

**Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation
on Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical Pedagogy**

David Schnasa Jacobsen
Boston University School of Theology

These papers emerged out of the 2019-2021 Wabash Consultation on Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical Pedagogy. They are the culmination of several months of exploration into the literature of contemporary intercultural communication theory and reflection on our classroom pedagogical praxis. A small project grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology provided us the resources we needed to meet, discuss, and interrogate a body of literature that was largely new to us as homileticians and classroom instructors. More importantly, however, our grant provided us the service of a knowledgeable guide: University of Portland's Communication Studies Professor Jeff Kerssen-Griep. I came to value Prof. Kerssen-Griep's expertise when I first began studying the potential of facework theory for dealing with the problem of in-class sermon feedback during my last sabbatical in 2018. Little did I know that his presence at our Wabash consultation would inspire much broader questions and interrogations of intercultural and instructional communication theory for the work of homiletical pedagogy.

I use the phrase "intercultural and instructional communication theory" for a reason. Intercultural communication theory generally is a way of dealing with communication that accounts for cultural differences. As with many other fields, the definition of intercultural communication has not only changed but is still changing as different identities inflect the theorizing and different contexts create variegated settings for its work. Sometimes intercultural communication focuses on interpersonal relations and communications; sometimes it is more group oriented. The extension of our more or less coined phrase "intercultural and instructional communication," however, is pasted together to narrow an only general definition into something specific. Experts in instructional communication, like Kerssen-Griep, are bringing a concern for intercultural communication into the classroom. It is this key aspect of the phrase intercultural and *instructional* communication that makes all the difference. And that difference hangs close to an analogue that speech and communication instructors also face: feedback interventions in culturally diverse classes that focus on public speech. While not identical, communication instructors must hone their own craft as pedagogues in a situation not dissimilar from our own as homileticians. Intercultural and *instructional* communication becomes for our purposes a specialized form of intercultural communication that has pedagogical implications for our in-class sermon interventions, too.

Of course, even the most crisp definition of intercultural communication cannot herd the cats that are the homiletics guild. We, too, find ourselves teaching from different positions of culture and privilege and in ever more culturally diverse classrooms. As a result, an initial consultation invitation to focus on facework theory occasioned something much broader—and more in line with our respective classroom issues. The manifold nature of this exploration became clear when our diverse team of homileticians met Prof. Kerssen-Griep for the inaugural session of our consultation in January 2019. The initial dialogue around facework theory and in-class sermon feedback quickly branched out to include a variety of questions and research foci: cultural humility, intercultural conflict theory, anxiety/uncertainty management [AUM] theory, and stereotype threat theory among others. Some of the projects continued to center the issue of

in-class sermon feedback, but other important questions loomed large as well when we thought carefully about the complexity of the homiletics classroom and its role in identity formation.

The result is this collection of papers. And they don't all view the significance of intercultural instructional communication the same way. Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby, for example, recounts her experience with facework theory in a mentoring role with students as a Teaching Fellow. She sees and articulates deep dimensions of how "witness" as a theological and ethical commitment grounds the kind of intercultural interactions she witnessed in a classroom in 2020. Her description of her own facework pedagogical practice, interpretation of student evaluation responses, and theorizing around witness and facework pedagogy make for a rich invitation to the intercultural work to be done. Jared Alcántara uses stereotype threat in dialogue with the work of a social psychologist to help "purify the air" in our classrooms. With close attention to tools like identity seeing, intelligence shifting, and imaginative shaping he seeks to help teachers "recognize and reduce stereotype threat" so that classrooms and teaching and learning relationships are interculturally enhanced. Sarah Travis focuses on cultural humility as a help to the homiletics classroom. She asks how cultural humility can also help us imagine people who are not in the classroom, who are *not* in the room where it happens, as a means to help preaching assume a more *public*-theological role. Travis aims to see how cultural humility can help us by means of curiosity and wonder about others so we can decolonize our perspectives. My article rounds out the set and seeks to envision a way in which the preaching teacher might in the end "un-master homiletics." It begins by describing the implementation of a facework-oriented pedagogy in my 2020 "Introduction to Preaching" class. In 2020 this facework-informed pedagogical praxis was carried out in course sections of about 7 students each to further a kind of mentored learning that furthers students' growth as homiletical *theologians*. The article takes into account student responses on an anonymous course evaluation to assess facework's value in furthering in particular a sense of belonging among students for their homiletical-theological formation. Looking ahead, the article considers how Willie Jennings's *After Whiteness*, a recent work on belonging in theological education, actually recasts the intercultural value of facework theory amid institutional problems with white supremacy--and thus offers the possibility of "un-mastering" homiletics.

Thanks are due to so many. I am grateful for the journal *Homiletic* who agreed to jury our articles for publication. I am grateful also to the Wabash Center whose funding made this whole research arc possible. I also want to thank André Resner and Gerald Liu who participated in the early phases of our consultation's work. I am aware that I have found both Liu and Resner's writings and reflections so generative for my own and know that they have also had impact on many of these pages. I am grateful for the commitment of our consultant, Prof. Jeff Kerssen-Griep who continued with us for several months as we thought about our research projects and our pedagogical praxis on Zoom calls. I also need to thank Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby who was co-administrator with me on this Wabash small project grant. She wrote the bulk of the proposal and carried us all forward with her uncanny insight, commitment to justice, and enthusiasm. All these interpersonal connections make me hopeful about pedagogy in our field and the promise we are aiming yet to fulfill: to promote a truly life-giving, intercultural theological education in preaching classrooms.