

Introduction:

An image which is often used in describing spaces that foster learning and development in intercultural encounters (or any interaction with someone that is different from us) comes from Nevitt Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support. The image depicts a target with the comfort zone in the bull's eye, learning zone in the next ring, and panic zone in the outer ring, demonstrating that learning typically cannot take place if we are too comfortable or too uncomfortable. In an intercultural learning context, this image may be used to encourage educators to find a balance between too much and too little support of students and to encourage students to challenge themselves to venture outside their comfort zone to experience true intercultural learning. But what if the image of the target doesn't speak to any given individual? There are many other descriptions and images that individuals may draw upon when they are feeling either too bored or too stretched in a new setting. This activity introduces Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support and encourages participants to identify an image and quotation that best captures the feelings that come with adjustment to new experiences and environments, ultimately challenging them to go beyond their comfort zone.

Instructor notes:

Activity Instructions #4-6 provide extensive ideas for the image and quotation brainstorming phase, however, instructors are encouraged to focus more time on the debrief and discussion portion of the activity after participants have identified their personal image and quotation. Time spent on sharing and explaining models should be minimized so emphasis is ultimately placed on the discussion.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Articulate the main points and applications of Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support.
2. Identify an image and quotation with which they personally resonate when moving beyond their comfort zone toward true learning and growth in new settings.
3. Consider ways to access the learning zone in new settings when experiencing the realities of the comfort and panic zones.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Entire group.

Materials:

Going Beyond the Comfort Zone Handout and PowerPoint slides (both in [Downloads](#)); Computer with access to internet; Journals for each participant (optional). You may also consider a whiteboard for an optional group brainstorming session.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Other Skills:

Emotional Resilience.

Activity Instructions:

1. Before the activity, familiarize yourself with Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support via the following article:

<https://www.truenorthintercultural.com/blog/getting-beyond-the-comfort-zone>
2. Introduce participants to the theory within the context of intercultural learning.
3. Remind participants that each individual may conceptualize of these "zones" differently, both in word picture and description. Moreover, different images and quotations might speak to individuals in different ways, and what motivates and encourages one individual may not motivate and encourage the next. Tell participants that today they will be challenged to identify an image and a quotation they can personally draw upon when they are feeling too bored or too stretched in cross-cultural contexts.
4. First, participants will brainstorm words, colors, word pictures, and/or doodles that come to mind when considering the different zones presented. You might consider introducing

the Wheel of Emotions to participants to consider sensations and emotions associated with the comfort zone and moving beyond it:

<https://www.6seconds.org/2022/03/13/plutchik-wheel-emotions/>. You can consider the following group and individual brainstorming options:

- You can have them first brainstorm individually with or without the Handout and PowerPoint slides, then in pairs or small groups, and then as a whole group, writing their answers on a whiteboard.
- You can have them brainstorm individually with or without the Handout and PowerPoint slides and then share their ideas via Jamboard (notes below).
- A combination of the above ideas.

Digital option: You can create a Jamboard and share the link with participants (if everyone has access to a mobile device/computer) so that everyone can contribute ideas to the board (See [Example](#)). You can instruct participants to use the text box or sticky note options in Jamboard to add their ideas to the board.

Note: The Example link above is view only, so the facilitator will first need to make their own editable copy. In the top right corner, there is an icon with three vertical dots. Click that icon and then select "Make a copy." Rename the copied document to whatever is appropriate for the context. Click OK. You will then be directed to the new document. To ensure that anyone with the link to this new Jamboard copy has editing privileges, select "Share" in the top-right corner. Click "Change to anyone with the link." A new window will pop up with a drop-down menu that says "Viewer." Click that menu and select "Editor."

5. Then, participants will need to identify an image with which they personally resonate. You might consider showing them this Pinterest Board or creating your own based on this one: <https://pin.it/3PGnBtv>. You can have participants browse Pinterest or other sites to identify their image. They can also use ideas from the group brainstorm session if they wish. They might also wish to continue brainstorming individually via their Handout.

If you'd like, you can present journals to each participant with a space in the front to place the image they identified.

6. Then, instruct participants to consider a quotation that best captures their experience with comfort zones. They might consider using one from this link: <https://bucketlistjourney.net/motivational-comfort-zone-quotes/>, find another one online, or create their own.

Once participants have identified a quotation, you can have them include the quotation on the back of the journal or inside, if you choose to proceed with the journal option.

7. Debrief with the following questions:

- Why did you choose your particular image and quotation?
- Why might different images and quotations be chosen for different contexts?

- When you find yourself in a new and challenging environment, what will you do to coach yourself out of your comfort zone?
- For those of you who resonate with the panic zone, when you find yourself there, what might you do to coach yourself into the learning zone? What might you need in those situations?
- What will help you remember to reference this image and quotation when you find yourself in the comfort and panic zones?

Related Tools:

- [Beyond the Comfort Zone](#)
- [Comfort with Discomfort](#)