



Author Bennett Offers New Ideas: New Insights for "Intercultural Sensitivity" Model

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Creative people develop models as a way of explaining or describing an experience or process. When a model is applied to real life situations, then we discover how adequately it describes the experience or process. We asked Milton Bennett, originator of the personal model for Developing Intercultural Sensitivity if he had any new insights about the model as a result of working with it during the last few years.

First, Bennett says the model does not completely describe the process of "developing intercultural sensitivity" for all people. For instance, he points to people who have been oppressed by a dominant group in a society. He says they seem to go through the process differently (African-Americans in the U.S. for example.) Here is his current thinking:

"The development of ethnic identity, unrepresented in the Banks model can be mapped onto the Intercultural Sensitivity model ["The stages of ethnic & cultural development," *Multicultural Education: Theory & Practice*, 2nd ed., James A. Banks, 1981 (See Fig. 1, p.4)]. It suggests that members of oppressed ethnic groups do not experience "Denial", a position that, in modern societies, may only be maintained through a dominant group's exercise of exclusivity. More developmental time is spent in "Defense", for the purpose of solidifying and identity that is the dominant culture. "Minimization", which trivializes cultural difference, is less representative of people who have "rediscovered" a distinct cultural identity - they may even find it offensive. [Members of oppressed ethnic groups pass over "Minimization"

and drop into "Acceptance".] However the last three stages of Banks' model seem to flow parallel to the ethnorelative stages of Intercultural Sensitivity. Bennett finds differences with women, even though they are considered an oppressed group, "Women who have been subjected to assimilationist pressures on the job are a little more inclined to state dominant attitudes."

A second insight involves the first "Ethnorelative" stage, "Acceptance." Bennett says the term "acceptance" is occasionally misunderstood to mean that a person has to "accept" or take on personally, a cultural perspective other than one's own. Bennett says the stage of Acceptance refers to a person who is ready to accept the viability of different cultural ways. "It does not mean personal agreement nor a choice to internalize that perspective," Bennett explains. He states that Acceptance is the first stage in which people begin to think about the notion of cultural relativity, where their own behavior and values are not the only good way to be in the world.

Next, Bennett tackles the ethical issues. He says some people get confused that accepting the viability of a cultural system other than their own somehow prevents them from making ethical choices. Bennett says he directs people to Perry's work on cognitive development to shed light on this problem (*Cognitive and Ethical Development in the college Years*, William Perry, 1969). Perry basically outlined a process of how young people learn to think about the world as they learn more

about it. Perry's work describes the movement from "dualism" (either/or thinking - simple) to "multiplicity" (more than one way to perceive, think evaluate, etc. - complex), and on to "contextual relativism" (different ways are judged according to appropriate context) and "commitment" (people must choose context, even though other ways are viable). If people see multiplicity as the only alternative to dualism, they don't see how ethical principles can be held. But, if they understand contextual relativism, they see how ethical choices can be made without being ethnocentric.

Last, Bennett says the model is often seen as prescriptive, in other words "If the goal is to become interculturally sensitive, then the model provides a process for reaching that goal." But, he claims that the end point for most people will be "Adaptation," not "Integration." Bennett believes the Integration stages was actually an attempt to describe the identity issues he saw many people experiencing. He tried to construe the experience of "marginality" as a more positive force in the development of intercultural sensitivity. As we move toward a more multicultural society, certain forms of cultural marginality may be both inevitable and useful for people who are facilitating the transformation.

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