

Progressing Toward Ethnorelativism: Using the City of Bell Scandal to Teach Intercultural
Competence Development

Michael A. Moodian

April 1, 2015

Author Note

Paper for delivery at the 2015 Western Political Science Association Meeting, Las Vegas, NV,

April 4, 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
SHIFTING LANDSCAPES	1
Intercultural Sensitivity and Conflcit Theories	1
Overview of Bell’s Residents and the Scandal.....	5
A Lesson Plan.....	9
Concluding Reamarks	11
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	12
REFERENCES	13

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. The DMIS.....	2
Table 2. The Dual-Concern Model.....	5
Table 3. The Intercultural Conflict Style Model	5
Table 4. Bell’s Most Recent Census Data	6

ABSTRACT

This conference paper provides a lesson plan for teaching intercultural competence development. I will provide overviews of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and the citizen activist movement that helped restore good governance principles in the City of Bell major government corruption scandal aftermath. The paper will explain each DMIS stage: the ethnocentric stages of denial, defense and minimization; followed by the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. After describing how 2 cultural groups that previously had minimal interaction came together in the scandal's wake, I will provide a 5-phase lesson plan for teaching intercultural competence development by exploring the Bell scandal through the DMIS lens.

SHIFTING LANDSCAPES

According to the latest U.S. Census data, the United States is becoming increasingly multicultural. In California, the most populous state, there were significant population increases among those who classify themselves as Asian, Hispanic, multiracial, and other groups in 2010 (Bloch, Carter & McLean, 2010). The nation is becoming increasingly diverse, and this is reflected in the voting public and public official representation. Take Orange County, CA, for example, where the City of Irvine had the first Korean American mayor of a major city, and the county, once considered homogenous in its demographic makeup, has a majority Asian American board of supervisors. As educators, how do we effectively teach important skills such as intercultural competence to political science students? This paper provides an overview of a major theory of intercultural development, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), along with an example of how a recent local government corruption scandal can be used as a teaching lesson to develop these necessary skills.

Intercultural Sensitivity and Conflict Theories

A major view among interculturalists is that the key to reforming oneself from ethnocentrism is cultural self-awareness, or the ability to experience oneself as operating in a cultural context (M. J. Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004). To do this, students must be taught to display an ability to lead from less of a polarized ethnocentric worldview and incorporate more of what M. Bennett (2004) refers to as an ethnorelative worldview, or "the experience of one's own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities" (p. 62). Ethnorelativism also refers to an increased level of cultural sensitivity in which one has the ability to look at the world through the eyes of multiple cultural perspectives. The term is derived from Bennett's DMIS, which lists six stages in the development of intercultural

competence, as seen in Table 1. They are (in order) the ethnocentric stages of denial, defense, and minimization, and the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

Table 1

The DMIS

Denial → Defense → Minimization → Acceptance → Adaptation → Integration					
ETHNOCENTRISM			ETHNORELATIVISM		

When classified under the denial stage, one is comfortable with the familiar and not anxious to complicate life with cultural difference. Oftentimes, an individual in denial is the product of a polarized worldview and a monocultural socialization process. One may have never had contact with individuals from other cultures, so the idea of cultural difference might be irrelevant to them. Public administrators who practice denial might be unable to recruit a diverse workforce and likely have a complete lack of understanding about cross-cultural issues (M. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005; Hammer, 2009b).

One who practices defense demonstrates a strong commitment to his or her own worldview and some suspicion or distrust of cultural behaviors that differ from his or her own. Typically, one in defense might have an oversimplified us versus them ideology or feel that other cultural groups are either with them or against them. Individuals classified under the defense stage might take strong stances in favor of one-language laws and assimilation programs. Related to defense is the reversal stage, in which one might demonstrate a positive view of a new adopted culture and a largely negative view of his or her previous host culture. Implications might include a general attitude of superiority and the perception of cultural differences as issues that are to be avoided (M. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005; Hammer, 2009b).

One who practices minimization tends to minimize cultural difference and might consider others basically like him or her. A challenge with this ideological perspective is that it leads to the assumption that others are either as simple or as complex in their cultural characteristics. Equality is stressed at a superficial level (M. Bennett, 2004). Implications for minimization include an overestimation of cultural sensitivity and poor retention of successful diverse recruiting initiatives in public agencies (M. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005; Hammer 2009b).

In reference to the ethnorelative stages, acceptance refers to the acknowledgement and respect for cultural difference and means that one looks at his or her own culture as just one way to experience the world out of many viable possibilities. Implications include communications and training efforts that acknowledge cultural context with appropriate action unclear, plus the understanding of the value of diversity leading to efforts of recruiting and retaining a multicultural workforce (M. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005; Hammer, 2009b).

Adaptation refers to two subcomponents. First is cognitive frame shifting, which is the recognition of the added value of having more than one cultural perspective available. This also refers to the ability for one to take the perspective of another culture. Next is behavioral code shifting, which is defined by the ability for one to change intentionally his or her culturally based behavior and establish a broad behavior repertoire. The implications for adaptation mean that cultural awareness makes the transition into cross-cultural competence, and a solid climate of respect for cultural difference leads to a high retention of a diverse workforce (M. Bennett, 2004; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005; Hammer, 2009b).

Earley and Mosakowski (2004) refer to the ability of behavioral code shifting as Cultural Intelligence, meaning:

A person with high [Cultural Intelligence] can somehow tease out of a person's or group's behavior those features that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic. (p. 140)

By being able to do so, this means that successful leaders are able to deal with various national and vocational cultures (Early & Mosakowski, 2004). This sort of cultural relativism relates to group conflict, as well as those who are potentially involved in a dispute and need to be able to recognize and agree upon cultural boundaries among groups (Bull, Fruehling, & Chattergy, 1992). The ability to move from a polarized worldview to one in which an individual can experience multiple cultural perspectives simultaneously can be extremely enriching and advantageous to students.

Finally, integration represents a comprehensive intercultural worldview, in which one is able to internalize bicultural frames of reference. Policy development is viewed through cultural contexts, and one is able to demonstrate an ethnorelative perspective (J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2005).

To implement adequately an appropriate intercultural training model, an assessment of the levels of conflict also has to occur. Traditionally, the Dual-Concern Model, as outlined in Table 2 (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986), had been used to display various methods of communication (and ultimately conflict) within groups. The model measures one's concern for self combined with one's concern for others. Conflicting styles can often result in conflict situations.

Table 2

The Dual-Concern Model

		Self-Concern	
		High	Low
Other Concern	High	Problem Solving	Accommodation
	Low	Concession Making	Avoidance

Table 3 outlines the Intercultural Conflict Style Model, which categorizes one's intercultural conflict style that correlates with one's cultural socialization processes. Picking up where the Dual-Concern Model leaves off, the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory measures conflict style in a cultural context by looking at cultural ways in which emotion is displayed, combined with cultural constructs of directness in communication style.

Table 3

The Intercultural Conflict Style Model

Direct	Discussion	Engagement
Indirect	Accommodation	Dynamic
	Emotional Restraint	Emotional Expressiveness

The four styles identified are discussion (disagreement by directness and emotional restraint), engagement (disagreement directness and emotional expressiveness), accommodation (disagreement by indirectness and emotional restraint), and dynamic (disagreement by indirectness and emotional expressiveness). Understanding the different conflict styles enables individuals to approach and manage conflict successfully in a variety of cultural environments (Hammer, 2005, 2009a).

Overview of Bell's Residents and the Scandal

The City of Bell scandal, the largest local government scandal in California history, was a tragic story of corruption and human frailty. Many of the story's facts have been well reported: a

city manager, assistant city manager, and city council members were indicted on corruption charges. A recall effort followed, along with guilty verdicts on some charges, no contest pleas, jail and prison sentences, and the election of a new city council. What has often been underreported about the Bell ordeal has been that it took two communities that previously had minimal interaction with each other—Latinos and Lebanese Americans—to help restore democracy in the municipality.

Table 4 displays Bell’s recent census data. Bell has a relatively small population of 35,948, with 93.1% identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino. This Latino community was established in the city in the 1980s. *Los Angeles Times* reporters Fuetsch and Griego (1991) wrote, “Asian and Hispanic populations have surged in Long Beach and the Southeast Los Angeles County area over the last decade, while the Anglo population in almost every community has dropped, according to U.S. Census data released this week” (para. 1).

Table 4

Bell’s Most Recent Census Data

	Bell	California
Population, 2013 estimate	35,948	38,332,521
Population, 2010 (April 1) estimates base	35,477	37,253,959
Population, percent change, April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013	1.3%	2.9%
Population, 2010	35,477	37,253,956
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2010	8.8%	6.8%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2010	32.0%	25.0%
Persons 65 years and older, percent, 2010	6.8%	11.4%
Female persons, percent, 2010	49.6%	50.3%
White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	53.8%	57.6%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.9%	6.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.9%	1.0%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.7%	13.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	[near 0%]	0.4%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	4.4%	4.9%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	93.1%	37.6%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010	4.9%	40.1%

Living in same house 1 year and longer, percent, 2009–2013	89.4%	84.2%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2009–2013	44.4%	27.0%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5+, 2009–2013	88.5%	43.7%
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009–2013	45.3%	81.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009–2013	5.9%	30.7%
Veterans, 2009–2013	520	1,893,539
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16+, 2009–2013	28.8	27.2
Housing units, 2010	9,217	13,680,081
Homeownership rate, 2009–2013	27.2%	55.3%
Housing units in multiunit structures, percent, 2009–2013	36.6%	31.0%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2009–2013	\$282,700	\$366,400
Households, 2009–2013	9,102	12,542,460
Persons per household, 2009–2013	3.81	2.94
Per capita money income in past 12 months (2013 dollars), 2009–2013	\$12,076	\$29,527
Median household income, 2009–2013	\$35,985	\$61,094
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2009–2013	30.2%	15.9%
Total number of firms, 2007	2,224	3,425,510
Black-owned firms, percent, 2007	3.0%	4.0%
American Indian- and Alaska Native-owned firms, percent, 2007	[suppressed]	1.3%
Asian-owned firms, percent, 2007	[suppressed]	14.9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander-owned firms, percent, 2007	[fewer than 25 firms]	0.3%
Hispanic-owned firms, percent, 2007	[suppressed]	16.5%
Women-owned firms, percent, 2007	34.1%	30.3%
Manufacturers shipments, 2007 (\$1,000)	396,628	491,372,092
Merchant wholesaler sales, 2007 (\$1,000)	639,470	598,456,486
Retail sales, 2007 (\$1,000)	212,422	455,032,270
Retail sales per capita, 2007	\$5,840	\$12,561
Accommodation and food services sales, 2007 (\$1,000)	41,813	80,852,787
Land area in square miles, 2010	2.5	155,779.22
Persons per square mile, 2010	14,185.1	239.1

Note. Adapted from *Bell (city), California*, United States Census Bureau n.d.

In Bell, there is also a small Lebanese American population numbering approximately 2,000. This community was established when immigrants from Yaroun, a small village in southern Lebanon near Israel, immigrated to the United States to flee civil war in the 1970s.

Bell's Lebanese Americans live in an enclave near Otis and Brompton streets. *Los Angeles Times*

reporter Abdulrahim (2010) wrote, “They have mostly kept to themselves, creating an insular community where only people from their native village in southern Lebanon—Yaroun—are welcome, and outside social and civic involvement is mostly shunned” (para. 8). In addition to the geographic ancestral differences of these two groups, they also share religious differences, as Bell’s Latino population is primarily Roman Catholic and Protestant, and its Lebanese Americans are primarily Shi’ite Muslim (Audi, 2010).

During the roughly 40 years in which these communities lived separately from each other, there were some unfortunate situations that took place. When Ali Saleh, a Muslim American and son of Lebanese immigrants, ran for city council in 2009, someone placed fliers at a local supermarket with Saleh’s head superimposed on a body holding a sign stating, “Islam will dominate the world” (Becerra, 2009, para. 4), and “Vote NO Muslims for the City Bell Council 2009” (para. 5). The fliers had images of burning World Trade Center towers, radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and figures with black hoods standing with a hostage. Saleh received only 375 votes in a losing effort.

When the *Los Angeles Times* first reported the story “Is a City Manager Worth \$800,000?” (Gottlieb & Vives, 2010), a citizen activist group named Bell Association to Stop the Abuse (BASTA) formed. The association was one of the driving factors in the recall effort, and some of its leaders, such as Cristina Garcia and Ali Saleh, were elected to political positions after the recall. (Garcia serves in the California State Assembly, and Saleh was the top vote receiver in the Bell city council’s 2011 and 2015 elections.)

Beyond this, BASTA was noteworthy for bringing Bell’s Latino and Lebanese American communities together. For the first time in roughly 4 decades, members of these communities learned about each other and starting working with each other to fight government corruption. A

main reason for this was that BASTA meetings regularly took place at the El Hussein Community Center, a Muslim center that was the only facility large enough to accommodate the large number of citizens who would attend. Originally, people unfamiliar with Islam expressed hesitation about meeting in the center, but eventually, activists explained that the BASTA movement in some ways brought the community together as one. While there were not dramatic improvements in the relationship between these two groups, there were at least initial steps toward unity. I wrote about this in extensive detail in my white paper, “Unity Through Crisis: How a Latino and Lebanese American Coalition Helped Save Democracy in the City of Bell” (Moodian, 2015), which is published in Chapman University’s City of Bell Scandal Revisited conference proceedings.

A Lesson Plan

How can the story of the citizen activist movement, along with an integration of Bennett’s DMIS, be used as a teaching tool? I propose a 2½-hour lesson, which could be divided into two 1¼-hour sessions, that encompasses the following:

1. Beforehand, the students should read as much as possible about the City of Bell scandal. This *Los Angeles Times* Staff (2013) timeline is an excellent starting point: <http://timelines.latimes.com/bell/>. *L.A. Times* journalist Jeff Gottlieb (2015) and Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia’s (2015) white papers in Chapman University’s City of Bell Scandal Revisited conference proceedings are also recommended assigned reading: <http://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/about-wilkinson/wilkinson-events/bell-conference.aspx>.
2. At the start of class, facilitate a discussion on the scandal, why it happened, and how two communities joined forces to fight government corruption. Discuss the role of

- citizen engagement in the political process, and share relevant census data on Bell's demographics.
3. Give the class an overview of each DMIS stage, starting with the three ethnocentric stages, and progressing to the three ethnorelative stages. A survey titled the Intercultural Development Inventory provides a quantitative measure of one's intercultural competence in relation to the DMIS, but this must be administered by a certified Intercultural Development Inventory administrator. Also, consider a brief overview of the Intercultural Conflict Style Model for an additional perspective on the social construction of difference. Hammer's (2009a, 2009b) book chapters are excellent supplementary resources on the Intercultural Development Inventory and Intercultural Conflict Style Model.
 4. Discuss cross-cultural relations in Bell through the lens of the DMIS. During the decades in which there was minimal interaction between these two groups, what stage was predominantly practiced (perhaps denial or defense)? How could one describe the bigoted fliers (perhaps as practicing defense)? Was the unifying of these two groups a progression toward minimization? In larger classes, consider dividing the students into small groups for discussion before facilitating a larger class discussion. Discuss theories of social pluralism (including assimilation and amalgamation theories) and ask the class if movements such as BASTA could represent a transition in Bell from a cultural plurality to an amalgamation.
 5. Discuss America's shifting demographics and evolving cities. Facilitate a discussion on how public policy leaders can foster intercultural competence in an effort to serve effectively constituents.

Concluding Remarks

The Bell scandal is a tragic story of massive fiscal mismanagement and malfeasance in a poor southeast Los Angeles County community. If there is anything positive to come out of this ordeal beyond a new, transparent government and focus on good governance principles in other municipalities, it is that we as social scientists can dissect aspects of the scandal to use as teaching tools as we educate the next generation of inquiring, ethical global citizens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael A. (Mike) Moodian is a Chapman University College of Educational Studies faculty member, chair of the United Nations Association of Orange County Advisory Board, and former chairman of the World Affairs Council of Orange County. He is the editor of *Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence* (Sage, 2009), a book that examines the application of cultural comprehension to organizations and the measurement of intercultural competence. Contact Moodian through his Web site (www.moodian.com) and follow him on Twitter (@mikemoodian).

REFERENCES

- Abdulrahim, R. (2010, September 8). Activist raises profile of Bell's Lebanese community. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>
- Audi, T. (2010, September 19). In one city, an Islamic center unifies. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com>
- Becerra, H. (2009, March 5). Campaigning in Bell and Cudahy gets ugly. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>
- Bennett, J. M., & Bennett, M. J. (2005). *Developing intercultural competence: A reader*. Portland, OR: Intercultural Communication Institute.
- Bennett, M. (2004). Becoming interculturally competent. In J. Wurzel (Ed.), *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 62–77). Newton, MA: Intercultural Resource Corporation.
- Bennett, M. J., & Castiglioni, I. (2004). Embodied ethnocentrism and the feeling of culture: A key to training for intercultural competence. In D. Landis, J. M. Bennett, & M. J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training*. (3rd ed., pp. 249–265). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bloch, M., Carter, S., & McLean, A. (2010). Mapping the 2010 U.S. Census. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Bull, B. L., Fruehling, R. T., & Chattergy, V. (1992). *The ethics of multicultural and bilingual education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Early, P., & Mosakowski, E. (2004, October). Cultural intelligence. *Harvard Business Review*, 82(10), 139–146.

Fuetsch, M., & Griego, T. (1991, February 28). Census shows Asian, Hispanic surge. *The Los Angeles Times*, pp. J1, J4.

Garcia, C. (2015). Building BASTA. In F. Smoller (Ed.), *The City of Bell scandal revisited conference proceedings*. Orange, CA: Chapman University.

Gottlieb, J. (2015). Bell: A total breakdown. In F. Smoller (Ed.), *The City of Bell scandal revisited conference proceedings*. Orange, CA: Chapman University.

Gottlieb, J., & Vives, R. (2010, July 15). Is a city manager worth \$800,000? *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>

Hammer, M. R. (2005). The intercultural conflict style inventory: A conceptual framework and measure of intercultural conflict resolution approaches. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 675–695.

Hammer, M. R. (2009a). Solving problems and resolving conflict using the Intercultural Conflict Style Model and Inventory. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Exploring the cross-cultural dynamics within organizations* (pp. 219–232). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hammer, M. R. (2009b). The Intercultural Development Inventory: An approach for assessing and building intercultural competence. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Exploring the cross-cultural dynamics within organizations* (pp. 203–217). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Los Angeles Times Staff. (2013, March 20). Timeline Bell: ‘Corruption on steroids.’ *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com>

Moodian, M. A. (2015). Unity through crisis: How a Latino and Lebanese American coalition helped save democracy in the City of Bell. In F. Smoller (Ed.), *The City of Bell Scandal Revisited Conference Proceedings*. Orange, CA: Chapman University.

Pruitt, D. G., & Rubin, J. Z. (1986). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate and settlement*. New York, NY: Random House.

United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Bell (city), California*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0604870.html>