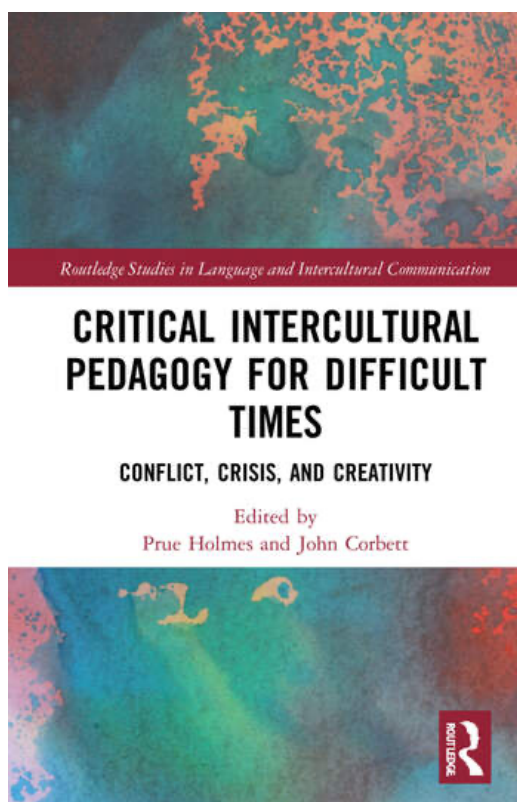




Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times

Guest post by John Corbett and Prue Holmes



Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Difficult Times: Conflict, Crisis, and Creativity, edited by Prue Holmes and John Corbett (2023) is a volume of case studies and theoretical reflections which arose from an AHRC Research Network project, initiated, and led by Prue Holmes of the University of Durham in 2019. Holmes was interested in exploring the theoretical and practical issues involved in the creative application of critical intercultural teaching and learning in conditions of conflict and extended crisis. In short, how does critical intercultural pedagogical theory inform creative practice, and vice versa, in what Holmes and her team came to think of as ‘difficult times’?

Holmes proceeded to establish a network of practitioner-theorists in a variety of higher educational contexts, all characterized in some way by crisis and conflict. Beatriz Peña Dix trains English teachers at the Universidad de los Andes, in Bogotá, Colombia. As well as recovering from a shattering civil war, Colombia is coping with extremes of wealth and poverty; Peña Dix's case study focused on a group of trainees from an economically marginalised urban community who adopted techniques from Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' to explore conflict and reconciliation, through English, in high school classrooms.



Two case studies emerged from Turkey, a country on the front line of an immigration crisis as thousands of refugees from the civil war in Syria sought safety in their neighbouring state. Many of the refugees were given the right of access to higher education in Turkey, which meant that universities had to provide language support in academic Turkish to Arabic-speaking Syrians, and Turkish and Syrian members of the student body had to learn to 'live with the other.' At Istanbul University, Ayşe Zişan Furat and Zeynep Özde Ateşok oversaw a project to create a dialogue between Turkish and Syrian students based on their shared inheritance of folk music. At Anadolu University, Filiz Göktuna Yaylacı and Filiz Göktuna Yaylacı used, not musical heritage, but a shared course in photography, with a focus on visually documenting student lives, as a creative site in which Syrians and Turks could meet on common ground and develop positive relations.

Immigration, resettlement, and aspiration were themes taken up by Prue Holmes, Marta Moskal and Taha Rajab, in their case study of encounters between refugee youths and their students at Durham University. Student volunteers engaged with young refugees in a walking tour of the city, which is now specifically designated as a place of sanctuary, ending up at the university, where they engaged in a creative engagement that prompted them to imagine what kind of

higher education institution might be inclusive, open, and responsive to their experiences and needs.

Several members of Holmes' network had difficulty in participating physically in group meetings: Nazmi Al-Masri of the Islamic University of Gaza and his colleagues were unable to leave Palestine. Their case study developed into an online intercultural exchange, brokered by Janaina Weissheimer, Refaat Alareer, Bruno de Lima and John Corbett, in which Palestinian students and Brazilian students from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) in Natal, in the economically marginalised North-East of Brazil, used poetry and flash non-fiction as a platform through which to share their everyday realities.



The case studies, then, though modest in nature, engaged with conditions of forced migration, conflict, occupation, trauma, reconciliation and aspiration, in a range of communities worldwide. The pedagogical procedures followed in the case studies grew out of hybrid meetings in Istanbul, Bogotá, and Durham which, for those members of the network who were able to travel, were crucial in learning about shared concerns across geographical divides, and how to address them. The case studies deliberately focused on arts and humanities disciplines – drama, visual arts, music and literature – as ways of creating safe spaces in locations characterised by uncertainty and fear.

In the early stages of the project, the teams refrained from too overt an imposition of pedagogical theory, as we cautiously felt our way into the contexts experienced by instructors and students in each location. But as the project developed, our practices and reflections were deepened by readings and discussions of critical intercultural pedagogy, arts-based inquiry, critical and responsible citizenship, and new materialism. As the case studies became a basis for the published book, we invited distinguished scholars from a range of backgrounds in the Global South and North to consider the different case studies and comment on them in relation to their own pedagogical and critical positions. Thus, the volume includes complex responses to the case studies, and proposals for further development of intercultural pedagogy from voices such as

Manuela Guilherme, Khawla Badwan, Robert Aman, and Clarissa Menezes Jordão. Finally, John Corbett and Prue Holmes offer their own reflection on the affordances and limitations of building this kind of research network, and the ethics of researching multilingually in multidisciplinary research teams.

Since the case studies concluded and even while the published volume was being prepared, global crises deepened in new and unexpected ways, a process that has only accelerated since. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily paralysed the kind of travel that, in 2019, enabled this research group to meet physically and learn from their encounters. The more recent conflicts in Ukraine-Russia and Gaza-Israel have caused unimaginable misery for thousands. As Khawla Badwan, in the title of her chapter, on intercultural communication and vulnerability, observes, “I’m afraid there are no easy fixes”. There are, indeed, no easy fixes, and, for those of us engaged in intercultural education, there seems cause, too often, for despair. However, the case studies reported in this volume affirm, through their modest tales of resilience, aspiration, and hope, that in the enveloping darkness there are flickers of light.

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Reference

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