

Episode 2: What is an intercultural trainer?

Time	Speaker	
00:07	Joseph	Hello, I'm Joseph Shaules. Welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. This is a podcast for people who are moving between different cultural worlds, living in foreign countries, speaking foreign languages. And, we talk about intercultural experiences, and we also dig into the science and the psychology of culture and mind.
00:33	Joseph	This is Episode 2. I'm here with Yvonne van der Pol. Hi Yvonne.
00:39	Yvonne	Hi Joseph.
00:40	Joseph	Great to have you here. We're going to be co-hosting this first season of the Deep Culture podcast, and I'm thrilled to have you with me. You are in the Netherlands now?
00:52	Yvonne	I'm in the Netherlands, and it's also great to be part of this process and the podcasting series.
01:00	Joseph	And, I'm speaking to you from California. Of course, I am based in Tokyo, but I am with family here. It's not a good time to travel during this pandemic, but we are making do. I am so happy to be doing this podcast with you. You know, I love the intercultural work that we both do, and I'm fascinated by the questions of cultural mind that we are going to be talking about. And, I'm just thrilled to get to share this podcast experience with you. How are you feeling about this podcast?
01:33	Yvonne	Well, actually, it's the first time that I am recording podcast in this series, and when you came up with the idea, I was like, "OK, a podcast." Never thought about recording it, you know, in our own projects. But I enjoy the experience, and I look forward to doing this actually, and create, well, it's a process of creativity.
01:55	Joseph	You and I have been collaborating for quite a while, and I remember when we first met at a conference in Tallin. Do you remember when that was?

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02:05	Yvonne	Yeah, it was back in 2013?
02:09	Joseph	I actually looked up the title of the workshop that I gave, which you came to, and which was the first time that we met. And, the title was...
02:21	Yvonne	Did you?
02:22	Joseph	Yeah, so this is...
02:24	Yvonne	What was the title?
02:26	Joseph	This is the title of the workshop that you signed up for. "Cultural Neuroscience and The International Brain: New Paradigms for Intercultural Educators, Trainers, and Researchers."
02:40	Yvonne	Wow.
02:41	Joseph	That's a, that's a heavy title.
02:43	Yvonne	Interesting. Did I sign up for that?
02:47	Joseph	For a whole day to talk about that. Do you, what was your impression? Why did you sign up for something like that?
02:57	Yvonne	Yeah, what did I sign up for? I actually was interested in brain and how it's related to learning, how it's related to culture if it does at the time. You know, I didn't have a lot of understanding yet about brain. And then, you also came up with mind, which was for me like also a new field, like how it's related to the whole context. So, I signed up out of curiosity and interest, and it was a nice day actually. How do you look back on it?
03:26	Joseph	Well, I have great memories of that day, and I remember the content less than I remember the people. It's great to be with a group of people who share deep interests in this topic. I was also thinking back on this title, and that is actually quite similar to the content of the podcast that we're going to be doing. The title of this was "Cultural Neuroscience" which is a fairly recent specialty, which not a lot of people know about, I think.
04:01	Joseph	And, the international brain. And, I don't now use the term, international brain. I don't think those words go well together. And, the subtitle was "New Paradigms for Intercultural

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		Educators, Trainers, and Researchers.” And, that’s how I look at this. I look at this as the new paradigms for the kind of work that we’re doing. And, that’s how I see what we’re doing with this podcast. We’re going to be exploring these brain and mind sciences, and looking at these new paradigms. So, it’s nice to be going this next step together with you.
04:38	Yvonne	I’m also looking forward to explore this, and I was challenged back then, also by new paradigms, and I really think they are, and even more than, well I might even fully grasp or understand what does it mean to start in the work of an intercultural trainer and educator, to start from brain and mind, and watching how culture fits in, and what does it say to us. So, we’re going to explore all these questions and have conversations, and I’m thrilled by the process.
05:23	Joseph	Today’s episode has three parts. So, what is an intercultural trainer or educator? And then, what is this field of intercultural communication? And, where is this field going? So, let’s start with what’s it like to do intercultural work for a living? How do you like, how do you like this field, Yvonne?
05:43	Yvonne	Yeah, it’s a nice question. Um, how do I, well, I’ve worked in this field for 17 years now, and it sort of happened to become, you know. I’ve never thought about it deliberately before, but it just happened out of experiences, and that’s also when I see many other colleagues working as intercultural coaches, consultants, trainers, and educators. Usually, they have started somewhere, and I started in anthropology and from international development cooperation.
06:16	Yvonne	I ended up giving more and more trainings and got interested in intercultural trainings, and yes, that’s what I’ve been doing ever since. Where did you start, Joseph?
06:28	Joseph	I discovered this field of intercultural communication in graduate school by reading a book by Edward Hall, and then

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		by taking a workshop at the Summer Institute of Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon. I discovered the work of Milton Bennett, and I got so excited to discover that there were people out there, thinking about and researching all of these intercultural experiences that I had been having.
06:56	Joseph	And, my work is a bit different from yours, I think. I work more in university education. I do work in some in business, but you work more in business, and you've been working with the Dutch diplomats recently as well, right?
07:09	Yvonne	Yes, exactly. So, my background, I work mainly with non-governmental organizations and also with governmental organizations, as well as in business, but always internationally. And, most recently, I also worked with diplomats and even traveled to embassies of the Netherlands across the globe, where you have those multicultural teams. And, of course, you know, those teams, they can outperform homogeneous teams.
07:37	Yvonne	But, you know, how to use the diversity and find the surplus value, and also, well, of course, misunderstanding that you can have. Even though you work together as a team. So, I find it interesting to work in those team settings. But also, I do many other things, and especially now with the pandemic, it's all online, and you also have challenges in online collaborations interculturally. So, it's like a new, well, branch on the tree. What about you? What are the things you usually do, and what's the new stuff?
08:15	Joseph	I do work with businesses, but most of my work is in the university setting. And, I work a lot with students who are going to abroad, or studying abroad, and also with people who are learning a foreign language. I came into this field originally through learning a foreign language, living in Mexico, running a language school there, being a language teacher in Japan as

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		well. And, I'm particularly interested in the way that learning a foreign language also involves exploring another cultural world, or other cultural worlds.
08:53	Yvonne	Yes, really intriguing, Joseph, that you say all these. I'm listening attentively. What I enjoy in your work is also that you combine culture and language, and you combine in such, well, an eloquent way, I must say. And, it's interesting that in many languages you have worked are not translatable, but also it's not only grammar what you say, it's also words of meaning, and it touches upon culture.
09:24	Joseph	And, there's this contradiction, because people say, "Well, language and culture are very closely related." At the same time, linguistics and anthropology are very different fields. And, so, it's not always easy to bring those two things together, but that's one of my areas of particular interest. I think that we can divide intercultural work as a profession into three broad areas. One is education, international education, language teaching, study abroad.
9:58	Joseph	Then, there's business. So, international companies, for example, who have diverse teams like the work that's you're doing. I sometimes have done work with expatriates who were going to be managing in a foreign country, and they need to learn cultural competencies for working in that country. And then, of course, there's academia. There's research.
10:23	Joseph	I do some research as well, particularly in the area of intercultural adaptation, and psychology of experiencing a new culture. So, it's a pretty wide field. What do you like and not like? What are the, what should we call these, the joys and the frustrations of working in this field for you?
10:49	Yvonne	Yeah, or the joys and the challenges.
10:51	Joseph	Yeah, we're not supposed to call them frustrations.
10:57	Yvonne	Yeah, exactly. Well, the joy is, well, also feeling to contribute to

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		<p>understanding. For me, that maybe even more than a joy. It's like fulfilling kind of thing, you know. When people really have irritations and finally find out that's because we come from different, well, different logics. We really see things in a different way, and we had to laugh when we started recording the podcast a week or so accurate on time, you know.</p>
11:28	Yvonne	<p>But, time, in my understanding, is also sometimes very irritating for people who have different perceptions. Edward T. Hall, you just mentioned him, he came up with it, and really explored it well. So, that's absolute joy when people also understand it's not, you know, there's also a cultural element to behavior, and you have to become aware and then talk about it, and for instance, and to come to grips with it.</p>
12:07	Joseph	<p>I really like the "Ah-ha" moments. When you...</p>
12:11	Yvonne	<p>Oh, yes.</p>
12:11	Joseph	<p>When you discover these parts of yourself that you are never aware of, and whenever you go into a foreign environment, or you're learning a foreign language, or spending time in a foreign country, it's not just that you are learning new things about the foreign place, or this new place, or this exotic place, you are learning things about yourself. And, I'm always fascinated by how people experience this, kind of this insight that you get into yourself from these foreign experiences.</p>
12:45	Joseph	<p>And, that's, of course, one of the things that Edward Hall focused on, the psychology of these intercultural experiences. So, those are some of the things that I love, but are there challenges in this work for you, Yvonne?</p>
13:00	Yvonne	<p>Oh yes, of course, there are challenges. Just what you say, it's also about insight in yourself and, for instance, also biases, and well, many things. And, not everybody likes to go there. So, that's a challenge, and some people also think, "Just give me do's and don'ts." And, to go beyond that point, take people on</p>

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		a journey, and also, it's about discovering and learning.
13:27	Yvonne	And, well, it can be challenging especially when people are sent to training courses, and it's obligatory to work with them. But, over time, my experiences that usually you can reach something. But, that can be challenging actually.
13:46	Joseph	Well, when you are talking about these do's and don'ts, so you are referring, for example, to someone, to an organization that says, "Well, we're going to have people working in country X, so please give them a four-hour training on what they should and shouldn't do." Or, you know...
14:02	Yvonne	Exactly.
14:03	Joseph	So, their expectations about intercultural work are very superficial. They are thinking about intercultural ability just in terms of something like etiquette. Is that right?
14:14	Yvonne	Exactly. And, in your case, you live in Japan and you have been living there for quite a while. And, people think that in a half day in an afternoon, you know, we have the "do's and don'ts," and some "how to work in Japan," and well, by telling and living there, you know, you are learning each day, you know. So, that's the contrast.
14:38	Joseph	I had a, recently had an executive who was starting to work in Japan. He was from Germany, and I asked him, "Well, how has it been going since you've started working here?" and he said, "Oh, everything is fine," and "I'm having no problems at all." And, I said, "Well, that's really great." He said, "Well, there is just one tiny thing, you know. When I, at a meeting, when I ask people, 'Do you have questions?' they say nothing and no questions, and then, the meeting is over, and at the end of the meeting, people come up to me, and they start to ask me questions. So, what should I do?"
15:21	Joseph	And, this is really so typical that something which seems so small like, "Do you ask a question or not?" is really the tip of the

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		iceberg. If you are just looking at this in terms of behavior or etiquette, you are just scratching the surface. So, that really interests me, but it's also a challenge for me as well, because if people are expecting just behavioral do's and don't's, they may not be ready to question themselves. They may not be ready to ask themselves difficult questions.
16:00	Joseph	So, let's move on to this second question we wanted to talk about. What is the theory and research that's been used in this field? I've had students, for example, who tell me, "You know, I never knew there was such a field as intercultural communication. How can I learn more about this?" And, it's a difficult question because there are university programs in intercultural communication, for example, but they are not that common.
16:30	Joseph	So, the question, "What do you have to study in order to learn more deeply about this field?" is really not an easy question to answer. So, one place to start this question is "how you got into this field" and "how you learned the deeper side of this issue." You have a background in anthropology, right?
16:53	Yvonne	Yes, I have a background in anthropology, and yet, at that time, well, I'm not sure if it was related at that time, but we just didn't explicitly work on intercultural communication. So, it's only later actually that I discovered, for instance, Hofstede's work, his landmark study on cultural dimensions. And, one thing led to another, you usually bump into like, some other names, larger names and works.
17:24	Yvonne	What I also find important is having a network of other people working in this field, and the SIETAR community has been very important for my development.
17:35	Joseph	And, by SIETAR, you are talking about the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research.
17:41	Yvonne	Exactly.

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17:42	Joseph	Which is one of the main academic associations, our professional associations related intercultural work.
17:53	Yvonne	Yes.
17:54	Joseph	But, I agree. It's not easy to know where to look. And, you mentioned Geert Hofstede. He is one of the big names particularly in the field of intercultural communication in business, intercultural management. I came to this through discovering Edward Hall, and then taking a workshop at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon.
18:25	Joseph	But, recently, there's been all of this new research coming out, but it's not from the people who are calling themselves intercultural communication specialists. And, I'm thinking about research in cognitive science, and social psychology, and cultural neuroscience. How did you discover the brain and mind science side of this field?
18:53	Yvonne	Maybe it started with like a gut feeling, and also linking a bit to neuroscience, and actually then I bumped into the workshop you were giving and conducting at the conference, and I thought, "Well, let's join." So, here I found myself in your workshop, and that was the time that you were writing on your book, "The Intercultural Mind," and that's also where we got connected and our professional relationship started.
19:23	Yvonne	So, actually, I found it very interesting in all the work that you have been doing and that you published in "The Intercultural Mind."
19:34	Joseph	There isn't an exact starting place for people who are interested in learning about this field, but one way to think about it is, if there is one book, for example, that we could recommend for someone who is interested in this. What would you say would be one book to recommend?
19:52	Yvonne	Of course, I just mentioned your book. No, I would really

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		<p>recommend it. And, besides that, the book I also find very interesting is Richard Nisbett. It already starts with the title. It's "The Geography of Thought," and how Westerners and Asians think differently and why. And, it really gives an understanding in the deep level on mind, and how cognitive processes work, and how differently and how hard, actually, communication and understanding is. So, I was actually really intrigued by this work.</p>
20:32	Joseph	<p>I loved this book. "The Geography of Thought." What a wonderful name! And, Richard Nisbett is a specialist in understanding cognitive processes. And, he is interested in how culture shapes cognition. So, I've heard, for example, someone say, "When a Chinese person sees a wall, an American sees a brick."</p>
21:03	Joseph	<p>And, the image, of course, is of a brick wall, and we are both looking at the same thing, but our attention, or is focused in a different way. We are experiencing that in a different way. Are we looking at it as an object, as a collection of bricks that is in a wall, or are seeing the wall as a whole? And, this kind of subject/object thinking versus more holistic thinking. This is not something that's analytic, it's not something we are thinking about. It's just the way that we used to perceiving the world.</p>
21:43	Joseph	<p>We think of "thought" as just being "thought" as though it's the same everywhere. Especially, if we are used to think, "Well, all human beings are the same. We all have the same brains." So, you'd think that our thinking is all the same. But, it's really not that simple. So, I really, also highly recommend that book, and I think he is a really important pioneer in this field.</p>
22:15	Joseph	<p>What is on the horizon for this field, this field of intercultural communication? We are at the beginning of the 21st century. There's a lot going on in the world. Um, how are you feeling about the intercultural field, Yvonne?</p>

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22:31	Yvonne	We need to work cross-culturally. We need to solve our issues on a global scale and work across borders, and that's where intercultural communication comes in. So, I think our field is important. And yes, in the way we work, we need to develop and continue developing, and sometimes I see some development that seems to go the way towards do's and don't's. Well, actually we have to go and turn the other way around. So, I see this as a challenge we need to face. And, What do you see?
23:07	Joseph	You know, you used the word, "interconnected." It's easier and easier to be connected. And it's easier and easier to have a superficial understanding of cultural difference. But, to solve big problems, really requires deeper understanding. And, I don't have the feeling that the deeper intercultural understanding is getting easier these days.
23:36	Joseph	So, this is a contradiction that we are more interconnected, yet this is not necessarily creating deeper intercultural understanding. And, that's how I see this brain and mind sciences are well related to this, that this kind of deeper understanding requires self-understanding. It requires looking into our own minds and developing as human beings.
24:02	Joseph	So, I see the brain and mind sciences as being really important for the field of intercultural understanding and intercultural communication. There're certainly plenty of challenges in the world. And, I think we need more bridge people.
24:22	Yvonne	Yeah, exactly. I also think that. Many of our listeners are these bridge people. And, it's about also understanding that culture is deep, it's complex, and it's also intense in a way, you know, that's not only cognitive, but it's also emotional, you know. Sometimes you get upset or irritated or whatever, furious maybe. And, dealing with all these kinds of things and learning to deal with it, sort of transfer that to work place and to solve

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		complex cross-cultural issues. We need bridge people, definitely.
25:00	Joseph	One of the things I like about the work that you do, Yvonne, is that you, like me, see a connection between intercultural work and growing as a human being.
25:13	Yvonne	Yeah, it's probably, you cannot split it. It would be very, well, schizophrenic. So, yes, it's about development, human development, and also development in all these complexes that we live and work in.
25:32	Joseph	I'm hoping that, with this podcast, we can also focus on this kind of personal side of intercultural experiences. We are not going to be just introducing, you know, brain science research. Let's try and find this balance between the soft heart and the hard science.
25:58	Joseph	So, it's about time for us to wrap up this episode. We will be back next time talking about Edward Hall. So, thank you, Yvonne, and I look forward to seeing you next time.
26:14	Joseph	If you haven't already, please subscribe to the Deep Culture podcast. Rate us, write a comment, get in touch, share your thoughts about today's episode. You can write us at <a href="mailto:dcpodcast@japaninterculturalorg">dcpodcast@japaninterculturalorg</a> , or leave a comment on our website at <a href="http://www.japanintercultural.org">www.japanintercultural.org</a> , or just do a web search for podcast, Japan Intercultural Institute. This podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, which is NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. Thanks to Robinson Fritz for all his technical support and sound design, and thanks to Chriss Koyama, our production assistant. And, we'll see you next time.

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