

**A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL
OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY***
Milton J. Bennett, M.D.

I. DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE

The inability to construe cultural difference. Indicated by benign stereotyping (well-meant but ignorant or naive observations) and superficial statements of tolerance. May sometimes be accompanied by attribution of deficiency in intelligence or personality to culturally deviant behavior. Tendency to dehumanize outsiders.

1. Denial/Isolation: Isolation in homogeneous groups fails to generate either the opportunity or the motivation to construct relevant categories for noticing and interpreting cultural difference.

2. Denial/Separation: Intentional separation from cultural difference protects world view from change by creating the conditions of isolation. Some awareness of cultural difference may yield undifferentiated broad categories, such as "foreigner" or "Asian" or "Black."

Cognitive Structure:

- No categories ("what difference?") or only broad categories for different cultures.

Affective Quality:

- Benign on the surface ("live and let live"), but potentially genocidal when pressed into cross-cultural contact.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Aggressive ignorance ("I don't need to know"), stress on the familiar.

Exercise of Power:

- Possibility of exploitation.

At this stage, learners say:

- "Live and let live, that's what I say."
- "All big cities are the same-lots of buildings, too many cars, McDonalds."
- "What I really need to know about is art and music."
- "As long as we all speak the same language, there's no problem."
- "The main concerns I have involve knowing how to get around and ordering in restaurants."
- "With my experience, I can be successful in any culture without any special effort."
- "I never experience culture shock."
- "All I need to know about is politics and history-I can figure out the rest of it as I go along."

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: DENIAL

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

To recognize the existence of cultural differences

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: High Challenge Educators should emphasize:
High Support

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Objective culture: Art, music, literature, theatre, dance
- Heroes and holidays
- Culture specific social science: Politics, history, economics, sociology
- Travel tips: "Do's and taboos"
- Use symbols, not target cultures

Process:

- Illustrate ideas with user-friendly activities
- Embed differences in non-threatening contexts
- Promote an inclusive, non-blaming climate
- Address learner anxieties in existing categories, but limit time
- Build on what they already know

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Subjective culture: Selected values, beliefs, and behaviors
- A constructive vision of intercultural interaction

Process:

- Arouse curiosity
- Facilitate structured contact with other cultures through films, slides, panel presentations, etc.

STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- The ability to gather appropriate information about culture
- The initiative to explore aspects of subjective culture
- Trust, friendliness, cooperation
- The ability to recognize difference

II. DEFENSE AGAINST DIFFERENCE

Recognition of cultural difference coupled with negative evaluation of most variations from native culture—the greater the difference, the more negative the evaluation. Characterized by dualistic us/them thinking and frequently accompanied by overt negative stereotyping. Evolutionary view of cultural development with native culture at the acme. A tendency towards social/cultural proselytizing of "underdeveloped" cultures.

3. Defense/Denigration: Cognitive categories for construing cultural difference are isolated by evaluating them negatively, thus protecting world view from change. ("I know Americans have a different culture, but everything about it proves what barbarians they are.")

4. Defense/Superiority: Existing cultural world view is protected by exaggerating its positive aspects compared to all other cultures. Any neutral or positive statement about another culture may be interpreted as an attack.

5. Defense/Reversal: Tendency to see another culture as superior while maligning one's own. Dualistic thinking is identical; only the poles are reversed.

Cognitive Structure:

- Better elaborated categories for cultural difference, but original world view is protected by poor integration of the new categories (hardening of the categories).

Affective Quality:

- State of siege; defense of privilege and defense of identity.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Same-culture segregation; "backlash" actions; possible support for supremacist and hate groups.

Exercise of Power:

- Exclusionary denial of equal opportunity.

At this stage, learners say:

- "I wish these people would just talk the way we do."
- "Even though I'm speaking their language, they're still rude to me."
- "When you go to other cultures, it makes you realize how much better the U.S. is."
- "These people don't value life the way we do."
- "Boy, could we teach these people a lot of stuff."
- "What a sexist society!"
- "These people are so urbane and sophisticated, not like the superficial people back home."

- "I am embarrassed by my compatriots, so I spend all my time with the host country nationals."
- "I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people."

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: DEFENSE

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Mitigate polarization by emphasizing "common humanity"

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: Maximum Challenge

Educators should emphasize: Maximum Support

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Universality of ethnocentrism (in-group/out-group distinctions)
- Existing (but previously unaddressed) differences within the in-group (such as learning styles, personality type, etc.)
- Address affect - something for each person to identify with

Process:

- Avoid cultural contrasts
- Provide reassurance and information about similarities
- Allow structured opportunities to share concerns
- Focus curiosity on the culture of their own group
- Promote cooperative activities

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Historical contexts (wars, slavery, colonization, etc.) .
- Commonalities, including shared needs and goals, between in-group and out-group

Process:

- Stress conflict mediation and team-building
- Identify existing/transferable skills at dealing with difference
- Promote cooperative activities

STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- The discipline to maintain personal control

- The ability to manage anxiety
- Tolerance
- Patience

III. MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE

Recognition and acceptance of superficial cultural differences such as eating customs, etc., while holding that all human beings are essentially the same. Emphasis on the similarity of people and commonality of basic values. Tendency to define the basis of commonality in ethnocentric terms (i.e., since everyone is essentially like us, "just be yourself").

6. Minimization/Physical Universalism: Emphasis on commonality of human beings in terms of physiological similarity. (e.g., "After all, we're all human!").

7. Minimization/Transcendent Universalism: Emphasis on commonality of human beings as subordinate to a particular supernatural being, religion, or social philosophy. (e.g., "We are all children of God, whether we know it or not.").

Cognitive Structure:

- World view is protected by attempting to subsume difference into familiar superordinate categories ("deep down we're all the same").

Affective Quality:

- Insistently nice.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Active support for universal religious, moral, or political principles.

Exercise of Power:

- Acceptance of institutionalized privilege.

At this stage, learners say:

- "The key to getting along in any culture is to just be yourself-authentic and honest!"
- "Customs differ, of course, but when you really get to know them they're pretty much like us."
- "I have this intuitive sense of other people, no matter what their culture."
- "Technology is bringing cultural uniformity to the developed world"
- "While the context may be different, the basic need to communicate remains the same around the world."

- "No matter what their culture, people are pretty much motivated by the same things."
- "If people are really honest, they'll recognize that some values are universal."
- "It's a small world, after all!"

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: MINIMIZATION

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Develop cultural self-awareness

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: Moderate Challenge
Educators should emphasize: Moderate Support

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Definitions of culture, race, ethnicity, stereotypes, and generalizations.
- Culture, perception, and world view
- Minor subjective cultural differences, such as nonverbal behavior, or communication styles

Process:

- Avoid excessive stress on cultural contrasts
- Expand curiosity about their own culture to other cultures

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Categories and frameworks for understanding their own culture, including values and beliefs
- The privilege of dominant groups
- Use authentic materials (advertising, media, etc.) from their own culture

Process:

- Facilitate contact with ethnorelative resource persons in structured activities
- Structure opportunities for difference-seeking
- Focus primarily on cultural self-awareness
- Use selected and trained ethnorelative resource persons

- Build on positive affect to motivate further exploration

STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- Cultural general knowledge
- Open-mindedness
- Knowledge of their own culture
- Listening skills
- The ability to perceive others accurately
- The ability to maintain a nonjudgmental interaction posture

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

Recognition and appreciation of cultural differences in behavior and values. Acceptance of cultural differences as viable alternative solutions to the organization of human existence. Cultural relativity. The beginning of ability to interpret phenomena within context. Categories of difference are consciously elaborated.

8. Acceptance/Behavioral Relativism: All behavior exists in cultural context. Ability to analyze complex interaction in culture-contrast terms.

9. Acceptance/Value Relativism: Beliefs, values, and other general patterns of assigning "goodness" and "badness" to ways of being in the world all exist in cultural context.

Cognitive Structure:

- Differentiation and elaboration of cultural categories; development of a metalevel view of cultural difference, including one's own culture

Affective Quality:

- Curiosity

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Acquisition of knowledge about cultures, including one's own

Exercise of Power:

- Tends to be avoided through inaction (liberal paralysis)

At this stage, learners say:

- ""The more difference the better-more difference equals more creative ideas!"
- "You certainly wouldn't want to have all the same kind of people around-the ideas get stale, and besides, its boring."
- "I always try to study about a new culture before I go there."

- "The more cultures you know about, the better comparisons you can make."
- "Sometimes it's confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values."
- "When studying abroad, every student needs to be aware of relevant cultural differences."
- "I know my homestay family and I have had very different life experiences, but we're learning to work together."
- "Where can I learn more about Mexican culture to be effective in my communication?"

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: ACCEPTANCE

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Refine analysis of cultural contrasts

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: Low Challenge

Educators should emphasize: Moderate Challenge

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- More complex subjective cultural differences including values analysis
- Elaboration of categories for cultural contrast and comparison
- Relationship between cognitive and communication styles

Process:

- Make cultural difference the focus while deepening cultural self-awareness
- Prepare learners for cultural frame-of-reference shifting

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- The appropriate use of culture-general (etic) and culture-specific (emic) categories
- Issues of cultural relativity, distinguishing it from moral or ethical relativity

Process:

- Build on enthusiasm for "difference-seeking" to promote examination of more profound contrasts
- Provide guided experiential learning opportunities such as homestays, drops-offs, simulations and role plays requiring intercultural empathy

STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- Cultural specific knowledge
- Cognitive flexibility
- Knowledge of other cultures
- Contextual knowledge
- Respect for others' values and beliefs
- Tolerance of ambiguity

V. ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENCE

The development of communication skills that enable intercultural communication. Effective use of empathy, or frame of reference shifting, to understand and be understood across cultural boundaries.

10. Adaptation/Empathy: Ability to consciously shift perspective into alternative cultural world view elements and act in culturally appropriate ways in those areas.

11. Adaptation/Pluralism: Internalization of more than one complete world view. Behavior shifts completely into different frames without much conscious effort.

Cognitive Structure:

- Knowledge and behavior are linked by conscious intention; category boundaries become more flexible and permeable

Affective Quality:

- Competence

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Intentional perspective-taking, empathy

Exercise of Power:

- Ability to recognize and respond to power in cultural context; some ability to exercise power appropriately in alternative contexts

At this stage, learners say:

- "To solve this dispute, I'm going to have to change my approach."

- "I know they're really trying hard to adapt to my style, so it's fair that I try to meet them halfway."
- "I greet people from my culture and people from the host culture somewhat differently to account for cultural differences in the way respect is communicated."
- "I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways."
- "In a study abroad program, every student should be able to adapt to at least some cultural differences."
- "To solve this dispute, I need to change my behavior to account for the difference in status between me and my counterpart from the other culture."
- "I'm beginning to feel like a member of this culture."
- "The more I understand this culture, the better I get at the language."

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: ADAPTATION

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Develop frame of reference shifting skills

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: Low Challenge

Educators should emphasize: High challenge

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Models of culture shock and cultural adaptation
- Advanced cultural topics requiring intercultural empathy (e.g., appreciation of humor, assessment of cultural deviance)

Process:

- Facilitate opportunities for learners to practice behavior in known cultures
- Use trained ethnorelative cultural informants in less structured activities (small groups, case studies, etc.)
- Prepare learners to learn autonomously (use of cultural informants, research strategies, etc.)

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Cultural identity development (ethnic identity models, intercultural sensitivity models)
- Re-entry

Process:

- Provide opportunities to interact in previously unexplored cultural contexts
- Address deeper anxiety issues (e.g., "internal culture shock," identity conflicts, etc.)

STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- Empathy
- Risk-taking skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Interaction management skills
- Flexibility

VI. INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE

The internalization of bicultural or multicultural frames of reference. Maintaining a definition of identity that is "marginal" to any particular culture. Seeing one's self as "in process."

12. Integration/Contextual Evaluation: Ability to use multiple cultural frames of reference in evaluating phenomena. Similar to "contextual relativism" in Perry's terms.

13. Integration/Constructive Marginality: Acceptance of an identity that is not primarily based in any one culture. Ability to facilitate constructive contact between cultures-for one's self and for others. Participation to some extent in a "marginal reference group," where other marginals rather than cultural compatriots are perceived as similar.

Cognitive Structure:

- World view categories are seen as "constructs" maintained by self-reflexive consciousness (cultures and individuals are "making themselves up")

Affective Quality:

- Confusion, authenticity

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Formation and maintenance of constructed affiliation groups; cultural mediation

Exercise of Power:

- Culturally appropriate, but tending toward consensual

At this stage, learners say:

- "Everywhere is home, if you know enough about how things work there."
- "I feel most comfortable when I'm bridging differences between the cultures I know."
- "Whatever the situation, I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view."
- "In an intercultural world, everyone needs to have a transcultural mindset."
- "I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures."
- "My decision-making skills are enhanced by having multiple frames of reference."

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: INTEGRATION

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Resolve the multicultural identity

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

Learners experience of difference: Low Challenge

Educators should emphasize: High Challenge

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:**Content:**

- Theoretical frameworks for constructing a multicultural identity

Process:

- Create opportunities for marginal peer group interaction
- Provide options for marginals to serve as resource persons
- Model constructive marginality

TO CHALLENGE THE LEARNERS:

Content:

- Cultural mediation models
- Modes of the multicultural self and society
- Models of ethical development

Process:

- Promote a view of self-as-process (choice-making)
- Encourage commitments and boundary setting
- Discuss strategies for cultural identity construction

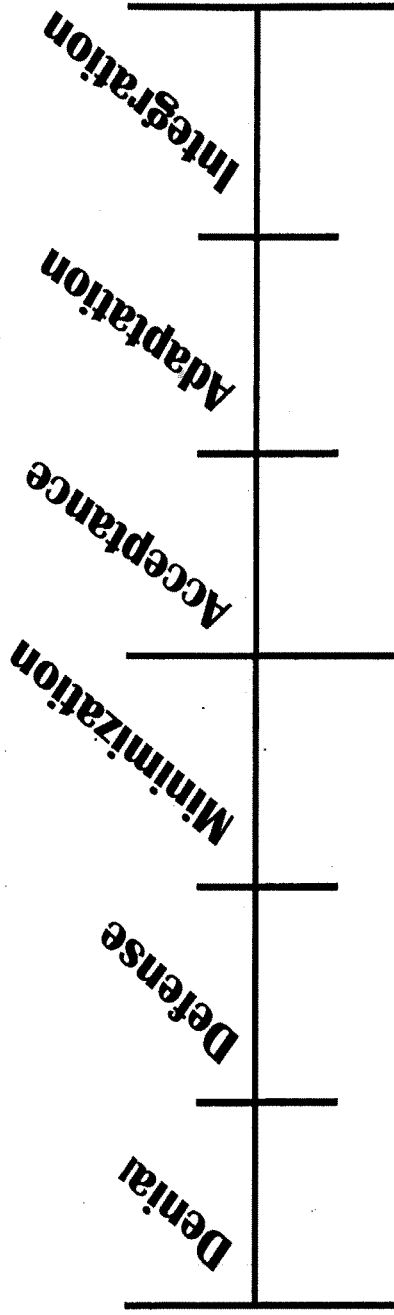
STAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:

- A culturally sensitive sense of humor
- The ability to create new categories
- Role flexibility
- Identity flexibility

* Derived from: Bennett, Milton J. "Towards a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" in R. Michael Paige, ed. Education for the Intercultural Experience. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993.
Also refer to Bennett, Janet M. "Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Intercultural Training," in R. Michael Paige, ed. Education for the Intercultural Experience. Milton J. Bennett and Janet M. Bennett, 2000.

Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

Experience of difference →



**Ethnocentric
Stages**

**Ethnorelative
Stages**

© Milton Bennett