

## Deep Culture Podcast – Transcript

The Deep Culture Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join hosts **Joseph Shaules** and **Ishita Ray** as we look at the personal growth that can come from travel, living and working abroad, learning a foreign language, growing up in a multicultural context—and the challenges of bridging different cultural worlds.

### (Episode 45 – Who Needs Intercultural Education?)

Joseph Shaules and Ishita Ray argue that the deeper goal of intercultural education is to see that our minds are shaped by culture. They explore natural biases, such as ethnocentrism and stereotypes, and the psychological impact of foreign experiences, including Oz moments and cultural shock. Emre Seven tells of his discovery that not everyone sees the world as he does.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:00	Emre	(Hook) One day, a young woman I worked with asked me, “Where are you from?” I replied, “Turkey.” She said, “What?” I repeated, “Turkey.” And then she burst into laughter, “There's a country with the same name as the animal?” I was furious.
00:00:32	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules and welcome to the Deep Culture podcast, where we explore culture and the science of mind. And today I am here with Ishita Ray. How are you today, Ishita?
00:00:44	Ishita	Hi, Joseph. I'm great, and it feels great to be back with another episode of this season. This episode was inspired by a frustration that we have heard from intercultural educators. How do I explain to people why intercultural education is important?
00:01:05	Joseph	And when we say intercultural education, we mean books or classes or training that focuses on things like cultural difference or diversity, maybe for students who will study abroad or people working on international teams.
00:01:22	Ishita	And educators tell us that learners often don't see why they should have to learn this intercultural stuff. Sometimes they're just not interested. Who needs it and what good does it do?
00:01:36	Joseph	I've heard students say, well, they just tell you, we have to appreciate other cultures. You know, diversity is good, blah, blah, blah. I've heard all of that.
00:01:48	Ishita	And I have heard Indians say that India is such a diverse country, and we get along just fine. Why do we need intercultural education?
00:01:57	Joseph	So we are going to dig into the question, who needs intercultural education?
00:02:02	Ishita	And the practical answer you get is, well, if you're going to a foreign country, or if you work in international business, or if you deal with diversity, then you need intercultural education.

00:02:15	Joseph	But for us, there is a deeper answer to that question. And it's the reason that intercultural education is interesting for us.
00:02:25	Ishita	For us, intercultural education is not just for people going abroad. Anytime we are in a new environment, we are pushed out of our comfort zone. We need to adapt. And that is true whether it's in a foreign country or a new school or a new neighborhood.
00:02:44	Joseph	And this can have a huge psychological impact on us. We get stressed, we have to learn new things. But this also stretches our mind.
00:02:54	Ishita	And in foreign situations, we encounter cultural difference. People's minds work differently, they see things differently, judge things differently.
00:03:05	Joseph	So foreign experiences stretch our minds. They are a way to learn about cultural difference, but also a way to learn about our own mind. The fact is how we look at the world - in other words, our perceptions - is shaped by culture. How we process information, our identity, how we experience emotion - the human mind is cultural. The experience of being human is cultural.
00:03:37	Ishita	But we don't notice how our perceptions are cultural. And foreign experiences are like a wakeup call to our mind. So, in this episode, we'll learn about culture and perception, some mental habits that we fall into, like ethnocentrism, and we'll see that foreign experiences have a psychological impact. And that's what intercultural education helps us understand.
00:04:07	Joseph	And that brings us to part one, A Three or a W?
Part One – A Three or a W?		
	Joseph	So, the starting point for this episode is the idea that we need intercultural education to learn how our perception is influenced by culture.
00:04:38	Ishita	And most people don't think about perception when they hear the word culture. Usually it's more like food, bowing, that kind of thing. And on this podcast, we call that surface culture.
00:04:52	Joseph	And it's true that you might learn about cultural customs in a class or a training. You might learn, for example, that in Japan you should hold your business card with both hands.
00:05:06	Ishita	Or that in India, don't give something to someone with your left hand.
00:05:09	Joseph	But that's not what we're talking about here. For us, intercultural education is about deep culture. And that refers to unconscious cultural patterns. And that includes the ways that culture shapes our perceptions.
00:05:27	Ishita	And what we learn from cognitive science is that perception feels very natural to us, but in fact, the mental processes involved are very complex.
00:05:39	Joseph	For example, it might feel like our eyes are just like cameras, simply observing reality, but that's not how it works. Perception is an active process, and our view of the world is constructed.

00:05:56	Ishita	And this is one way that culture shapes our perception. We see what we are used to seeing or what is meaningful to us. Let's take a simple example. If I hold three fingers up and ask you, "What do you see?", maybe you will answer, "Well, I see three."
00:06:16	Joseph	But another person may look at the same hand and those fingers in the same position and see a W, because that shape can also be seen as the letter W. Or someone could even say, "You are showing me an upside-down M."
00:06:32	Ishita	And the point is, when we see, we don't just see, we interpret. Our mind finds meaning in what we notice in the world. So, when we look at three fingers, one person sees a three as meaningful and another sees a W as meaningful.
00:06:53	Joseph	And this is cultural because we see things how we are used to seeing them. We have mental habits of seeing things in a particular way.
00:07:10	Ishita	And this is the first lesson that we get from intercultural education. In order to understand people who are different from us, people who grew up differently, who live in a different country, speak a different language, we need to learn that our way of seeing the world isn't the only way of seeing the world.
00:07:30	Joseph	And that's an insight that podcast team member Emre Seven experienced firsthand.
00:07:39	Emre	The first time that I really understood that people see things in a different way is when I went to the United States. I was shocked to find out that many people had not even heard of my country, Türkiye. One day, a young woman I worked with asked me, "Where are you from?" I replied, "Turkey." She said, "What?" I repeated, "Turkey." And then she burst into laughter, "There's a country with the same name as the animal?" I was furious. But before I could say anything, another colleague said, "Turkey? Where is that?" I couldn't believe it. I said, "Come on, it's between Europe and Asia!" She just said, "Oh yeah, never heard of that." Before I went to the United States, I took it for granted that Türkiye was known all over the world. It was a shock to realize that not everyone sees the world as I do, and that, in fact, we see the world in ways that are familiar. And Turkey wasn't part of the world they knew. And that made me realize that actually, there's a lot of the world that I don't know, too. It was a very humbling experience.
00:09:29	Ishita	This story is kind of funny, but kind of not funny.
00:09:34	Joseph	It sounds a bit strange to say, but for the American, the country Turkey did not exist.

00:09:41	Ishita	And so foreign experiences teach us that what's normal for me is not normal for you. Emre could feel that his perception was shaped by growing up in Turkey.
00:09:51	Joseph	And that's cultural difference. The patterns that I'm used to are different from yours.
00:10:00	Ishita	Let's take another hand example. What if I hold up my hand with my fingers in a fist with my thumb sticking straight up? What does that mean?
00:10:12	Joseph	So, your hand is in a fist, but your thumb is sticking straight up. In the US, it means good or all right. We sometimes say to give the thumbs up, and that's the like icon on Facebook, for example.
00:10:28	Ishita	But if you are a scuba diver and we are underwater, it means 'up', as in "go to the surface".
00:10:36	Joseph	And in the US, if you stand by the side of the road and hold up your thumb, it means, "I want a ride". It's a sign of hitchhiking. But then again, a French person may say that the thumb means one, because in France, when you count on your fingers, one, two, three, you use the thumb to mean one. Then two is the index finger and three is the middle finger.
00:11:01	Ishita	And these are very small examples, but they remind us that how we see things relates to our mental habits.
00:11:10	Joseph	Of course, mental habits are not only about concrete things like thumbs and fingers, but also abstract things like time.
00:11:20	Ishita	If you say the meeting will be at 10. What that means can depend on your cultural time habits. One person may think, "Well, the meeting will start at 10", whereas someone else might think, "Oh, I need to arrive at 10". And then some people may think, "Okay, so we will get together around 10 and get going when everyone is ready."
00:11:48	Joseph	Which reminds me of a story that you, Ishita, told in episode 15 about time logics in India. Let's listen back.
00:12:02	Ishita	I grew up using different time systems. In English, we say, time is money, like it's a precious commodity. In Bengali, there is a word <i>naagaad</i> . It means around or approximately and can be used only for time. The concepts we use to talk about time are themselves very flexible and fluid. Even distance is given in time. So, when asked, "How far is it to the store?", we say "It's a ten-minute walk." There is a certain logic or rhythm to this fluidity. India is primarily an agrarian society with vast shifts in climate and temperatures within a single year. So, time cannot be viewed as linear, static, or be defined once and for all. Time must depend on context. Seasons are viewed as something that returns. Farmers who have lost their crops this year due to floods must remain hopeful about a bounty the following season. If there is drought, the time for repaying the loans will have to be extended to continue feeding families. Seasons influence time.

		Relationships influence time. Community influences time. Life influences time.
00:13:51	Joseph	One thing I like about your story, Ishita, is that the smallest differences, they can help us see the world in a new way.
00:14:01	Ishita	And this is something that Emre discovered, too, in the US, that people with different backgrounds will see the world differently from you.
00:14:11	Joseph	But as we have said, we often don't notice those mental habits until we've experienced difference.
00:14:19	Ishita	Which brings us to part two: Mind your mind!
Part 2: Mind your mind!		
	Ishita	So, we've said that culture shapes our perceptions, but I don't think that explains clearly enough why we need intercultural education.
00:14:45	Joseph	Well, yes, it's not just that culture shapes our perceptions. It's that we have a natural tendency to feel that our perceptions are the right perceptions.
00:14:55	Ishita	And the word we use to describe that is ethnocentrism, which is the natural tendency to look at the world from our own cultural point of view.
00:15:07	Ishita	So, in foreign situations, when things are different, they often just don't feel right.
00:15:14	Joseph	And that's something that you spoke with Emre about in episode 30. He felt his ethnocentrism in France at breakfast. Let's listen back.
00:15:29	Emre	I remember years ago, I noticed my own ethnocentrism at breakfast when I was traveling in France. The tour guide had mentioned that there was a buffet breakfast, which I was really excited about. But when I approached the table, I see there is only croissant, coffee, and cheese. And I thought, "Is that all? Man, that's no buffet!". In Turkey, a good breakfast is often seen as having a lot of different ingredients, and they are all served together. And so that was a normal breakfast for me. A croissant, a coffee, cheese, you know, that just wasn't enough.
00:16:26	Ishita	I love Emre's honesty. We often do not admit when we make negative judgments like that.
00:16:34	Joseph	And intercultural education helps us notice our negative reactions to foreign things and to understand that it's natural to react that way. Of course, negative reactions aren't good, but everyone has them.
00:16:50	Ishita	And that brings us to another common reaction to intercultural experiences, stereotypes. And we talked about that in episode 33. Let's take a listen.
00:17:07	Joseph and Ishita	Joseph - Well, the word stereotype has quite interesting origins. It comes from the French "stereotype" and refers to a printing method using solid plates. So, from this, we get the idea of a stereotype being a fixed image. And often this is as far as the discussion goes, it's a simplified image. It's prejudicial. That means we have to stop using stereotypes.

		<p>Ishita - But from the cognitive perspective, that is just not possible.</p> <p>Joseph - The inescapable fact is that all of us have stereotypical images in our minds that occur to us when we think about a particular group of people. Germans eat sausage. Russians drink vodka. Italians are romantic. Japanese are polite, Californians surf.</p> <p>Joseph - Why do our minds work this way? What evolutionary purpose might they serve?</p> <p>Ishita - There is a certain cognitive efficiency in stereotypes. Our ancestors survived by quickly judging people. Friend? Enemy? Are they nice? Mean?</p> <p>Joseph - And this is efficient in the sense that these images come quickly to mind and allow us to make quick judgments.</p>
	Joseph	<p>Ishita, I really liked what you said about cognitive efficiency, that making quick judgments helped our ancestors survive. You know, if we catch sight of something yellow in the grass, we instinctively jump back. It might be a lion.</p>
00:18:54	Ishita	<p>Lions are dangerous, and our minds evolved to be cautious about the unknown. Watch out for that lion. Watch out for the person who is different. And so, another lesson from intercultural education is that our mental functions are rooted in our ancient past. We are, you know, quite clever primates, but some of our natural mental tendencies make intercultural understanding more difficult.</p>
00:19:25	Joseph	<p>And I think one of the most obvious signs of this is culture shock. Our mind evolved to function in familiar environments, and so in new environments, our mental systems get overloaded. And we talked about this in episode 18.</p>
00:19:47	Ishita and Joseph	<p>Ishita - And I think anyone who has traveled to a foreign country has experienced this to one degree or another. A feeling of being overwhelmed by new surroundings, mentally tired when exploring a new city, or feeling homesick and missing familiar food and friends.</p> <p>Joseph - I divide the experience into three culture surprise, culture stress, and culture shock.</p> <p>Ishita - So culture surprise is when you start noticing cultural differences. It can be interesting, it can be surprising or stressful. It's like, "Wow, look at that!".</p> <p>Joseph - And then culture stress. That's the mental stress caused by the unfamiliar things in everyday life. So, like, "Well, how do I use this stupid ATM machine!" You know? Because this ATM is different than the one</p>

		back home. Or maybe it doesn't have the language that I speak. And then culture shock is a kind of depression or mental tiredness, but there's no specific reason for it. It's just that our psychological batteries are low. This feeling of, "Well, could you just leave me alone?"
00:21:08	Ishita	So sometimes people ask us, what can we do about culture shock? And usually, we simply need to let our mind get used to the new patterns around us. With a bit of time, we feel better.
00:21:25	Joseph	We've been talking about stereotypes and ethnocentrism and culture shock. Like, we have to watch out for so many things. But the point we're making is simply that intercultural experiences are powerful, and they can be powerful in a really positive way.
00:21:44	Ishita	And that brings us to Part 3: Mental Impact
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00:21:59	Joseph	So, let's talk now about how foreign experiences stretch our mind in a good way.
00:22:07	Ishita	And one amazing way that foreign experiences stretch our mind is with Oz moments.
00:22:14	Joseph	The term Oz moments comes from a movie, <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> , in which Dorothy is transported to the magical kingdom of Oz. The Oz moment is when you realize, wow, this is really a different world.
00:22:29	Ishita	For example, in episode 7, we heard Ayako's story about arriving in the Los Angeles airport on her first trip outside of Japan. Let's listen back.
00:22:45	Ayako	I visited my friend who was studying English for three months in LA. Going abroad was something that I never thought about doing myself, so it was like going to the moon. So, after I went through the immigration, I went to a bathroom, and I found a different bathroom in LAX. Unexpectedly, there was a gap between the floor and the door, and you could see if people were inside. You could see people's shoes. You could see a lot of things from Japanese point of view too much, yes. I was very surprised, and I noticed that I was the only one who was surprised. And I realized that I had only one choice, which is to go to this bathroom. There's no other bathrooms. I had to really make up my mind. I didn't know what it means to be in a foreign country. And I didn't know that discovering these different realities or different normals would be what was waiting for me when I went to the United States or any other countries. So, when I first went to the United States and experienced this different normal or different reality, I realized that what I was thinking as normal in my country is not necessarily normal elsewhere. And if a small thing like a bathroom is different, is so different. I felt the need to experience different parts of the world's normals, not just traveling, but by living to experience different normals, to really observe that what's normal in my country is not normal and the world is a big place.
00:24:59	Joseph	I love this story. For one thing. You know, you wouldn't expect that going to a bathroom is going to be some kind of deep culture experience. But

		Ayako just found it so strange that in an American bathroom, you can see people's legs, the doors don't go down to the floor.
00:25:20	Ishita	And these things can have a big impact on the cultural patterns of our mind. We understand that we are in a different world. For Ayako, American bathrooms were hard to understand. How could Americans not be ashamed?
00:25:36	Joseph	And she remembers all of these details many years later. Oz moments stick in our memory because they affect us at an unconscious level. It's like we have a cultural pattern detector in our mind.
00:25:51	Ishita	And I really like how she said, the world is a big place. You can feel that her perception has expanded. She realized that even what feels private can depend on culture, and that made a big impression on her.
00:26:07	Joseph	Well, I also admire Ayako for not simply jumping to conclusions. She could have just said, "Oh, Americans are crazy." It's really easy to just judge things that seem wrong.
00:26:20	Ishita	And that's what shows us that spending time in a foreign place can really transform us as we learn new ways of looking at things.
00:26:30	Joseph	And we heard about this kind of experience from our podcast team member Liu Liu in episode 41.
00:26:41	Liu	Growing up in China, my goals and targets were set for me. Because my dad loves math and physics, he directed me to study similar subjects. My motivation back then was to fulfill my dad's expectations of me. Because these expectations didn't align with who I am and what my strengths are, I didn't do well in any of the subjects, and I didn't get into university. That brought dissatisfaction and disgrace to my whole family. Later, I moved to the UK. I got a low-level job in the mailroom. And this felt beneath me because I come from a family of well-educated high achievers, and I wanted to become someone whom they feel proud of. But I was no longer in China. I didn't have the same social expectations around me because my dad and others didn't understand life in the UK. This meant my motivation shifted. Transitioning from an interdependent culture to an independent culture is like driving with an instructor and driving by yourself. You are not told what to do anymore, but you are also responsible for your actions. Your social group doesn't make demands, but it's not there to support you either. I felt a sense of release and at the same time it was scary. I had to learn what I'm good at and what I'm passionate about. That mailroom put me on a path of independent motivation and self-discovery.
00:28:54	Ishita	What a story. You can really feel the power of foreign experiences. They can change us in deep ways. And this is what we call deep cultural learning.
00:29:07	Joseph	And there's one last thing that we need to point out about who needs intercultural education. Cultural learning isn't just about going to foreign countries. Many people live between different cultural worlds without ever traveling internationally.



00:29:24	Ishita	For example, if your parents are immigrants or you grow up as part of a religious, ethnic or racial minority.
00:29:34	Joseph	Anyone who is living between different cultural worlds becomes a cultural bridge person. Now this can be a challenge, but it's also a special gift. It stretches our mind, and it teaches us to see the world in different ways. It enriches us.
00:29:52	Ishita	And I think that's a good place to bring this episode to a close. We played clips from different episodes from this podcast. Maybe that will give intercultural educators some ideas about how different episodes can be used in their work.
00:30:09	Joseph	<p>So, check out the other episodes we referenced today. That was:</p> <p>Episode 7 - The Oz Moment          Episode 15 - Rubber time or slaves to the clock?          Episode 18 - Culture Shock          Episode 30 - Ethnocentrism          Episode 33 - Stereotypes          Episode 41 - Motivation and Culture</p> <p>The Deep Culture podcast is sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. Both JII and this podcast are completely non-profit. If you enjoy this podcast because it looks deeper into these topics, you really need to check out JII's <i>Brain, Mind and Culture masterclass</i> - it is a blended learning course and online community.</p> <p>Also, JII is sponsoring a project to develop teaching and training materials for the Deep Culture podcast. Do a web search for the Japan Intercultural Institute or get in touch directly at <a href="mailto:dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org">dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org</a>. Thanks to Emre Seven for sharing his stories today to the other members of our podcast team - Yvonne Van der Pol, Liu Liu, Daniel Glinz, Ikumi Fritz, our sound engineer Robinson Fritz and everyone at JII. And thanks to you, Ishita, for sharing this time with me.</p>
00:31:30	Ishita	Thank you, Joseph. It was great spending this time with you.