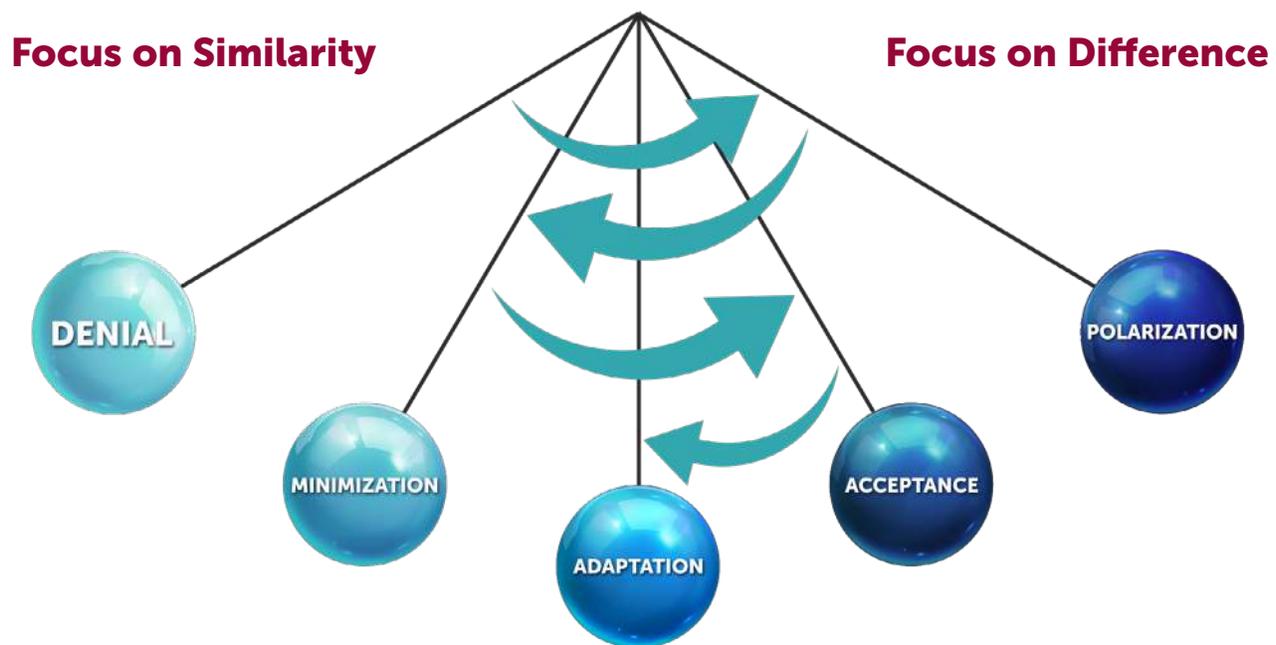


A NEW METAPHOR FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

A well-known stage-based model for intercultural competence is the Intercultural Development Continuum (for more information, see publications by Mitchell Hammer and the website <http://idiinventory.com>). The IDC is typically depicted along an arrow that moves from more monocultural orientations such as denial, polarization, and minimization to the more multi-cultural orientations of acceptance and adaptation. Yet, we (Sundae Bean and Kris Acheson) as practitioners have found that this linear representation often doesn't resonate with the lived experiences of our clients, colleagues, and students.



Instead, we picture the stages of the IDC as points along the arc of a pendulum. Moving into unfamiliar cultural territory often destabilizes our perspective, just as a clock's pendulum may be set in motion when it is moved. Like over-correcting a vehicle with sensitive steering, people swing too far towards the opposite of their current orientation before (hopefully) finding balance between seeing cultural similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Based on Acheson, K., & Schneider Bean, S. (2019). Representing the Intercultural Development Continuum as a pendulum: Addressing the lived experiences of intercultural competence development and maintenance. *European Journal of Cross Cultural Competence and Management*. Download the article at <https://hubicl.org/publications/3/1>

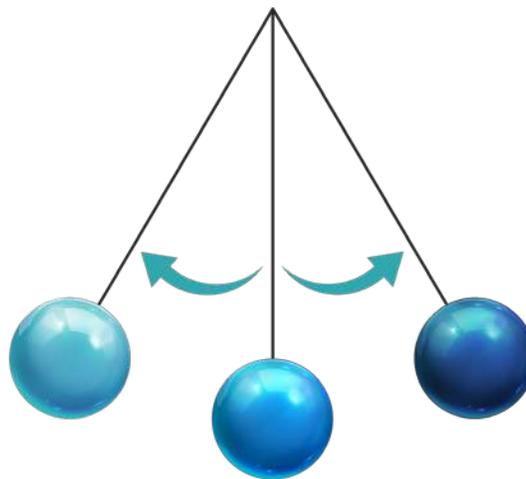
INSIGHTS OF THE PENDULUM METAPHOR

Movement on the pendulum can occur in either direction over the long-term or even from moment to moment. Starting from one side or the other will often result in extreme swings, whereas those starting from closer to the center will be able to return to balance more quickly and easily. The image below illustrates some forces that can affect our pendulums—magnets are exterior forces which tend to pull the pendulum towards too much focus on similarity or too much focus on difference. Notice that tourist lifestyles can act as magnets on both sides: they can both buffer us from local customs and encourage us to frame the world in terms of us vs. them.

Focus on Similarity

Examples of Magnets:

- Religion
- Separatism (e.g., isolation in an expat community)
- Moments of connection with others
- Tourist life style



Focus on Difference

Examples of Magnets:

- Traumatic encounters with difference
- Moments of conflict with others
- Tourist life style

Examples of Anchors:

- Physical and emotional health
- Strong diverse social networks
- Habits of mindfulness

Like magnets, anchors also exert force on the pendulum, but rather than pulling you away from your habitual orientation, anchors ground you and allow you to resist swinging to previous stages on the IDC in times of stress. While magnets operate on the pendulum largely outside of our control, anchors require deliberate cultivation on our part; we must drop anchors if we want them to help hold us in place. Expat fatigue is common for those who don't cultivate strong anchors to aid their emotional and physical resilience.

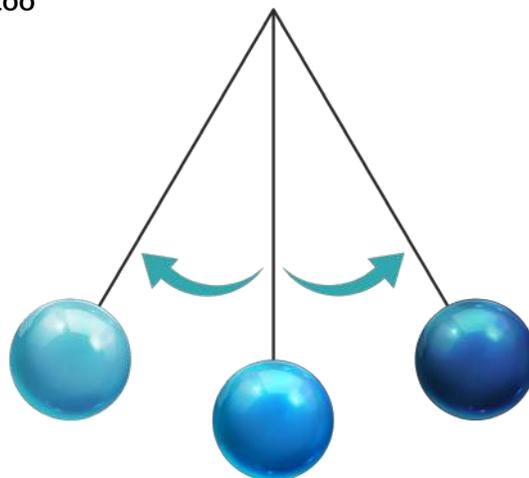
YOUR PERSONALIZED PENDULUM

Now it's your turn: Research suggests that best results may be gained from the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory as a formative assessment. However, reflection using a tool like the pendulum can also be a very useful strategy. [This fillable .pdf can be printed once you are finished so you have a record of your reflection.](#)

Where do you think you are on the pendulum's arc right now? Are you stable or swinging (or perhaps anticipating an upcoming swing)? Do you tend to focus too much on how you are similar to or different from other people in your life (home, work, community)?

Now use the graphic below to think through your own personal magnets and anchors...

Magnets that make you focus too much on cultural similarities:



Magnets that make you focus too much on cultural differences:

Anchors that make you balanced and stable:

Feeling stuck? Contact Sundaebean for a 30 minute free coaching session.

ABOUT SUNDAE SCHNEIDER-BEAN



Creator of Adapt and Succeed Abroad™, Host of Expat Happy Hour™ Podcast, and Founder of Expats on Purpose™

Sundaebean is a solution oriented coach and intercultural strategist for individuals and organizations. She helps individuals adapt as quickly (and painlessly!) as possible, expedite success, create meaningful connections (abroad and at home), and cherish experiences. Sundaebean is US American by birth, Swiss by marriage, and an expat to South Africa by choice. Her clients range from European multinational organizations to international NGOs, and from country directors to expat spouses, representing over 60 countries across 6 continents.

Find out more about Sundaebean's products and services at www.sundaebean.com.



Have questions about the academic application of these ideas?

ABOUT DR. KRIS ACHESON-CLAIR



Director of Purdue University's Center for Intercultural Learning, Mentorship, Assessment and Research (CILMAR)

Kris currently leads a team of intercultural learning specialists at Purdue University with the mission of supporting the development of intercultural competence among Purdue students, faculty, and staff and sponsoring cutting-edge intercultural research. Kris specializes in fostering positive attitudes towards intercultural interactions and teaching skills for cultural discovery. She was raised in a US military family, and has traveled abroad extensively. Kris holds a BA in Spanish and Art from Berry College, an MA in Applied Linguistics from Georgia State University, and a PhD in Intercultural Communication from the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University.

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