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The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity was created by Dr. Milton Bennet in 1986. He developed the DMIS "as a framework to explain how people experience and engage cultural difference" (IDRInstitute, *DMIS Model*). Dr. Bennet was a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1968-1970 and returned to acquire his doctorate at the University of Minnesota. He is currently a professor at the University of Milano Bicocca in Italy (IDRInstitute, *Directors*).

DMIS is a tool for explaining the way that people naturally react to and interact with cultural difference. It includes six stages which move from low to no interaction with other cultures to feeling like, or being able to adapt the mindset of, a member of a different culture. The first three stages are ethnocentric, including:

1. Denial – No experience or acknowledgement of cultural difference

2. Defense (or Reversal) – There is acknowledgement of difference, but it is seen either as a threat (Defense) or is romanticized and idolized (Reversal)

3. Minimization – View that some aspects of one's own culture are common to all cultures, that some values and experiences are universal

The last three stages are ethnorelative and frame the progression toward complete adaptation to a different culture. These stages include:

4. Acceptance – Acknowledgement that one's own culture/worldview is but one of many, curious and respectful when encountering cultural difference, may still be judgmental

5. Adaptation – Ability to change one's behavior to be appropriate in a different cultural setting, "intercultural empathy", using sensitivity to inform communication

6. Integration – Ability to move and bridge between cultures, dealing with being between cultures

An example of a person in the minimization stage is someone who believes that people in any culture are motivated by the same ambitions, like everyone wants money and family. An example of a person in the adaptation stage is a person who interacts differently in groups of male or female colleagues based on how respect in shown in the colleagues' culture. (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, p. 164)

One of the current controversies regarding DMIS is whether it is portable to other cultures. According to a study by Joe F. Greenholtz, some of the concepts in the DMIS and its partner, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), are not able to be translated into Japanese and thus limits its ability to be used in non-English-speaking cultures.

I think it could also be controversial as it seems to assume universal experiences. For example, that people always start at the Denial stage. If someone in a very open and accepting culture were to encounter another one, it could be that they start from more of an ethnorelative than ethnocentric position.

For my future career, the DMIS could help me prepare students who are going to study abroad by increasing their cultural competency. With the learning goals and strategies laid out in *The International Education Handbook*, I have an easy reference to help students assess where they are on the continuum and how to help them move along it toward Integration.

If a student comes to me and wants to study abroad, I can talk to them about their intercultural experiences and how they have reacted in the past to them. This will help me to figure out where I think they are on the DMIS. Then I would show them the descriptions of the stages and ask them to do some self-reflection to determine which stage the student thinks they're at.

Once the student and I know which stage they're in, then we can move on to strategies to help them move to the next stage. For example, if a student is in the Reversal stage, I can guide them with discussions regarding what is good about their own culture and the commonalities between all cultures.

The DMIS can also help me to build on my own intercultural competency and make me a better representative of my future company. Reflecting on the stages in the DMIS, I am in the Acceptance stage. In order to progress, I should focus on using what I know about intercultural competency in my interactions with other cultures.

One thing all my classmates should know about the DMIS is that it's a useful tool for assessing intercultural competency and it provides strategies for increasing intercultural competency.

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