A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL
OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY
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I. DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE

People with this predominant experience are "in denial" about cultural difference – they are unable to experience differences in other than extremely simple ways. They may be perplexed when asked about their own culture, because they have not considered how culture impacts their own or others' lives. They might ask well-meant but naive questions about other cultures ("do they have television in Japan?") and make superficial statements of tolerance ("live and let live"). In some cases, people with this orientation may dehumanize others, assuming that different behavior is a deficiency in intelligence or personality.

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

> **Denial/Avoidance:** Intentional separation from cultural difference protects worldview from change by creating the conditions of isolation. Some awareness of cultural difference may yield undifferentiated broad categories, such as "foreigner" or "Asian" or "people of color."

Perceptual process: Failure to differentiate "culture" as a category, thus an inability to perceive or construe data from differing cultural contexts.

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."
- "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 INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY: DENIAL

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

To recognize the existence of cultural differences
To begin the reconciliation of stability and change

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 positive vision of intercultural interaction

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

II. DEFENSE AGAINST DIFFERENCE

People with a predominant experience of Defense experience cultural difference in a polarized way –us and them. They feel "under siege" by people that they stereotype in simplistic and negative ways, protecting themselves with a hardened boundary between themselves and the "others." Typically, one's own culture is exalted, and other cultures are denigrated with negative stereotypes. This hierarchical view of culture may lead people to assume a kind of social Darwinism wherein they place their own culture at the acme of development and civilization.

A common variation is a **Reversal** of the two poles, so that one's own culture is denigrated and other cultures are uncritically lauded. While Reversal may superficially seem to be more culturally sensitive, it is nevertheless still dualistic and overly simplistic.

> **Defense/Denigration:** The existing cultural worldview is protected by negatively evaluating persons with different cultural behaviors or values.

> **Defense/Superiority:** The existing cultural worldview 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, exemplified by "going native" among long-term sojourners or the "false ally" among some dominant-culture seekers of minority approval.

Perceptual process: categories for culture and cultural difference are better-elaborated, but data is organized into polarized evaluative categories, making neutral statements about cultural difference impossible and thus masking sophisticated differences with simplified stereotypes.

Exercise of Power: Exclusionary denial of equal opportunity.

At this stage, learners say:
- "Why don't these people speak my language?"
- "When I go to other cultures, I realize how much better my own culture is."
- "My culture should be a model for the rest of the world."
- "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"**
> **Distribute criticism equally**

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

III. MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE

The predominant experience of Minimization is that of having "arrived" at intercultural sensitivity. The polarized experience of Defense has given way to a recognition of the common humanity of all people regardless of culture ("We are the world"). The familiar cultural worldview is protected by believing that deep down we are all alike, either physically/psychologically or spiritually/philosophically. This assumption of similarity is then invoked to avoid recognizing one's own cultural patterns, understanding others, and eventually making necessary adaptations. The assumed commonality with others is typically defined in ethnocentric terms: since everyone is essentially like us, it is sufficient in cross-cultural situations to "just be yourself."

> **Minimization/Human Similarity:** Recognition and appreciation of superficial cultural differences such as eating customs, etc., while holding that the more important fact is that all human beings are essentially the same in their physiology, such as the need to eat. Emphasis on commonality of human beings in terms of physiological similarity as a way of approaching different cultures, e.g. "After all, we're all human."

> **Minimization/Universal Values:** Emphasis on the similarity of people in terms of some basic values, typically those of one's own worldview. All human beings may be viewed 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," or "All human beings are subject to the same (Marxist, Capitalist) economic forces."

Perceptual process: Stability is maintained by subsuming difference into familiar superordinate categories, thus creating the experience of one's own worldview as central to the reality of everyone. Unfamiliar data is perceived in neutral terms, but it is construed within the familiar categories of one's own worldview ("bow, shake, kiss – it's all just showing respect")

Exercise of Power: Acceptance of institutionalized privilege; disavowal of power, while unconsciously imposing cultural norms

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**
> **Reconcile unity and diversity**

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

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

When Acceptance is the predominant experience, people experience cultural difference in context. They accept that all behaviors and values, including their own, exist in distinctive cultural contexts and that patterns of behaviors and values can be discerned within each context. They see cultures as offering alternative viable solutions to the organization of human existence, and they are curious about what the alternatives to their own culture are. Acceptance does not mean agreement or preference for alternative values, but rather acceptance of the distinctive reality of each culture's worldview.

> **Acceptance/Behavioral Relativism:** The perception that all behavior exists in cultural context and the pursuit of understanding complex interaction within and between cultural contexts.

> **Acceptance/Value Relativism:** The perception that beliefs, values, and other general patterns of assigning "goodness" and "badness" to ways of being in the world all exist in cultural context, and that cultural worldviews can be understood in terms of these values.

Worldview Structure: Differentiation and elaboration of cultural categories allows for a rich experience of different cultures, and self-reflective consciousness allows for the experience of one's self in cultural context (cultural self-awareness). Data is is organized into cultural context**;** Culture-general frameworks allow systematic contrasts of behavior and values between cultures**;** Culture-specific frameworks allow analysis of behavior and values within cultural context

Exercise of Power: Exercise of power tends to be avoided through inaction (liberal paralysis), and perhaps some unwillingness to apply ethical principles cross-culturally

At this stage, learners say:
- "The more difference the better – it's boring if everyone is the same"
- "People in other cultures are different in ways I hadn't thought of before"
- "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."
- "My homestay family and I have had very different life experiences, and we're learning from each other"
- "Where can I learn more about Mexican culture to be effective in my communication?"

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE: ACCEPTANCE

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:

Refine analysis of cultural contrasts
Reconcile relativity and commitment

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

V. ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENCE

The experience of Adaptation is one of consciously shifting perspective and intentionally altering behavior. Adaptation is the application of Acceptance, and it is likely to become the predominant experience when there is a need to actually interact effectively with people of another culture. With the acceptance of another culture's organization of reality, Adaptation can proceed by allowing one to reorganize experience in a way more like that of the other culture. This is *intercultural empathy*. The ability to empathize with another worldview in turn allows modified behavior to flow naturally from that experience. It is this natural flow of behavior that keeps code-shifting from being fake or inauthentic.

> **Adaptation/Cognitive Frame-Shifting:** The conscious shift of perspective into an alternative cultural world view, thus creating access to a facsimile of the alternative cultural experience. Cognitive empathy.

> **Adaptation/Behavioral Code-Shifting:** Acting in culturally appropriate ways based on an intuitive feel for the alternative worldview. Intuitive empathy. The most effective code-shifting occurs in conjunction with conscious frame-shifting. In other words, it's best to first know how things generally work in another culture, and then to allow your behavior to shift into those patterns when appropriate.

Worldview Structure: Cultural category boundaries become more flexible and permeable, and experience is consciously linked to particular cultural context (self-reflexive consciousness). Conscious re-framing of data allows it to be perceived in various ways, thus allowing experience to be intentionally formed in various cultural contexts

Exercise of Power: Ability to recognize and respond to power in cultural context; Reconciliation of ethical issues and the ability to apply consistent ethical principles in culturally relative ways

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 cognitive and intuitive empathy
Expand repertoire to allow a broader range of authentic behavior

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.)

VI. INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE

The experience of Integration is of being a person who is not defined in terms of any one culture – typically a person who is bicultural or multicultural. The experience of Integration may occur when individuals intentionally make a significant, sustained effort to become fully competent in new cultures. It may become the predominant experience for nondominant group members who have adapted (not assimilated) to a dominant or colonial culture, or it may characterize persons who grew up or lived for extended periods in other cultures. A marginal cultural identity allows for lively participation in a variety of cultures, but also for an occasional sense of never really being "at home." People with this orientation experience themselves as "in process," and they generally have a wide repertoire of cultural perspectives and behavior to draw on.

Integration/Constructive Marginality: Maintenance of a personal or organizational identity that is not primarily based in any one culture, combined with a tendency to facilitate constructive contact between cultures. Participation to some extent in a "marginal reference group," where other marginals rather than cultural compatriots are perceived as similar.

Integration/Ethical Commitment: Construction of an ethical system that allows for "commitment in relativism."

Worldview Structure: World view categories are experienced as constructs maintained by self-reflexive consciousness (cultures and individuals are "making themselves up"). Data both is generated by and generates context; therefore, we control knowledge by the construction of context

Exercise of Power: Culturally appropriate, but tending toward reconciliatory

At this stage, learners say:

- "While sometimes I feel marginal in groups, I am able to move in and out of them with relative ease."
- "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 intercultural 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
Support for 3rd culture constructions in personal or organizational interaction

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT:

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

TO SUPPORT THE LEARNERS:

Content:
- Theoretical and experiential frameworks for constructing a multicultural identity

Process:
- Create opportunities for marginal peer group interaction
- Provide options for constructively marginal people 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

Derived from: Bennett, Milton J. (1993) Towards a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity In R. Michael Paige, ed. *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

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