

Cross-Cultural Curiosity (CCC): A Theoretical Framework for Intercultural Competence

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Intercultural Competence (ICC) develops in individuals and organizations according to basic processes of human development. The encounter with cultural difference involves a three-step process that can be defined and operationalized. The first step involves creation of sufficient security in one's own cultural way of approaching the world in the presence of people of other cultures.. The second step involves a sense of the common connections between people of different cultures. The third step involves the creation of cross-cultural curiosity (CCC). Each step is governed by a specific set of tasks and operations. Each step depends upon achieving the previous step and overcoming specific definable obstacles. In this paper I will outline and explain how basic psychoanalytic, developmental and neuropsychological concepts help to delineate and conceptualize the separate steps in the development of CCC. This delineation can have practical application in evolving programs that help create intercultural competence and especially in problem-solving when a desired intercultural creation breaks down.

It is a common reductionist error to address the most complex developmental creations as if they are achieved by one step –namely the next to the last. ICC runs the risk of such an error. It would be difficult to conceive of a human creation more complex and multifaceted than Intercultural Competence. Using conceptualizations from the fields of psychoanalysis, child development, and neuropsychology, I will trace a three step process that can lead to the development of ICC.

Caveat: Temperament

The Other does not at first arouse our curiosity. In many situations, what is strange arouses an element of anxiety and a need for self-protection. There is a broad intra-cultural range of reaction to the unknown. One way to conceptualize this range involves the conceptualization of “temperament” differences between individuals. This rubric was proposed and developed by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess (1977) over decades of observation in the New York Longitudinal Study of child development. One of the nine “inborn” temperamental attributes of individuals proposed was that of “approach vs. withdrawal.” These researchers noted that some infants – and adults – have a first-line response of approach to new stimuli while others automatically withdraw at first. Any organization trying to enhance ICC would be well advised to note these constitutional differences. ICC would be accomplished when even the “withdrawers” have made progress towards ICC in their own way. Growth and change in organizations is measured by what in chemistry is called the “rate-limiting step”, here the progress of those whose constitutions make the progress **most** difficult. A false but seductive goal would be to have the “approachers” become interculturally competent, something that might come to them much more naturally, leaving the “withdrawers” to wonder what is the matter with them. This group “sorting out” might masquerade as real change and be “achieved” too glibly and at the expense of true change.

Step One: Security

Splitting

Thus our defined goal is to help even the “withdrawers” to move towards ICC. We now move towards an understanding of the **experience** of withdrawal from the unknown. One direct way to conceptualize this withdrawal is in terms of a “split”, a term proposed by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and more recently explicated by Thomas Odgen (1986). The experience of defensive withdrawal from the Other involves an absolute division between what is familiar and attributed to “self” and experienced as “good” and between the outside non-familiar non-self which is experienced as “bad”. The “good self” is threatened by the presence of the unfamiliar and the anxiety aroused by it in “withdrawers”, and this bad feeling of anxiety is projected upon the unfamiliar in order to save the inner “good” self from the bad feeling.

This process would be the first challenge to developing CCC. The unfamiliar culture would automatically be characterized as bad in order to protect the good feeling with the familiar culture. This automatic split involves an answer before a question can arise, and thus allows for anything but curiosity. It is crucial to recognize the defensive character of the split in order to overcome it. I suggest that the first level to be achieved is that of Intercultural Security. This would involve creating an experience of safety in the *home* culture in the presence of exposure to the alien culture. When this safety is experienced, the foreign culture no longer needs to be split into the realm of the bad in order to protect the goodness of the home culture. Then the goodness of the foreign culture can be experienced without arousing the anxiety that motored the split.

The senses and their use

This process is one of sensual experience more than of words and ideas. In my experience, sharing meals in common is a frequent “ice-breaker” that we could now re-label “split-preventer”. Using all five senses would be even more effective (Flashman, 2003). People could make themselves comfortable in a home culture environment of tastes, fragrances, creams, ways of touching, music and color patterns (for example fabrics). Then people could be gradually exposed to all these sensual aspects of the foreign culture until they find the sensual experience of the foreign culture pleasant as an addition to the home culture sensual experience. Such a procedure (or any part of it) would give recognition to the automatic tendency for splitting and help relieve this tendency and create a more grounded sense of security. Failure to recognize the need of many people for such a procedure runs the risk that people feel uncomfortable and insecure with the foreign culture but feel expected to somehow intellectually “get over it” as if the splitting tendency is bad rather than natural. This tends to create muddles of insincere or artificial relations not grounded in safe secure experience. We are reminded of the “primitive yet sublime” greeting referred to by Martin Buber (1970, p. 70): “I smell you!”

Step Two: Connection

Once security in one’s home culture is achieved, the next step involves building a bridge to a **feeling of connection** (Flashman, 2003) with people of the foreign culture. We feel connected with others when we experience both ourselves and the other together forming a common “we”. This experience is based on what each part of the “we” have in common. The “we” itself is both what each member has in common, and is stitched together by parts that we experience in common. Thus, connection involves finding

human similarities between the cultures. Once we can feel safe with differences, we can seek connection by way of what is common.

Neuropsychology 1: Mirror Neurons

Human beings have a nervous system in common. Rizzolatti and his colleagues (2001) at Parma, Italy have recently demonstrated this on a profound level. Like many significant scientific discoveries, the first step involved recognizing the importance of a serendipitous event. In this case, experimenters were working under the universal assumption that the parts of the cerebral cortex responsible for motor activity are in the frontal lobe, completely separate from the parallel region responsible for sensations in the parietal lobe a few millimeters away towards the back. The investigators passed a minute electrode into the front motor area and were interested in tracing the arousal of these frontal cells when the subject, a macaque monkey performed complex motor movements, such as reaching for food. The monkey would reach for a banana and the pattern of neural activity in the motor neurons was traced. Taking a break, the monkey sat quietly when a research assistant reached for an apple. The monkey's brain responded in a nearly identical pattern, as if it was the monkey who had reached for the apple. The researchers realized something important was afoot and began to look further. They discovered what they called "mirror neurons," neurons in what had previously been regarded as exclusively motor territory, which respond in our brain when we observe a recognizable complex motor action. Our brain responds as if we ourselves had performed the action. The response is nearly instantaneous, too rapid to be the result of "thinking about it." There is immediate response before there is time for the sensory apparatus to feed the visual input through the occipital visual cortex and process the image as a sensory map that could then be passed on to the motor cortex as a way of "understanding by imitating." Rather, certain complex actions are recorded immediately in the motor cortex as if they were our own.

I think that the existence of motor neurons helps to explain and amplify how connections can be created in an intercultural context. When we expose ourselves to complex movements of the Other that we can recognize, we feel that we participate together in these actions. Two important areas of movement are of particular relevance here. The first involves the movements of the facial muscles (Gallese, 2001). The commonplace notion of the "contagion" of smiling can now be understood as a neurobiological experience of participation in the smile of the other. Our brains literally "smile" internally before we respond with the external smile. Since facial expressions constitute a basic and common human repertoire across cultures – a notion as old as Darwin – face to face contact would be a singularly useful tool for creating the experience of connection. The second realm of movement involves dance (Glaser, 2005). Formal dance styles may translate with difficulty across cultures. In one experiment, the brains of dancers were studied as they observed others dancing. The brains of classical ballet dancers "danced" as they observed others performing familiar ballet sequences, but were silent as capoeira was performed. The brains of capoeira dancers responded in a complementary manner. It would seem to me that creating cross-cultural sequences of movement *together* should be able to influence the sense of connection deeply.

Psychobiology 2: Synaesthesia

One additional insight from brain science can be helpful here. That insight involves *synaesthesia*. As Chris Lofting (on-line article, no date) has argued convincingly, sensory

experiences that engage different areas of the brain create a sense of inner coherence when they occur together. The right hemisphere normally controls visual experience, which is organized by simultaneity of all elements of the “picture” and the ability to recognize hierarchical relations between the parts. This side also is most clearly related to the emotions. The left hemisphere controls acoustic experience, which is organized by elements in sequence. The relations but the not hierarchy between elements is recognized here. When an experience includes both visual and acoustic aspects, one feels the coming together of these two forms of organization, a sense of the creation of inner coherence. It would make sense that intercultural experiences that bring together the visual and the acoustic would create a connection to the foreign culture in the sense that the observer feels that what he encounters from the *foreign* culture creates a sense of inner coherence in him.

Putting together these two insights from psychobiology, we could conceptualize that the sense of “we”, of intercultural connection, becomes more robust in experiences that allow 1. recognition of facial and motor movements from the foreign culture that “play directly” on the brain of the participant and 2. that such experiences would be particularly robust when a synaesthetic conformation creates inner coherence. Simply put, if one can “connect” for example with a film (visual and acoustic) from a foreign culture, that culture feels profoundly less foreign, and one gains a sense of connection with the foreign culture.

Step Three: Curiosity

Only after security and connection have been achieved, one is prepared for the creation of intercultural curiosity. At this point one additional set of concepts will be of service. In his landmark book, *The Interpersonal World of the Human Infant*, Daniel Stern (1985) described the development of relationships in two stages. In the first, *regulatory* stage, mother serves to regulate the inner emotions of her infant. Throughout most of the first year, the baby needs mother’s attendance to his inner world, and uses her ministrations to regulate through his experience of mother what he cannot yet regulate on his own. A baby cannot calm himself down, cannot feed or hug himself, and cannot build increasing pleasure or interest except through the regulatory interaction of mother. Once this regulatory activity has become secure, the infant turns to a second use of mother, that of *inter-subjective* experience. Here the infant becomes interested in mother as a subject in her own right, and takes interest in what interests her, what she feels, rather than in what she intends for him to feel. Indeed, Stern suggests that the first subject for the baby is *mother*, and that as she shares her subjectivity with her baby, the baby begins to create his own subjectivity. Hence the term *inter-subjectivity*. Clearly, intersubjective experience is grounded in curiosity. If in the regulatory experience mother is the source of answers (she intends for the baby to become quiet or satiated), in intersubjective experience the mother is the source of questions. Baby becomes curious about her experience and in time curious about his own experience.

The relationship between regulatory and intersubjective experience could be seen as a complementary series (Flashman & Avnet, 2005), with a decrease in regulatory activity as intersubjective activity grows. The stages of security and connection defined above would fit into the regulatory framework, while once regulation has become secure – security of oneself and security in the connection – intersubjective curiosity becomes

possible. I use the term CCC to discriminate the specific third level of curiosity from the much more general ICC which I am proposing requires all three stages.

Affective Attunement and Intersubjectivity

Security was achieved by being secure despite difference. Connection was attained by attention to what is common. Curiosity involves making use of difference in order to deepen connection. One way to appreciate this use of difference is in the phenomenon of *affective attunement* described by Stern (1985). A baby makes a movement, say stretching both arms out wide. Mother could mirror this motion with her arms, or she could create a sound that has the same timing and form as the motion (one could think of her creating the “music” to the baby’s “dance”). In the intersubjective phase, the baby will prefer mother’s new auditory creation to her mimetic arm movements. Stern suggests that the explanation of this preference lies in the baby’s new-found interest in mother’s subjectivity. A pure copy can be reproduced from the outside, but to pass the form of the baby’s movement through her own inner world and create something new gives clear evidence of a *subjective* experience that mother has had in response to her baby. This could remind the reader of the inverse of the mirror neuron – or better, the next step. In this case, mother has “done something” (in the word’s of British psychoanalyst W. Bion) with what her baby has offered, and this is a sign of her subjective presence.

Mentalization

This “doing something” has been recently discussed in terms of “mentalization” by the contemporary British psychoanalyst Peter Fonagy. We come here to what would be recognized more simply as curiosity. Fonagy (2002) and his colleagues refer to a process in which reflective and symbolic functions become possible. The individual notes a discrepancy between a stated “reality”, for example “Joe does not answer me,” as if that were a simple objective fact (“Joe does not like me”), and the possible inner states that could be attributed to this (“Joe could be deaf”, “Joe could want me to pay more attention to him”, “I may have not heard Joe’s response”, and so on). The possible inner states are considered not in the realm of “objective simple reality” but rather in the realm of play. When the individual is able reflect on and integrate the difference between “objective” reality and “playful possibilities”, the individual is able to achieve reflection and symbolization (Joe’s silence as a symbol, not just a fact) and playfulness. He is now able to entertain the inner subjective realities of himself and of others and to recognize the mediation that the objective world undergoes in subjective reality.

Clearly, mentalization is part and parcel of intersubjective experience. I have emphasized this formulation in order to highlight the central part that *curiosity, reflection and playfulness* take in developing intercultural competence. Missing this point, one might assume that competence involves knowing the answers and the sooner the better. There would be a sort of race to translate one set of objective realities into the equally objective “meanings” of the other culture. I am emphasizing here the importance of the *process* of reflecting on what *might be*, a process essential to the curious mode of being.

Co-creation

I do not believe that CCC stops at the point at which a cultural phenomenon has been “understood”. This sort of “understanding” evokes a rather outmoded “telegraphic” theory of communication. As sketched by Gombrich (1963) this approach assumes that the individual with “something” to communicate engages in a simple linear process of

encoding a hermeneutically complete message in language that is transmitted to the receiver whose sole task is to “correctly” decipher the message. At this point the receiver is presumed to have no influence over the message he has received.

This simplistic model of communication limits the upper boundary of intercultural experience. I think that the mentalization process suggests a more dynamic interaction, in which curiosity involves openness, “receptive capacity” to change and be changed via intercultural experience. My personal experience with intercultural work, both as participant and as facilitator, suggests that such meetings offer the possibility of profound growth and change in the members of each culture. I would suggest that CCC involves a self-curiosity as much as curiosity regarding the Other, and that the meeting between cultures involves at its best a growth on both sides.

This notion of mutual growing has recently been expressed by developmental theorist Daniel Stern (2004) in the term “co-creation”. Stern extends some of the mirror neuron work mentioned above to suggest that there are brief but extremely deep direct experiences of face-to-face growth, in which both parties simultaneously create and are created, changing and growing by mutual influence. These moments may be quite brief, between 3 and 10 seconds. They are recognizable in that each party feels that he leaves the encounter different than he entered. Those familiar with the interhuman approach of 20th century existentialist thinker Martin Buber (1970) will find an affinity in such moments to Buber’s delineation of moments of direct “I-Thou” communion. These are moments of great intimacy, and need a firm basis of security and connection to come into being.

I emphasize the co-creation level of intercultural experience, which I see as the culmination of CC, because in my experience people involved in intercultural work often stop short of allowing themselves to feel changed, touched deeply and personally, by contact with a foreign culture. I see this reluctance as an understandable fear of a kind of intercultural intimacy. Yet I find that when people come close to such intimacy, they feel strongly pulled towards it and experience a sense of frustration and despair when intimacy is not achieved. To my experience, this often leads to a generalized disappointment with the intercultural endeavor - intercultural burn-out. On the other hand, I have found that should such meetings be enabled, and the co-creation recognized and valued – cherished, really –such meetings form the emotional glue for further work.

Spiral Processes

If we return for the moment to the split that I described above as a response to a threat that the Other poses to one’s inner security, it should be clear that curiosity, mentalization and intersubjectivity form a different mode of relating. Modes of relating are not final products, and they do not permanently replace one another. As contemporary psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden (1986) has pointed out, in human life there is constant spiral movement through each mode of relating. Growth involves such a spiral form in which we progressively repeat each phase. Psychologist Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) has suggested such a spiral reworking of the developmental theories of Jean Piaget to which I am grateful but which I will not present here. I will focus on Ogden’s contributions and explore their relevance to the development of CCC and ICC.

The Bottom Line

The splitting defensive form was called the schizoid-paranoid position by Melanie Klein, and the intersubjective was referred to as the “depressive” position. In the work of

Thomas Ogden these rather awkwardly named “positions”, modes of experiencing self and others, have been updated and refreshed and deserve renewed attention. The schizoid-paranoid mode is encountered quite frequently in intercultural challenges. In addition to splitting, it involves a sense of all or none, black or white, with the fear that whatever is gained in one area is lost in another. Thus, for example, attributing respect to one culture would be experienced as a loss of value in the other culture. Two cultures would be experienced as competing in a Zero Sum Game, each striving at the expense of the other. In addition, the temporal continuity of experience is disregarded and any given moment of tension or anxiety or threat is experienced as if one could attribute such feeling tone backwards and forwards without limit. Statements like, “If you can say that, it proves you have always felt that way and you will never change” give voice to this experience. In schizoid-paranoid experience, history is always being recreated. It might come as no surprise that in this mode of relating the only possible “solutions” to problems are instant fixes. There is the need for a belief in some magical sudden change that can “reset” all anxieties. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, emotional communication proceeds according to a process given the unfriendly name “projective identification.” This term refers to the universally recognized process by which an individual dramatically creates in his fellow some feeling he cannot bear. This is not “projection,” which is a one-person imaginary attribution of one’s feelings to another. Rather, a two-person drama unfolds in which in order to free myself from, say, hate, I need to get my fellow to hate me in the here and now, and only when experiencing **his** hate I can feel relieved of my own. Difficult intercultural experiences replay this mechanism constantly.

It is to the credit of Thomas Ogden to have pointed out that human beings never become free of this process, nor should they. Ogden points out the advantages of passing through this mode of relating, where creativity and “resets” are possible. Of course, he adds that this mode is one to pass **through**, and that pathology and impasse occur when we stay **only** in this mode and are unable to move to the next mode. I would add that becoming stuck in this mode is often expressed in Western terms as the insistence on some imaginary “Bottom Line” that is often invoked in difficult intercultural impasses. At the Bottom Line one resets history, claims an absolute knowledge, and is anything but curious.

Life Beyond the Bottom Line

When communication passes into the “depressive” mode of relating, curiosity becomes possible. The depressive mode maintains a chronological continuity in which shades of grey are recognized and reflected upon. The “I” is secure enough to consider the Other as subject and recognize that subjects at times hurt each other. It is the ability to recognize the pain of the other that the individual may have caused that gives this mode the name “depressive”. Intercultural failings are seen as an expression of human limitations of both sides over time, and reflection can be given to what experiences can create further movement. Difficulties are seen as experiences mediated by subjectivity on both sides, and both sides develop curiosity regarding the subjective experience of the other. The great advantage of the depressive mode is in its capacity for integration of complex parts of the whole picture. Ogden points out that this depressive mode has a limitation as well. When individuals insist of staying only on the depressive level they may become too fixed and stagnated at repeating reflections without taking the risk direct conflict, albeit

ugly. This stagnation could be accompanied by self-justification but without new experiences to enable change.

Thus Ogden would have us understand that healthy intercultural process would involve the possible movement from schizoid-paranoid to depressive and back. In terms of this paper, we could put it this way: the move from working on security to connection to meaning continues constantly. A living organism like intercultural experience grows to the point of meaning only to reach new confrontations with security and connection in order to continue creating in the realm of meaning. Perhaps because of the intimacy the CCC enables in the depressive mode, there are bound to be disappointments, which make participants face new levels of dangers at the level of security and connection before restoring the CCC that allows for new points of co-creation.

The Developmental Line of Intercultural Competence

A singularly useful way to conceptualize developmental process was proposed by Anna Freud (1965). Writing about “the concept of developmental lines,” Anna Freud suggested a three-tiered concept (see Flashman, 1996). At the basic, concrete level, she suggested certain parts of development tend to cohere chronologically. For example, experiences of eating tend to be continuous from a baby’s first be passively nursed, through more interactive games with food to independent rational eating as a nutritional activity. Early experiences influence the form of later experiences in the “line”, and so later experiences can be understood partly based on the flow of earlier experiences. The second tier of this concept is that of “coordination of between the lines.” This refers to experiences in which a child will actively connect experiences from two different lines. For example, a child saying “pass the salt” is connecting language with eating. (If he adds “please” he has made a connection with relations between people.) Anna Freud points out that it is this active “stitching” together of different lines that the child experiences as himself, one aspect of the “doing something with it” that we mentioned above. The second level takes place with very little fanfare, by small increments, each “stitch” both connecting the “lines” and creating a connectedness or glue in the experience of the “stitcher.” The third and most general tier is that of the sum total of the experience of being able to perform these connection. This would be the “I”, a sense that personal existence is experienced in these mental and emotional activities.

I think that ICC could be conceptualized as a special developmental line. It would involve first tolerating the presence of foreign cultural experience and expression alongside the familiar. The second level, the “stitches” would involve small gradual increments in the ability to become curious about the other culture. I am suggesting here that CCC constitutes the “stitches” between the aspect of the familiar and the foreign culture. Every little question, thought, “mentalization” about how it is to live in the other culture, how it works, what human dilemmas it resolves and what challenges it creates. ICC would be the sum total of the experience of these stitches. A person with more advanced ICC would be able to continue to stitch intercultural experience together. If we now “stitch” together what we have written above, we would then say that ICC would involve the ability to maintain security, experience curiosity and create integration and toleration in a spiral fashion. The success of one turn of the spiral would be the ability to confront more deeply challenging or disturbing cross cultural material, to create further realms of security and the stitches of curiosity, leading to an expanded sense of ability to

hold together the challenges of the foreign culture, turning to the next challenges and a repeat of the processes at the next turn of the spiral.

Groups and Differentiation

One more theoretical stitch is necessary here. We have been speaking of CCC and ICC as if they inhere in an individual. Yet the core of intercultural experience is a group experience. We require some theory of group behavior to make this connection.

The most widely cited theory of groups in Family Systems work in the USA is that of pioneer family therapist Murray Bowen (1978). Bowen proposed a theory for families that is easily applied to groups as well. Bowen proposed a scale for *relationships*, a scale between people, not inside them, which he termed “level of differentiation of the individual in the system.” (Names were not his forte.) Simply put, a group maintains a higher level of differentiation when three conditions are met (only the first two were systematically conceptualized by Bowen). Bowen attempted to operationalize his concept of differentiation by describing three elements of praxis by which a level of differentiation could be determined. The first two elements of this praxis achieved clear conceptual definition in his work; the third element of praxis is clearly described in his work but left without conceptual clarity (see Flashman & Avnet, 2005, Flashman, in preparation).

The first two elements of praxis are “I-position” and “Triangles.” Bowen suggested that in families with a higher level of differentiation, individual *commence* communication with each other speaking each from an “I-position.” Here we have an analogy imported from classical ballet. “First position, second position,” and here “I-Position.” Bowen meant that each individual begins to communicate by expressing in a relatively full and authentic manner his own experiential world, his needs and desires. These are expressed in an atmosphere of openness to a similar expression from the side of his partner in communication. In low differentiation, individuals limit the fullness of expression of themselves or of their partner. Rather, an individual may attempt to placate his partner by expressing only what the partner finds easy to hear. Alternatively, the individual may force his wishes upon his partner, without willingness to entertain the difference in experience or desires coming from his partner.

Bowen’s second concept, one he shares with most family theorists, is that of triangles. Two people enlist a third rather than engage in dyadic communication. Differentiation is lower when dyads communicate through a third. Differentiation is higher when dyads maintain their communication directly. Since families and systems are not solely dyadic, this would involve the robust existence of communication in all three dyads of a central triangle, but one at a time..

It was the third part of his praxis which Bowen demonstrated but failed to conceptualize. Here I would put it in terms of the co-creation mentioned above. Co creation refers to the growth in each individual that takes places simultaneously with the growth in his partner. For example, Bowen reported in 1967 in a Family Research Conference how he created a “tempest in a teapot” in his own family of origin – he himself was more than 50 years of age at the time – in order to make room for “I-positions” without triangles. He then describes in wonderful emotional depth the new conversations that took place. For example, he found a new closeness with his father and was able to “talk about the full range of important subjects without avoidance or defensiveness, and we developed a far better relationship than we had ever had. This experience brought a new awareness that I

simply did not know what constitutes a really solid person-to-person relationship. ...I believe that I had done something to change my relationship with my father, which in turn changed his relationship to all he contacted (Bowen, 1978 p. 517)" These are the sorts of relational innovations that I refer to as "co-creations".

Level of differentiation could be coordinated with terms mentioned above. In groups at a lower level of differentiation individuals engage more in operations required to regain security and connection, emphasize regulation, experience more "bottom-line" thinking and behavior, tend to force feeling upon others or withhold expression of feelings, and engage in triangulation (you and I are fine, *he* – for example the foreign culture- is the problem). In groups achieving a higher level of differentiation individuals are able to speak from a personal truth, maintain dialogue even in conflict, achieve curiosity, engage in intersubjective co-creation and mentalization..

Applications

Building towards CCC

Groups engaged in intercultural activity may experience a spiral of differentiation, with seemingly higher differentiation freezing into regulation under stress in order to then achieve a yet higher level of differentiation. I discuss here practical measures to raise the level of differentiation. In the next section I demonstrate how the spiral can be helped to turn.

In initial phases of intercultural experience, I think it best to assume a starting point of somewhat low differentiation. There may be expressions of "bottom-line" thinking and triangulating. For example (Flashman, 2003, 2006), in a group of Israelis and Palestinians which I facilitated, Palestinian Moslem women assumed secular Israeli women lack any sexual inhibitions, while Israeli women thought their counterparts unable to discuss intimacy. Each group was uncomfortable with the matter of intimacy in and among the same culture, and triangulated this discomfort as an "all-or-done" phenomenon onto the other group. At the first level, I asked the Israeli and Palestinian women to describe the range of public dress with which each group felt comfortable. Thus Israelis spoke to Israelis and enjoyed expressing their personal differences with their own culture, as did the Palestinians. Women on both sides took pleasure in hearing how the other side shops. The women then noticed the range of dress among those present from both sides in the group. By achieving security and connection, the women were able to move towards curiosity. Israeli women started to ask Palestinian women how they decided what colors they could wear and what had to be covered. The Israeli curiosity evoked a curiosity among the Palestinians who had never spoken with each other about this. The same process took place reciprocally. Challenged by the curiosity of the Palestinians, the secular Israeli women began to explore among themselves just how they decided the same questions of dress without religious guidelines. In the end, this CCC created a group that had for the moment achieved a rather high level of ICC.

Repairing CCC

Approaching ICC as a linear process burdens moments of crisis with the sense of failure. I find that the spiral approach allows the facilitator to maintain curiosity about a fairly expectable move towards lower differentiation rather than feel himself attacked or failed. For example, in a group of Palestinian and Israeli teachers over a four day seminar, the group has achieved a higher level of differentiation. Members were able to become curious about personal life in the face of trauma. My Palestinian counterpart presented

some research he had completed on the life cycle of suicide terrorists. He described an eighteen year old Palestinian according to his experiences within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict year by year. Since I had worked in other contexts with life-cycle issues, I proposed a parallel approach to understanding the inner world of the Israeli soldier (many of the Israeli members had children serving in the IDF). Within short order, the room was in chaos. The Israelis were stating that no life experience could justify suicide bombing, so what was presented was irrelevant. The Palestinians attacked me for “stealing” the ideas of their leader. The group needed to take a break.

My counterpart and I reflected during this break upon what had happened. We conjectured that the issue of terror had threatened both sides of the group and each drifted into operations to regain security, at the expense of curiosity. After the break, we first encouraged each side to express among themselves what had made them feel threatened. Through personal statements, members of each side could regain a sense of security within their own culture in the presence of the other. Then each side could see how violence threatens the other side. That sense of connection, of human beings caught in living through a violent struggle’ albeit on opposite sides, created enough connection between the two sides. Then group members were able to restore curiosity and began to ask each other what they feared for their children, be it danger or violent behavior of soldiers, or radicalization and desperation leading to terrorist activity. At this point the CCC in the group enabled each group to actually become enriched through the questions of the other. The level of ICC that was now achieved was higher than previously. We had not only “restored” competence, we had turned the spiral and grown together.

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