (1984).

Conclusion

While the above discussion served to highlight the fact that the theories of intercultural competence selected for this paper are not entirely autonomous, and that they do share common ground, it will be the aim of this conclusion to briefly reveal how all of this can, at least on paper, benefit foreign language educators working in Japan.

Bennett has maintained that the two crucial features of intercultural competence are empathy and communication. Few would argue that these qualities, easy to envision but difficult to realize on a continual basis, would also help improve the practice of pedagogy anywhere on the planet!

Hanvey's concept of transpection, not to mention Gudykunst and Kim's concept of the intercultural person, could have a direct, positive impact in many language learning environments. There is, however, also an indirect benefit, in that those professionals who are open to other cultures and to different ways of thinking and doing might well be more flexible than those who are less open-minded. Such flexibility is a valuable pedagogical commodity, especially given the recent pace of state-sponsored educational change.

In promoting cultural interface, Hall has advocated that cross-cultural educators should focus on that which unites all humans, as opposed to that which is divisive. The implications of this for both NS and NNS educators teaching language in Japan are clear. Whether dealing with gifted or challenged special education learners, rich or poor pupils, religious minority or religious majority ones, male or female ones, gay or heterosexual ones, it is vital for such educators to focus upon what brings together a community of learners. In other words, the mindset promoted by intercultural competence logically progresses towards non-cultural fringe benefits, ones that facilitate the creation of an inclusionary learning environment.

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