Prof. Noureddine Mouhadjer

M1 LC

Cultural Studies

Cultural Perception

**A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

Milton J. Bennett

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.

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.

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."

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."

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.

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.")

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.

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

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."

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').

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

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.").

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!"

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.

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

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.

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, it’s 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 home stay 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?"

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.

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

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

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."

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."

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

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 marginal’s rather than cultural compatriots are perceived as similar.

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."

**Experience of Difference**

**Denial Defense Minimization Adaptation**

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.