tionally, to ensure that we continue to be out of touch with our inner core.

**Ground Sequence Model**

*Figure/Ground*

The concept of figure/ground provides a unique and relevant tool for conceptualizing issues of ethnicity and culture and the use of self in diverse contexts. We developed the Ground Sequence Model (see Figure 1) when we served as faculty at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, practicing Couples and Family Therapy and leading the Small Systems Training Program. It was the culmination of our own experiences as Filipinos encountering our training as Gestalt therapists, our explorations of different models of family therapy, our education as psychologists, our training as diversity consultants, and our perceptions about the culture of counseling in the context of “American” culture.

This model provides a perspective that enlarges the possibilities of our gaining awareness of our use of self and opens those possibilities for assessment and intervention.

The present embodies both figure and ground. We may put our attention to *what stands out* for us in the moment, the *figure* (be that an issue, dilemma, feeling, behavior, sensation etc.), while the *ground is everything else* (the “given” context, structure, time, pattern etc.) that holds and frames the figure for each person in the interaction. The *ground of culture* is the “invisible present” for those who are immersed in the dominant culture; it can be taken as the implicit standard by which to view and compare self and (different) other. Ground is what is taken for granted, unnoticed or out of awareness. It embodies worldview, the acculturated, adaptive, and habitual styles of interaction with the environment. Ground influences the way we make meaning of experiences of communication, decision-making, implementation of action, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

For example, a committee is given the task of designing and implementing a closing activity for a physician who is leaving the medical team. The situation is seen as having the potential to be politically critical by the management of the hospital, which is working on creating an environment appreciative of diversity. There are a variety of feelings — ranging from relief to fear to anger to sadness to shame to guilt — that
Figure 1. Ground Sequence Model: Figure Ground Through Time Sequence

NOW
GS1
Observable: Data (within the hour)

GS2
Daily interaction routine (one day to a week/month/Problematic stuckness)

GS3
Extended family and social systems (month to many years)
Event...traumas/toss - Unfinished business

GS4
Family of origin (generation to generation) Family/trance/values/rules/traditions/beliefs

GS5
Culture/Society/Ecology/Political Shifts (Multi-generations) Mythological changes/Worldwide practices/Socialization/Race/Gender

GS6
Universality (Collective unconscious)

GS7
Transcendence
are not being shared. The task is also complicated by the fact that this
physician is a controversial black man — the only black physician in the
department — whose competence is respected, envied, and questioned,
who holds considerable power over the direction of the team, and whose
terminally ill is known to a few, but not to all.

Projections are floating around and the atmosphere is tense. What is
figural for the committee is the task. What is figural for the facilitator is
the intensified arguing, which seems incongruous to the task on hand.
What is not in the awareness of the committee is the ground (i.e., what
is this event of departure evoking in all the members? What is being re-
acted, recreated? What is the hidden agenda? What is the pattern, the
unfinished business being replayed in the different levels of ground?
What assumptions, rules, values are operating?)

While it may appear that the committee is talking about the “same”
task, their subjective figures (where they are focusing) may differ.
Similarly, the impact of their shared and/or unshared ground is influ-
encing the process of their current interactions and is hindering the
committee in its effort to accomplish a satisfactory agreement concern-
ing the plan and implementation of a closing event.

Even as persons of the same culture and ethnic background (with
many aspects of shared ground, i.e., cultural values, common history,
life experiences, and structures of relationships influenced by econom-
ic, ecological, social, and political realities in the larger society) may
differ, cross-cultural encounters bring greater complexity in consider-
tions of diversity because issues and themes that grow out of the other’s
ground may not easily become accessible, understood, or appreciated.
When this diversity goes unacknowledged, unappreciated, unknown,
the task is even made harder, particularly when there is the assumption
that “for us to get along, for things to be right, we should all be feeling,
thinking, doing in the same way.”

In using the Ground Sequence (GS) model and the Being model as
lenses by which to frame perceptions, the facilitator intervenes to
engage the committee’s participation through listening/hearing and
being curious about each other’s ground, as it is constituted in the pres-
ent circumstances or as it is being evoked by the task and the situation
that they, as a committee, are dealing with.

This approach helps the committee face the task of taking the large
and complex field of perceptions and rendering from it something
meaningful, so that they can interact in the current context in some use-
ful and satisfying way, thereby supporting the committee in the accomplishment of their task.

More specifically, the field/ground consists of:

(1) *Inner sensations, feelings, and urges* (what is inside our organism), and *outer sensations* (comprised of our five senses and the environment of people, objects, and social systems).

(2) Our metaphors, meanings, and larger frames of experience are all shaped by our structures of ground, as culture, ethnicity, and religion. What we draw on, in order for us to attend to or to create new figures, is dependent on the richness or the diversity of our ground.

In the beginning phases of this consultation, we found it valuable to attend to the committee/client system’s ground, in order to achieve a fuller appreciation of the contextual field affecting the task at hand (goal, objectives, action plans, strategy, etc.). Their experience of having their diversity heard, seen, acknowledged, and understood supported their rising to an energized common focus that honored their diversity. In the middle phases, we worked collaboratively with the committee on the task (closure program for the departing physician) and process figure (honoring their diversity). In the ending phases of consultation, the committee debriefed their work together, expressing their appreciation of having learned from their diversity and of having gained a stimulating, energizing, working team that was different from what it had been when they started.

**Ground Sequence Levels**

Experiences are embedded in one’s own ground, in the constructs one makes of one’s perceptual field (Constructivism). Using the GS Levels as a lens, we get a view of the client system’s self (mapper) and their relevant ground (their pre-given world) as they exist in context, together, in history, and in development of background, through:

(1) Exploring/assessing the level of embeddedness of a present-
ing issue, dilemma, or theme, and examining how data is organized (narrative/story) for their unique experience of the issue.

(2) Noticing/selecting the GS Level that seems energized and available as a fruitful point of entry for collaborative work.

(3) Reading/assessing feedback from interventions in that GS Level with an openness to information regarding other GS Levels.

(4) Allowing for shifts, when necessary, to other GS Levels — with appropriate interventions.

(5) Assessing in the context of culturally responsive intervention.

(6) Developing a thematic metaphor to hold the complex phenomena/dynamics of figure and ground/field in diversity assessment and intervention.

(7) Attending to differentiation between process (observable and inferred HOW) and content (WHAT).

(8) Appreciating "sacred" ground evoked from GS Levels work.

Ground Sequence Levels Exercise

We offer two exercises to illustrate the model. We suggest that you put everything aside and find a quiet place for reflection. Take a comfortable position. Have before you your GS Levels Diagram (see Figure 1), paper, and a pen, pencil, or crayon. You may also choose to play some reflective music in the background.

GROUND SEQUENCES EXERCISE 1: Reflection

Let us start this presentation with a reflection exercise. You can color, doodle, or write on paper or a flip chart. Follow this exercise step by step.

I. Identify a behavior of yours that has occurred within the past
hour. Give this behavior a color, a melody, or a movement. For our purposes, we shall call it Behavior X. Notice what you are saying to yourself about Behavior X. Notice what was going on around you during this hour, and to whom Behavior X is responding or reacting. Notice what need(s) you have that Behavior X is meeting. Describe how Behavior X is helping/benefiting you at this moment. Notice how Behavior X is hindering you at this moment. (See Fig. 1, GS Level 1.)

GS1 — Observations of phenomenological data in the present (within the last hour).

✦ Observe present behavior, how the content of conversation is being portrayed in present behavior or in the current interactional pattern.
✦ Observe strengths — what is working well?
✦ Watch for stuckness, for what is not working.
✦ Be aware of present observable ground: ethnic origin, race, cultural characteristics, language, and communication process

II. Now, let yourself go through your daily or weekly routine. Notice when Behavior X occurs. Describe the context. Notice who is there. What are you saying to yourself? What is the interaction? What are you trying to accomplish (goal) or what need are you meeting? Who is Behavior X helping/hindering? Who is benefiting? (GS2.)

GS2 — Routine, rituals of day/week, repetitive pattern/sequence, or problematic stuckness that has built up over time.

Frequently, when GS1 is addressed, the client will spontaneously reveal how that issue, experience, interaction is calibrated and embedded in a GS2 sequence (which is played out over one day to a week, often depending on daily routines of the client couple/family).

III. Now, let yourself go to a time in a month or year — perhaps
when certain events tend to occur: i.e., anniversaries (birthdays, death, divorce, trauma, loss, etc.), monthly or annual meetings, reunions, holidays, etc. What is the event? Describe the context in which Behavior X occurs. Who are the players in this event, and who is Behavior X helping/hindering? Notice repetitive patterns of interactions. What need is Behavior X meeting? (GS3.)

GS3 — Extended family/social systems (e.g., educational, legal, medical) that are part of the repetitive, replicating patterns of interaction or problematic interaction over a period of years.

✦ Stories of personal trauma, loss, death — where stuckness occurred: how family/system/community responded to the trauma.
✦ Unfinished business (heightened in anniversary days). Attempts to finish, showing replications in GS2 and GS1.
✦ Economic status, educational status, occupational, and social networks.
✦ Family as supportive group.
✦ Supportive institutions in ethnic/cultural community.

IV. Now, as you revisit your family of origin, perhaps choosing a particular time when you were a child and living at home or with your caretakers, what scenario do you see? Notice whose behavior in your family of origin Behavior X mirrors. Assign a color to designate Mirrored Behavior X (MBX). What is the context of MBX? Who is benefiting or being helped with MBX? What values, beliefs, or stories did you hear or experience about MBX? Were there stories of immigration, relocation, translocation, and acculturation? (GS4.)

GS4 — Family of Origin: sequences of patterns from generation to generation.

✦ Process/variables, structures.
✦ Family stories, myths, roles, rules, encoded values, beliefs, religious/spiritual influences/practices on psychological effects of health/illness.
Worldview of family group.

(May calibrate/embed shorter GS3, GS2, and GS1 sequence/patterns. Events in one generation mirror events and processes in previous generations.)

Immigration, relocation, translocation, acculturation, dislocation.

V. Take a look at the culture(s) in which your family of origin lived. Which groups of people’s habits, customs, practices, and socio-political roles did MBX replicate, and is Behavior X representing? If members of your family of origin’s cultural group were to comment on value(s) that MBX and Behavior X uphold, what would they say? Is MBX and Behavior X acceptable behavior in your cultural group? Who is benefiting or being helped? (GS5.)

GS5 — Transcultural generations: culture, race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, socio-political, ecological, “isms.”

Primarily in awareness — surface and folk culture: fine arts, literature, drama, classical music, popular music, folk dancing, games, cooking, dress.

Primarily out of awareness — deep culture: mental/behavioral process of ethnic/cultural group; healing/health practices, customs, ideals governing child-raising, patterns of superior/subordinate relations, definition of sin, courtship practices, conception of justice, incentives to work, notions of leadership, relationships to time, tempo of work, patterns of group decision-making, conception of cleanliness, attitudes toward the dependent, theory of disease, approaches to problem-solving, conception of status mobility, eye behavior, roles in relation to status, age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, conversational patterns in various social contexts, conception of past and future, definition of insanity, nature of friendship, conception of “self,” patterns of visual perception, preference for competition or
cooperation, body language, social interaction rate, notions of adolescence, notions about logic and validity, patterns of handling emotions, facial expressions, arrangements of physical space.

(May calibrate/embed shorter GS4, GS3, GS2, and GS1 patterns.)

VI. Now, take a moment and notice your breathing, your body sensations as you went through steps I to V. As you scan your experience, notice which level holds the most energy (has the most interest) for you. Which level has the least energy? Which level do you want to avoid? Where do you feel stuck? Where do you feel excited? Write down your experience.

If you wish, you may focus on the level that stands out for you. Notice where in your body you are experiencing feeling sensations. Describe your sensations; write or draw them.

Sharing with a Partner

Share with your partner what you experienced through the different GS Levels of this exercise. What awarenesses are you having about the ground of Behavior X? As you share with each other, be aware of your experience in your dyad.

Group Processing

Hear from each dyad about their experience, awareness, and learning. Draw from their experience to inform teaching on GS levels in the concept of figure/ground, systems intervention, holistic assessment/intervention, and multicultural perspectives.

Conclusion

In closing this chapter, we are reminded of Wilber's (1996) examination, in a work of unparalleled scope and originality, the course of evolution as the unfolding manifestation of Spirit, a Tao, a Way, a Current of the Cosmos. His, integrative vision of diverse domains points to the direction we take if we are to participate is allowing “glob-
al transformation” to become reality. In moving through the diverse manifestations of the Present Current, we find that richer and “deeper level, a Tao, a Way, a Current of the Cosmos, from which we have not and could never deviate.” As diversity consultants we see our work, centered in the Use of Self, as being present to this deeper Current, this Tao. Our work is to allow the appreciation of Beingness and Wholeness to manifest, as that “there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in one’s worldview.” Herein lies the possibility of global transformation.