The purpose of this study was to explore an action research approach to program planning when used by a leadership team working to enhance the intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. The three primary research questions that guided this study were: (1) how do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?, (2) what learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?, and (3) what elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence? The theoretical and empirical frameworks were used based on transformative learning, intercultural development and group dynamics. Through action research methodology, the primary investigator collaborated with stakeholders in a public institution of higher learning to develop and execute programs and interventions with the intent to enhance intercultural competence. Data for this project were collected through qualitative design strategies and the use of an assessment instrument for diagnostic purposes. The study’s findings recognized that group development was established through short term programs and interventions which introduced
and exposed participants to a learning process that facilitated the beginning stages of change in cognitive, skill development and attitude to enhance intercultural competence. The study’s use of practice and theory provided a basis for further research on systemic changes in a group approach to program development that focused on building cultural awareness.

The conclusions from this study indicate that: action research methodology leverages the use of individual diversity and expertise that contributes to and supports group work, team development, and the benefits of evaluating group intercultural competence; introducing multicultural education garnered responses in participants to increase cultural awareness; and creating effective conditions for multicultural education does not assure transformative learning. Recommendations for future research are shared along with implications for theories and best practices.

Keywords: intercultural competence, learning, action research, team diversity
DEVELOPING THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF EMERGING ADULTS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

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Submitted to the advisory committee of Linda M. Lyons for the partial requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013
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December 2013
DEDICATION

In loving memory of my parents, William Howard Lyons and Essie Lark Lyons, the very first educators in my life and to my daughter, Jacqueline Valeria Graham, gone too soon to see the great things we both could have achieved together in this life time.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One’s work may be finished someday but one’s education, never.
-Alexandre Dumas, the Elder-

I would like to acknowledge and give a sincere “thank you” to those who have assisted me in this scholarly journey. First, and foremost, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Bob Hill, who gave me the foundation and guidance in my doctoral trajectory. I would like to also thank my committee members, Dr. Wendy Ruona and Dr. Laura Bierema for their time and continued support throughout this process. I especially want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Karen Watkins who graciously worked with me during my final stages of writing and for her encouragement that got me across the finish line. I must also acknowledge the hard work that all of the faculty members within the program gave to this cohort; your courses also enhanced my learning and I’m truly thankful to have had the opportunity to work with you during the past several years.

There were also many others who supported me through this educational endeavor. I like to acknowledge and share my appreciation to my place of employment, without your permission to conduct my work within the organization and without the overwhelming support you have shared throughout these past years this study could not have been successful. I also want to thank the members of my leadership team—you guys rock!—and the extraordinary group of students who participated in the research project. Each of you was a joy to work with and we all got the opportunity to learn more about our work as well as about each other.

I must acknowledge and thank the behind the scenes individuals, Dr. Mitsu Misaw, Dr. Leanne Dzubinski, and Ms. Kelly Eisele, who supported me in my writing and was always there
through countless hours of editing, suggesting changes, and transcribing recorded interviews and focus group meetings. I am also thankful and deeply honored to share this learning experience with my fellow classmates. Our time together as the first cohort of this degree program will always be special to me and I’m very appreciative of the friendships we have formed that I hope will last a lifetime.

Finally, but most importantly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support in all of my endeavors. You have been my lifelong cheerleaders and without your backing as well as your encouragement I don’t think I would have made it through this process. Thanks for talking me off the ledge during those low moments within the program and for reminding me over and over again that I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me. Although the product is completed, my learning continues.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Population demographics will continue to change in this country; we are now experiencing an increase in the number of persons of color, immigrants entering the United States, elderly citizens, veterans, and the emergence of sexual orientations (Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2007; Allen, 2011). As of July 2011, non-Hispanic whites accounted for 49.6 percent of all births under the age of five and minorities—anyone who is not single-race white and not Hispanic—reached 50.4 percent of the total population (Newsroom, 2012; New York Times, 2012). As the population continues to grow in this country, the next generation of leaders must be educated and well prepared to approach these paradigm shifts from a low diverse population to an increasingly growing multicultural population in this country. When preparing emerging adults (also referenced as undergraduate students) for entry into a diverse society and workforce, intercultural competence is a key learning component that institutions of higher learning can integrate into their academic curriculum and co-curricular activities. Furthermore, there is more need to find new ways of doing business and for colleges and universities to increasingly implement strategies for educating students on how to succeed in this new environment.

University graduates are expected to enter a work force that is increasingly diverse culturally, politically, and socially (Friedman, 2006). This will require knowledge, personal principles, and skills respectful of the differences among people (Devine, Green, & McDowell, 2012). As these demographics continue to change in the United States, there is a need for proficiencies around intercultural competence—the understanding of others’ worldviews,
cultural self-awareness, curiosity and discovery of differences—and a deeper knowledge and comprehension of one’s own culture as well as other cultures (Deardorff, 2006).

Colleges and universities are now aligning teaching and active learning practices with the existence of the new global environment (Deardorff, 2006). Collaborative approaches that can be adopted by educators in higher education to facilitate and support emerging adults’ intercultural competency development will contribute to the growth and development of the individual learner and also create a change in higher education. The application and study of such applications enhances best practices that are used by educators and facilitators in the academy with the intent of producing emerging adults who are astute in different worldviews.

**Issue Identification**

Thomas Friedman (2006) details in his book, *The World is Flat*, that global events and inventions are changing the world and that college graduates will require personal principles and practices respectful of the differences and the uniqueness of others. However, (Braskamp & Engberg, (2011) argues that emerging adults are graduating from institutions of higher learning with very little preparation either as citizens or as professionals for the intercultural challenges confronting graduates in a diverse environment. Consequently, a number of employers rated emerging adults as not being fully prepared as global citizens; employers are advocating for additional academic studies around knowledge of global issues that will foster intercultural competence as key learning outcomes in higher education (Devine, et al., 2012).

Given the growing diversity in the 21st century, many colleges and universities recognize their pivotal role in addressing the complexities around intercultural learning (Chang, 2002). They are now including additional courses that cover multicultural information and issues in their curricula as well as facilitate adult learners’ successful intercultural interactions in the
future (Soule, 2004). However, gaps in the literature say little is known about how such courses are being developed and delivered in institutions of higher learning or if these interventions intended to enhance intercultural competence will produce transformative learning in emerging adults and create lifelong learning skill sets. In addition, longitudinal research is almost non-existent when comparing pre-self-assessments, interviews and other evaluation methodologies of emerging adults developing these competencies with post performance or behavioral changes that can effectively measure transformative learning as a result of specific programs and interventions. While information was plentiful in the use of diagnostic instruments to measure intercultural competence baseline data, a gap exists when using these tools in identifying the value of diversity among team membership who are charged with designing and executing programs with the intent to build intercultural awareness in emerging adults.

**Client System**

The research was conducted at a public comprehensive four-year institution of higher learning located in the southeast region of the United States. One specific unit on campus is responsible with providing interdisciplinary programs with the aim of cultivating meaningful and measurable experiences in leadership development, multiculturalism, and civic engagement for emerging adults in a cohort learning environment. A small leadership team within this unit is charged with providing primary oversight and program development for one of the cohorts of emerging adults. Wilson and Cervero (2010) share that the formula to program planning is to “define the needs, use needs to set objectives, use objectives to select content, select teaching strategies to meet the objectives and deliver the content, and evaluate the results” (p. 81). The specific cohort who will be the recipient of the programs developed and executed by the leadership team consists of high achievers just entering the institution as freshmen for their four-
year degree program. These emerging adults are introduced to a wide variety of academic experiences, such as rigorous course work, co-curricular activities, mentoring opportunities with campus and community leaders, and opportunities to study abroad during their undergraduate tenure. My interest in working with this client system was due to the credible reputation that this university has locally and nationally when promoting global engagement and multi-cultural development programs.

**Problem Statement and Research Purpose**

The need to be intentional and systematic in developing and executing diversity initiatives and multicultural education in order to enhance the intercultural competence of emerging adults (specifically undergraduate students in higher education) is an ongoing concern in today’s global environment. The client institution selected for this specific research project recognized the importance of enhancing emerging adults’ knowledge, skills, and values around intercultural competencies to prepare them for entry into a global society. The client system’s goal is to provide global and diversity awareness and education to address the changing demographics of its emerging adult population. Data collected indicated: fifteen years ago, minority students comprised only 7% of the student body; beginning in Fall 2004, minority student enrollment had risen to 20% and remained at 20% during Fall 2005; Black, Asian and Hispanic student enrollments at the institution boomed and grew many times faster than majority student enrollment over the past 15 years; although the 15-year growth rates (percentages) for all minority student groups were substantially greater than the growth of majority students, the increases in the number of minority students and the proportion of the student body were most notable for Black students at the institution. The number of Black students grew by over 1,500 during this period, and their representation in the student body increased from 4% to 10% over
the last 15 years (Institution’s data collected, 2011). Due to the increase growth in the minority student population, there was a concern that additional programs and interventions were needed to enhance current multicultural education and programs that focused on intercultural competence development.

The institution sought reaffirmation of its accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) during the timeframe of July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007. As part of the SACS reaffirmation process the school was required to propose a detailed Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to improve emerging adults’ learning in some specific area. Because the school has been intentional and systematic in its diversity initiatives and international education, the QEP focused at enhancing the intercultural competencies around global learning of students, faculty and staff. The selection of the plan’s title, *Global Learning for All*, established a set of learning objectives that served as a starting point for conversations about intercultural dexterity, greater inclusion of multicultural and global perspectives in all degree programs, general education, campus life, and co-curricular experiences. The learning goals and specific learning outcomes that addressed enhancing emerging adults’ knowledge, skills, and values around intercultural competencies are listed below in Table 1.
Table 1

**QEP Goals and Learning Outcomes**

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<th><strong>QEP Goals</strong></th>
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| Graduates Possess Global Awareness and International Perspective (Knowledge) | - Graduates articulate knowledge of world history, politics, government, literature, regional geography, and economics; they will systematically acquire information from a variety of sources regarding diverse regions, countries, and cultures.  
  - Graduates make informed critical assessments of global events, processes, trends, and issues, and convey the interconnectedness of political, economic, and environmental systems.  
  - Graduates interpret world events from more than one cultural viewpoint, and they will analyze the effects of internationalization and globalization on the nation, state, and local communities.  
  - Graduates articulate perspectives and experiences in global learning associated with their degree programs. |
| Graduates Are Effective in Cross-Cultural Communication and Engagement (Skills): | - Graduates recognize individual and cultural differences and demonstrate an ability to communicate and interact effectively across cultures.  
  - Graduates demonstrate fundamental communication skills in one or more foreign languages.  
  - Graduates demonstrate flexibility, openness, empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity.  
  - Graduates espouse and exhibit respect for diversity.  
  - Graduates demonstrate sophisticated uses of databases, computers, the Internet, the Web, and other information technologies for global communication and problem-solving. |
| Graduates Are Committed to Global Ethics, Social Justice, & Sustainable Development (Values): | - Graduates advocate and show support for human rights and economic well-being throughout the world community, including but not limited to the importance of access to education, health care, and employment.  
  - Graduates address environmental resources and issues in ways that benefit the world and future generations. |
-Graduates connect root causes of acute global problems (e.g., population growth, poverty, disease, hunger, war, and ethnic strife) to issues of land use and access to natural resources (e.g., clean air and water, bio-diversity, nutritious food sources, minerals, and energy) as well as political and economic systems.

-Graduates espouse the interconnected nature and importance of global issues such as arms control, maintaining peace, enhancing security, alleviating poverty, and managing resources cooperatively, responsibly, and equitably.

The school’s QEP demonstrated strong emphasis on the world community and on appreciating multicultural diversity constitutes a strong tie towards building intercultural competencies. The president of the institution commented on the defined goals for providing more visibility to the school’s existing learning opportunities and the alignment with the creation of the QEP as follows:

“The QEP also supported the university’s strategic plan of preparing students to be leaders and creating a campus culture that assures appreciation of diversity. We set out to make sure our school is preparing all of its students for an increasingly globalized world, and I think we are well on our way toward achieving a climate that embraces the importance of global learning” (Institution’s historical documents, 2012).

The commitment to the institution to address intercultural deficiencies in their student population also underscores the importance of having all graduates of the university make intercultural connections in their learning and their lives and establishes the contextual framework of this action research project.

The problem that informs this study is that many emerging adults at the client institution are not developing the skills to interrelate in diverse environments and among individuals who are culturally different from themselves. Although programs and interventions have been put in place to enhance intercultural competence, many of the emerging adults are not capitalizing on these learning opportunities. Historical data collected from the school regarding the education
abroad programs showed that the number of students participating in these study abroad programs over the last ten years has grown substantially from 26 students in 1995 to 319 in 2006 with notable increases in every college. Similarly, faculty participation in study abroad has grown from 2 in 1995 to 26 in 2006. Nevertheless, those numbers of participants represent a small percentage of the institution’s now 24,500 student enrollment. Student participation in Exchange Programs and Semester Abroad Programs is also low, but has grown from none in 1995 to 26 in 2006. The school has set a goal of increasing student participation in study abroad programs by 5% per year. Precise data collection methods will be developed and monitored in order to accurately track the number of study abroad programs offered by level, department and college with annual participation rates (Intuition’s historical data files QEP 2007-2008 Annual Report). Furthermore, there is a growing need to understand the approaches that can be adopted by the institution’s faculty, instructors, and administrators in order to facilitate and support the emerging adults’ learning experience with the intent of enhancing their intercultural competence.

The purpose of this study was to explore an action research approach to program planning used by a leadership team working to enhance the intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. The primary research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?
2. What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?
3. What elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence?

Throughout the duration of the study, the research questions were modified to better reflect the problem and guide the action research process. Theoretical and empirical literature was used as a foundation to the study’s purpose and research questions. These questions also formed the basis of my conceptual framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and empirical literature were used for this study based on the works of four scholars; Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory—self-reflection that allows for alternative thinking, and consequently changes in perception and in meaning making with the influence of Edward Taylor’s exploration of the relationship of perspective transformation learning and the development of intercultural competencies (1994); Milton J. Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986), a theoretical stage-based model designed to examine how people construe cultural difference; and Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work around group dynamics and the stages of group development. The research questions form the basis of my conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Intercultural Competence*

The figure draws from the broader areas of adult learning principles, cultural awareness, program development, and evaluation. It illustrates how a learner exposed to these four entities,
is more likely to build cultural skill sets. Also noted in this document are several theorists who question Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and posit other aspects to learning. Scholars such as Newman (2012) insist that the literature does not prove or share a solid example of learning resulting in a metamorphosis; however, if done effectively, learning involves some form of growth. Additionally, Merriam (2004) questioned whether one requires a certain level of maturity and developed thinking in order to participate in critical reflection and reflective discourse, two integral components to Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. These critiques were also considered when approaching this research project.

**Significance**

This study explored ways in which a leadership team collectively approached the design and execution of programs and interventions with the intent to enhance intercultural competence with emerging adults in higher education. The interventions included in the study served as models by which educators and facilitators could examine emerging adults’ learning levels around cultural awareness and responses to programs that are intended to build intercultural competence. Furthermore, this study explored the use of a theoretically grounded assessment tool that used an intercultural framework as a means to establish base line data in order for appropriate programs and interventions to be designed to build intercultural skills. It also identified leadership characteristics and the recognition of unique demographics as they relate to team dynamics and group development.

The study’s findings recognized that group development was established through short term programs and interventions which introduced and exposed participants to a learning process that facilitated the infusion of long-term change in cognitive, skill development and attitude in developing intercultural competence. The study’s use of practice and theory provided a basis for
further research on systemic changes in a group approach to program development that focused on building cultural awareness. The conclusions from this study indicate that: action research methodology leverages the use of individual diversity and expertise that contributes to and supports group work, team development, and the benefits of evaluating group intercultural competence; introducing multicultural education garnered responses in participants to increase cultural awareness; and creating effective conditions for multicultural education does not assure transformative learning. Recommendations for future research are shared along with implications for theories and best practices.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will provide background research and literature that addresses the dimensions of intercultural skill development. The first segment of the literature review will share the uses of the term intercultural competence. The narrative will illustrate several iterations of cultural competence, its point of interest to scholars, and how it has been used in a variety of disciplines. The second portion of the literature review, “Approaches, Theories and Influences of Intercultural Competency on Adult Learners,” shares various approaches and theories along with their influence on enhancing adult learners’ intercultural dexterity. The third section, Conceptual Frameworks and Theories Informing Intercultural Competency,” will provide perspectives from three theorists on the nature of human development across a range of dimensions: transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (M. J. Bennett, 1986), and Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work around group’s setting, behavior, and stage of group development. The literature review will also share arguments from several scholars, such as Kegan (1982), Newman (2012), Merriam (2004), and Kucukaydin & Cranton (2012) that critically question Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. All of these perspectives are used to guide the study’s work to explore an action research approach to program planning that will enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. The literature chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and ways in which the development of cultural competence in higher education can be further examined.
Uses of the Term Intercultural Competence

With the intent of creating intercultural competent adult learners and providing these emerging adults with opportunities to become more globally aware and culturally sensitive, a clear definition of intercultural competence and its various usages need to be stated. Multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, international communication, transcultural communication, global competence, cross-cultural awareness, and global citizenship (Deardorff, 2011) are many of the terms used when referring to intercultural competence. The use of these terms differs by discipline and approach. For example, the term cultural competence is most often used in social work settings; while those in engineering disciplines prefer to use global competence; and the diversity field uses such terms as multicultural competence and intercultural maturity (Deardorff, 2011). The concept of intercultural competence has been a point of interest of scholars from a variety of disciplines for the past 40 or 50 years (Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000). The initial attempts to explore the nature of intercultural competence (or as it was more commonly known then, “cross-cultural effectiveness”) were started by the post-World War II boom in student exchange and international development work, the Peace Corps movement in the 1960s, the increase in the numbers of the U.S. diplomatic corps and military personnel overseas, and the expansion in international trade (Yershova, et al., 2000). This cultural awareness campaign was fueled by the concerns of helping individuals who work and study abroad to adjust cross-culturally. Health care scholars were early adapters of intercultural competence development. Providing culturally competent services has been proposed as one of several key strategies for helping to reduce racial tension along with ethnic disparities in health and health care (Betancourt & Green, 2010).
It also increased the ability of health care professionals to effectively provide high-quality care to patients from diverse sociocultural backgrounds and country of origin (Like, 2011).

**Defining Culture**

Culture can be defined in different ways. For example, culture is defined in terms of ideas, behaviors, or products which are shared by members of a given group (Robinson, 1985). Culture can also be understood as cognitive and affective frameworks that are used to support the behavioral system (Moodian, 2009). For example, one can be physically removed from his or her native culture, but the native cultural will remain mentally within the person and adjustment to new surroundings may be deemed challenging. Ogbu (1990) defines culture broadly as an understanding that people have of their universe—social, physical or both—as well as their understanding of their behavior in that universe (Ogbu, 1990, as cited in Fried and Associates, 2012). Livermore (2011) uses the terms cross-cultural, intercultural, and multicultural synonymously and finds it helpful to use the terms interchangeably when approaching strategies for enhancing cultural awareness. He refers to cross-cultural as two cultures interacting and both intercultural and multi-cultural as multiple cultures interacting (Livermore, 2011). Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), distinguishes between objective culture and subjective culture (J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett, 2004). M. J. Bennett (1998) explains objective culture as the institutional aspect—behavior that has become routinized into a particular form—such as political and economic systems along with the products of culture (e.g. art, music, cuisine, etc.). Whereas subjective culture refers to “the psychological features that define a group of people—their everyday thinking and behavior—rather than to the institutions they have created (M. J. Bennett, 1998, p. 3). Culture will be defined in this study as shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of interacting people (M. J. Bennett, 2009).
Defining Cultural Competence

There are also several meanings of cultural competence. Cultural competence is defined by some scholars as the ability to communicate across cultures and the ability to appropriately relate in a variety of cultural contexts (J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett, 2004). Intercultural knowledge and competence is “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (J. M. Bennett, 2009, p. 97). Some areas of international discipline focus on the significance of the “inter” in intercultural competence. Such competence bridges domestic and global diversity by focusing on patterns of interaction in a cultural context, whether within a country or across national borders (J.M. Bennett & Salonen, 2007). These terms attempt to account for the ability to step beyond one’s own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). Similar to this definition is global competence, stated as having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate, and work effectively outside one’s environment (Devine, et al., 2012).

Developing intercultural competence is a complex process (Deardorff, 2006). The essential outcome of developing these skills is for learners to understand others’ world views. It is this ability to communicate effectively and appropriately within intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that demonstrates intercultural proficiency. The desired knowledge (learner will understand when exposed to facts and information); skills (learner will be able to do when putting the knowledge into practice); and attitudes (learner will adopt new values and perspectives), are needed to be effective in a changing multi-cultural environment (Fowler & Blohm, 2004). The Association of American Colleges and Universities
(AACU) developed an intercultural knowledge and competence rubric that suggests a systematic way to measure one’s capacity to identify cultural patterns, compare and contrast them with others, and adapt empathically and flexibly to unfamiliar ways of being (AACU, 2013). Core competencies measured include: knowledge (the understanding of cultural self-awareness and cultural worldview frameworks); skills (demonstrate empathy towards intercultural experience and recognize cultural differences as well as complexities); and attitudes (ask questions, display curiosity, along with receptive and conveys openness to cultural differences without judgment) (www.aacu.org). For the purpose of this action research study, intercultural competence is defined by Dr. Milton J. Bennett’s broad reference to the ability to appreciate differences through the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of people interacting from different cultural backgrounds (M. J. Bennett, 2009 & 1998).

**Approaches, Theories and Influences of Intercultural Competency on Adult Learners**

Institutions of higher learning can promote cultural awareness and tolerance through active learning and engagement to expose adult learners to various degrees of intercultural and global competencies. By learning about the different cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of life, emerging adults can further explore new perceptions and different world views. AACU indicates that integrating intercultural knowledge and competence into the heart of education is imperative and that the campus community requires the capacity to meaningfully engage with others, place social justice in historical and political context, and put culture at the core of transformative learning (www.aacu.org). A multiplicity of frameworks and approaches to defining and assessing intercultural competence exists (Sinicrope, et al., 2007). Literature findings suggest a use of constructivist instructional approaches—learn by doing and experience (Miles, 2003) —active intervention strategies, as well as a campus that demonstrates a
welcoming and inclusive environment (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Devine, et al., 2012; Deardorff 2006) will contribute to the development of greater intercultural understanding. Adult learners who participate in diversity consciousness-raising efforts such as course offerings, co-curricular activities, study-abroad opportunities, diverse learning communities, and civic engagement activities (Deardorff, 2006; Wooten, Hunt, LeDuc, & Poskus, 2012) will affect changes in developing the learner’s intercultural competencies (Morris & McClure, 2011). Learning does not have to be restricted to the classroom but can also be extended to valuable skill development activities beyond the classroom. Subsequent research further demonstrates that emerging adults involved in out-of-class activities are more likely to persist to graduation than those who are not involved (Wooten, et al., 2012).

Depending on the level of readiness of the institution’s emerging adult population, a well-structured curriculum may fail to produce constructive interaction—learning is active rather than passive and occurs through dialogue, collaborative learning and cooperative learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Experiential learning in academic programs has gained viable, even desirable, support as an approach to putting theory into practice (J. M. Bennett & Salonen, 2007). Experiences outside the formal classroom setting are influential, especially those in which learners are able to interact with others who are unlike themselves and have support for processing and reflecting upon new experiences (Braskamp & Engberg, 2011). Constructivist learning is what we come to understand as knowledge is based on the shared experiences of groups and suggests that reality is constructed through social interaction and dialogue (Williams, 2006). Drago-Severson (2009) defines constructivism as “we actively construct and make meaning of our experiences and create our realities with respect to cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal pathways of development” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 37).
Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model describes learners going through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection on that experience, and applying the insights in a new context (Kolb, 1984 as cited in Cranton, 2006). Constructivist and experiential learning share a relationship around learning opportunities. The distinction between the two is where constructivism focuses on new knowledge gained through a set of group-based experiences and dialogue (Williams, 2006) and experiential learning often takes place in environments where specific roles are the bases of the learning (i.e. apprentice, internships, and/or paid co-ops) (Fried, 2012). Constructivist learning opportunities such as role-playing, shared learning, and small-group discussion provide an interdisciplinary framework that allows emerging adults to develop intercultural competencies through a comprehensive use of course curriculum, experiences and reflections (Devine, et al., 2012). The use of exercises to promote cultural awareness, tolerance and interactions are activities that can prepare and involve emerging adults from a wide range of backgrounds to focus on the development of relevant intercultural competencies. For example, Berardo and Deardorff (2012) share several icebreakers and group activities that will allow for deeper meaning making around cultural differences in their book *Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models*. One icebreaker in particular uses a picture of an onion, an iceberg, a fish in water, and eye glass lenses; four teams are assigned one of the objects to discuss the similarities between it and culture (Berardo and Deardorff, 2012). This activity serves as a creative way of introducing and defining culture through an interactive learning environment. Allowing emerging adults to learn from each other’s experiences and perspectives exposes them to other learning opportunities beyond using only the traditional classroom format (Wooten, et al., 2012). Based on the literature review, this form of learning paradigm was used for this action research project to create powerful learning opportunities that contributed to
intercultural development rather than other forms of learning experiences that are usually attributed to the traditional formal classroom setting. Intervention strategies such as research projects, small-group problem-solving exercises, case studies, shared learning, oral presentations of research findings, and reflective essays, facilitate the development of critical thinking and self-awareness which in turn fosters an open-minded attitude as well as a different way of looking at things (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004).

However, the development of intercultural sensitivity is an ongoing and complex process. Interventions addressing cultural differences can strengthen adult learners’ convictions or continue to feed into adult learners’ limited perceptions (Liu, & Dall’Alba, 2012). It is the desire for this study’s educational efforts to lower levels of ethnocentrism regardless of how small that cognitive shift in intercultural perspectives may be for the emerging adults. The intent for constructivist learning is to help emerging adults develop the needed cross cultural skills, abilities, attitudes, and understandings adult learners will need to function effectively within a growing diverse and global environment (Devine, et al., 2012).

When considering measurability or the accountability of organizations or individuals, a place to begin is to determine the theoretical nature of cultural competence (J. Gallegos, Tindall, & S. Gallegos, 2008). Numerous researchers have proposed different perspectives in approaching intercultural competence which were typically focused on knowledge, motivation, or behavioral skills (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989). Several theoretical approaches to the research in intercultural competencies are summarized in Table 2.
Table 2

Theoretical Approaches to Research in Intercultural Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches from Simple to Complex</th>
<th>Elements of Intercultural Competence</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Verbal and non-verbal behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Conversational management behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Social work values</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Honor &amp; respect the cultural values within the larger context</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Implications of social class</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ethnic &amp; social stratifications</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective: ethnocentrism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conative: social distance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Value diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Institutionalize cultural knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Predisposition of individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Environment of culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Dynamic of group:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal/interpersonal communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Intercultural transformation of individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of stress and anxiety</td>
<td>Cultural immersion can cause:</td>
<td>Paige, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Frustration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Apprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Culture shock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retreat from learning more</td>
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</table>

Banks’ (1993a) work dispels the narrow conception some educators perceive of multicultural education as merely content integration. He further posited that multicultural education is a movement designed to empower emerging adults to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in an ethnically polarized nation and world (1993a). Banks (1993b) conceptualized five dimensions of multicultural education that would further the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in enhancing intercultural competence. The five dimensions are as follows:

- **Contact Integration:** the extent to which instructors uses examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate the key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline;

- **Knowledge Construction:** build students’ understanding of implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline being taught, and develop critical thinking capabilities;

- **Equity Pedagogy:** use of a wide range of strategies and teaching techniques such as cooperative groups, simulations, role-playing, and discovery, to enable participants from diverse racial groups and both genders to achieve the learning; and
- **Prejudice Reduction:** focus on the characteristics of the learners’ racial attitudes and on strategies that can be used to help them develop more positive racial and ethnic attitudes; and

- **Empowering School Culture and Social Structure:** the restructuring of the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and a sense of empowerment (Banks, 1993b).

Deardorff (2011) addresses the complexities of assessing learning outcomes when building emerging adults’ cultural skill sets. She posits “given the growing importance of intercultural competence within postsecondary education, it becomes imperative to more closely examine what this concept is and how best to assess it in our students” (Deardorff, 2011, p. 65). Her approach to building cultural dexterities is to focus on measurable outcomes of intercultural competence based on internal and external development of specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills. She indicates four implications for assessment of intercultural competence: (1) intercultural competence development is ongoing and individuals need to be given opportunities to reflect and assess their learning over time; (2) an individual’s critical thinking ability to acquire and evaluate new knowledge is a crucial role in the assessment process; (3) the consideration of a learner’s attitudes, openness, and curiosity impacts cultural development: and (4) the ability to see from others’ perspectives and to understand other worldviews (Deardorff, 2011). The assessment and learning are integral to the development process. This area focuses on gaining evidence that individuals are developing intercultural competence and encourages educators to use assessment data to guide emerging adults in their development and preparation for entry into a global society. Promoting cultural awareness through these theories and
approaches convey the various degrees of intercultural competencies that adult learners can gain through exploring different cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of life, with the intent to discover new perceptions and different world views.

**Conceptual Frameworks and Theories Informing Intercultural Competency**

After conducting an in-depth literature search, for the purpose of this study, the perspective on human behavior and the social environment captures best the intended outcomes of the transformational process which individuals may experience when exposed to interventions that build intercultural competence. The entities of valuing diversity, cultural self-assessment, and awareness of the dynamics created through culture interaction, the act of institutionalizing cultural knowledge, along with the development of programs and services that perpetuates an understanding of differences between as well as within cultures, are steps toward intercultural dexterity (J. Gallegos, et al., 2008). The intercultural competency framework and theory that will be used for this action research project is a combination of the perspectives around various intercultural competence models, social skills/environment, and human behaviors. The theoretical framework for this specific study will be narrowed around transformative learning and the works of four scholars; Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (1991) with the influence of Edward Taylor’s exploration of the relationship of perspective transformation learning and the development of intercultural competencies (1994); M. J. Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986), a theoretical stage-based model designed to examine how people construe cultural difference; and Tuckman’s (1965) stages of group development that address a group’s setting and behavior when bonding and collaborative interactions. The work shared by these authors provided deeper insights around the perception that college graduates lack the knowledge and skills necessary to interrelate in diverse environments and
among individuals who are culturally different from themselves, the need for proficiencies around intercultural competence, and the need to understand the approaches that can be adopted to facilitate and support intercultural learning experience.

Also conveyed in this literature review are other studies that support transformative learning without the need for critical incidents—an interpretation of a positive or negative experience as it relates to a specific topic or theme (Cranton, 2006)—or dilemmas to occur in order for transformative learning to take place. Challenges and frustrations can often occur when learners are going through the process of cultural immersion (Paige, 1993). For example, “high anxiety or tension, also known as stress, is common in cross-cultural experiences due to the number of uncertainties present” (Barna, 1994, p. 183, as cited in M. J. Bennett, 1998). The research will share the argument of Newman (2012) that questions whether actual transformation is taking place during program development, or if it is just good learning practices, and Merriam’s (2004) questioning of effectively engaging in the transformational learning process based on the mature level of cognitive thinking.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Mezirow (1991) described transformative learning as the process through which individuals become aware of their phenomenological assumptions and then learn to explore their own processes of knowledge construction (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1975) introduced the concept of transformative learning through his research exploring the learning trajectories of eighty-three women returning to college across a ten phase process of personal perspective transformation that utilized rational critical self-reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1975 as cited in Cranton, 2006). The larger framework on which transformative learning theory is grounded is based on Habermas’s (1971) three kinds of knowledge: instrumental (cause and effect),
communicative (understanding of ourselves, others and the social norms of the community or society in which we live), and emancipatory (self-awareness that frees us from constraints, as the results of critical reflection and critical self-reflection). (Habermas, 1971 as cited by Cranton, 2002). Transformative learning continues to be a foundational theory of learning in adult education (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010). As described by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting—questioning the values, assumptions, and perspectives presented in the world—on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds (Mezirow, 1991).

Transformative learning is associated with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience (Cranton, 2006). “Transformative learning is defined as the process by which people examine problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Cranton, 2006, p. 36). This shift in one’s frame of reference begins with a disorienting dilemma, followed by reflection, exploration of assumptions, behavioral changes, acquisition of confidence and competence in new role, and finally the integration of a new perspective (Sehnyshyn & Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2009). Critical examinations allow for alternative thinking, and consequently, changes in perception and in meaning making. This self-reflection leads to being open, discarding a habit of mind, seeing alternatives, and thereby acting differently in the world (Cranton & King, 2003). Transformative learning is not a linear process but often can occur in incremental steps in which gradual changes in the way we see things occur and then a realization that transformation has taken place (Cranton, 2002). Mezirow (1991) argues that participation in critical discourse is essential to transformative learning. He adds that having an open mind,
listening empathetically, making no premature judgment, and seeking common ground are assets for participating in discourse (Mezirow, 1991).

**Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity**

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a stage-based model designed to examine how people construe cultural difference. Bennett (2009) defines intercultural sensitivity as the way people make meaning of cultural difference and the varying kinds of experiences that accompany these different constructions. The model is cited in various areas of research and is pertinent to today’s issues around global engagement and intercultural skill development when assessing diverse levels of understanding among individuals. The DMIS is used to explain how people or groups tend to think and feel about cultural difference and provides a structure for understanding how people experience cultural difference through six distinct orientation levels: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (M. J. Bennett, 1986b, as cited in Wurzel, 2004). These levels also suggest what people do not see or think; therefore, the DMIS also highlights how people’s cultural patterns both guide and limit their experience of cultural difference (M. J. Bennett, 1986). The first three levels are known as the ethnocentric stage, meaning one’s own culture is the only basis for defining reality and making judgments of others. The second stage is ethnorelative, meaning one’s own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures, including the ability to adapt judgments and behavior to many different interpersonal settings without considering one’s own culture as central to others. This is where the other three DMIS levels are located. Table 3 outlines the DMIS’s intercultural development and the orientation levels.
Table 3  

*Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intercultural Stage</th>
<th>Orientation Level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnocentric</strong>: meaning that</td>
<td><strong>Denial</strong>: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one’s own culture is experienced</td>
<td>and there is a disinterest in cultural difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as central to reality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Defense</strong>: the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>superior and other cultures are inferior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Minimization</strong>: the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experienced as universal and similarities are highlighted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnorelative</strong>: meaning that</td>
<td><strong>Acceptance</strong>: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one’s own culture is experienced</td>
<td>a number of equally complex worldviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the context of other cultures</td>
<td><strong>Adaptation</strong>: the state in which the experience of another culture yields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perception and behavior appropriate to that culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Integration</strong>: the state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>include fluid movement in and out of different cultural worldviews.</td>
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</table>


“In general, the ethnocentric stages can be seen as ways of *avoiding cultural difference*, either by denying its existence, by raising defenses against it, or by minimizing its importance; the ethnorelative stages are ways of *seeking cultural difference*, either by accepting its importance, by adapting a perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity” (J. M. Bennett, & M. J. Bennett, 2004, p.153, as cited in Landis, et al., 2004).

Each stage indicates a particular structure that is expressed in certain way of thinking as well as specific kinds of attitudes and behavior related to cultural difference. Additionally, the DMIS is based on the assumption that as an individual’s experience of cultural difference
becomes more complex and sophisticated, one’s competence in intercultural relations increases. By recognizing the underlying cognitive orientation toward cultural difference, predictions about behavior and attitudes can be made and education can be tailored to facilitate development into the next stage (Hammer, 1998). Figure 2 illustrates the DMIS continuum developed by Milton J. Bennett (1986).

![Figure 2. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).](image)

Visually, the model is perceived to be linear, and there is in fact a linear assumption built into the model; however, it cannot be assumed that progression is a forward movement in one direction, or that it is permanent (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Research shows that the development of intercultural competencies is generally a non-linear process where one makes sporadic reversions to earlier levels and moves forward intermittently (Bourjolly, Sands, Solomon, Stanhope, V. Pernell-Arnold, & Finley, 2006). Movement through the orientations is suggested to be unidirectional with only occasional “retreats”; people do not generally regress from more
complex to less complex experiences of cultural differences (J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett, 2004).

The DMIS describes the developmental shifts aligned with cultural worldviews. “As one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one’s competence in intercultural relations potentially increases” (Hammer & M. J. Bennett, 1998, p. 12). At each level within the DMIS a certain kind of cognitive processing, attitudes, and behaviors would typically be associated with each configuration of that particular worldview structure (Hammer & M. J. Bennett, 1998). Within each level are appropriate competencies and activities recommended that are primary developmental task for cultivating intercultural proficiency (J. M. Bennett, 2009). Table 4 outlines each level with its expected learning outcome and specific recommended activities that will promote the development of worldview structure.

Table 4

**DMIS Developmental Task and Suggested Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation Level</th>
<th>Developmental Task</th>
<th>Suggested Activities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial:</strong> the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one and there is a disinterest in cultural difference.</td>
<td>- Recognize the existence of cultural differences</td>
<td>Facilitate structured contact with other cultures through films, slides, panel presentations, interactive games and exercises.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reconciliation of stability and change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop comfort level with being culturally curious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defense:</strong> the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is superior and other cultures are inferior.</td>
<td>- Recognize cultural similarities</td>
<td>Use of conflict mediation and team-building; promote cooperative activities such as peer-to-peer dialogues or leadership development programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability to distribute criticism equally and find commonalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimization:</strong> the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal and</td>
<td>- Develop cultural self-awareness</td>
<td>Structure opportunities for difference-seeking (i.e. attend diversity conferences, workshops or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reconcile unity and diversity</td>
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</table>
similarities are highlighted. - Use of open-mindedness and being nonjudgmental - Gain knowledge of own culture for understanding other cultures courses); interact with selected and trained ethnorelative resource persons; participate in study abroad experiences; motivate further cultural exploration through experiential learning and community services.

**Acceptance**: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews.

- Ability to refine analysis of cultural contrasts - Recognize your own culture exists in a context of equally valid cultures - Build respect for behavior and value difference Enhance cultural frame of reference shifting (i.e. take a foreign language course, host a foreign student); use of experiential learning (i.e. simulations and role plays that require intercultural empathy).

**Adaptation**: the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture.

- Develop cognitive and intuitive empathy - Expand repertoire to allow a broader range of authentic behavior - Improve co-shifting frames of reference to effectively function in other perspective. Interact in unexplored cultural context; address levels of culture shock; develop alternative communication skills; increase living experiences in another culture (i.e. study abroad, homestays/hostels, Peace Corp).

**Integration**: the state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to include fluid movement in and out of different cultural worldviews.

- Resolve/perfect the multicultural identity - Ability to recognize new cultural patterns - Ability to feel at home in the world and enjoy co-shifting Explore the nature of being a multicultural person; taking on new work assignments abroad or more study abroad opportunities; and create opportunities for marginal peer group interaction.


Similar recognition of behavioral changes and movements are also noted in other areas of research. Elliot (2006) identified the Hierarchical Model of Approach-Avoidance Motivation in which “the approach-avoidance distinction is being used to explain and predict motivated behavior” (p. 111). He continues to state that the “approach motivation may be defined as the
energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities), whereas avoidance motivation may be defined as the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior away from, negative stimuli (objects, events, possibilities)” (Elliot, 2006, p. 112). Hammer, M. J. Bennett, and Wiseman (1986) posited on the DMIS a non-linear movement from an enthnocentric frame of reference—one’s own culture is experienced as central to reality—towards an ethnorelative frame of reference—where one’s own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures. Elliot (2006) indicates that a movement forward can represent getting something positive that is currently absent or it can represent keeping something positive that is currently present whereas moving away can represent keeping away from something negative that is currently absent or it can represent getting away from something negative that is currently present.

Both conceptual frameworks are promoting the possibilities of behavior changes as one considers reactions to life’s experiences.

The Intercultural Development Inventory is a tool that measures the specific intercultural stages of the DMIS, interprets an individual’s or group’s level of engagement in diversity and intercultural competencies, and identifies the associated transition issues around that specific orientation (M. J. Bennett, 2009). The IDI proprietary software used to measure the DMIS intercultural stages is available to individuals who complete the IDI Qualifying Seminar. This is a three day training session conducted through the Intercultural Communication Institute (www.intercultural.org). IDI Qualifying Seminar attendees are trained and are authorized to provide feedback to individuals or groups on their assessment results in order to assist how to further develop intercultural competencies. The primary investigator for this research project is an IDI Qualified Assessor and attended the IDI Qualifying Seminar during the Fall of 2009. This
online instrument produces quantitative data and was used in this study as a diagnostic instrument in the form of a pre-test process. Both the IDI and the DMIS have been identified in the literature as mechanisms that assist facilitators of intercultural development programs in assessing the level of knowledge of the participants’ intercultural orientation as well as identify gaps in their intercultural competencies.

The study of intercultural development continues to grow. Milton J. Bennett’s (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is over 25 years old. Scholars now continue to build theoretical frameworks addressing cultural awareness and intercultural development. One example is Livermore’s (2011) Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Model that uses similar approaches to cultural competency development, but it differs in its specific ties to intelligence research. Livermore posits that cultural intelligence is much deeper than discovering new foods, languages, and currencies, but a willingness to undergo transformation in how we see ourselves, the people we encounter and the world at large. The CQ model also acknowledges that your multicultural interactions are personal and are individualized experiences (Livermore, 2011). His CQ model assess individual’s motivation to function effectively in culturally diverse settings; their knowledge about how cultures are similar and differ; how you make sense of culturally diverse experiences; and your capability to adapt your behavior appropriately for different cultures.

**Transformative Learning and Intercultural Competence**

Transformative learning theory has served as a model for various other learning processes and for other areas of study. Taylor (1994) explored Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation—the process of how we change our meaning structures by examining why and how these structures constrain the way we see ourselves and others (Mezirow, 1991, as cited by
Taylor, 1994) —as a possible explanation for the learning and the changes an individual experiences in becoming interculturally competent. Taylor (1994) established a link between three shared dimensions to clarify the application of Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation to the study of intercultural competency: the catalyst for change (disorienting dilemma which occurs as a result of an acute personal crisis, such as death, divorce, and job loss); the process (offers hierarchical stage models whereby people evolve from lower to higher levels of competence); and the outcome (reflects a change in world view). When aligned with intercultural competency development, the catalyst for change dimension seems similar in nature to culture shock (Paige, 1993), which is the stimulus for change in intercultural transformation. Kim & Ruben (1988) define culture shock as a necessary precondition to change and growth, as individuals strive to regain their inner balance by adapting to the demands and opportunities of the intercultural situation. The process dimension as it pertains to intercultural transformation begins with a stage or pattern of alienation and initial contact, followed by a trial and error period of testing new habits and assumptions, and concluding with a state of duality and interdependence within the new culture (Kim & Ruben, 1988, as cited in Taylor, 1994). J. M. Bennett (1977) indicates that culture shock is not unfamiliar to people; we may have experienced similar transitional impact, (e.g. divorce, death, loss of income) before exposure to another culture. She continues to state that by recognizing culture shock, as a defensive response to the dissonance that occurs when our world view is assaulted, we can learn to cope with the symptoms and develop methods of channeling shock into personal growth (J. B. Bennett, 1977 as cited in M. J. Bennett (1997). Lastly, the outcome dimension that reflects a change in world view is found in both perspective and intercultural transformation. Kim (1988) sees intercultural competency as the foundation in an individual’s adaptive capacity to alter perspective in an effort
to accommodate the demands of a different culture which moves an individual toward a more inclusive and integrated world view (Kim, 1988 as cited in Taylor, 1994).

Critiques of transformative learning theory. Many theoretical references have been used and have influenced adult learning based on Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. Although the previous theoretical frameworks address various aspects of transformation through initial stages of conflict, dilemmas, and critical incidents in order for some form of measurement of change to occur, some scholars argue this is not always the case. According to Kegan (2000), transformative learning is based on a constructivist view of the world; we see the world through a lens constructed in our interaction with our social context (Kegan, 2000, as cited in Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Kegan (1982) also espoused that meaning making is a physical activity (grasping, seeing), a social activity (it requires another), and a survival activity (in doing it, we live) (Kegan, 1982, as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Newman (2012) insists the literature does not prove or share a solid example of learning resulting in a metamorphosis. Additionally he goes on to state that the “one constant in all definitions of learning is change, and these changes are of the kind to be expected from well-resourced, competently delivered programs, and examples of good educational practices” (p. 38). He argues against Mezirow’s claim that “we undergo significant phases of reassessment and growth in which familiar assumptions are challenged and new directions and commitments are charted” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101 as cited in Newman, 2012, p. 40). Newman (2012) states that “any learning effectively done involves reassessment and growth” (Newman, 2012, p. 40). Furthermore he continues to question and reinterpret Mezirow’s 1974 research around the women returning back to college and points out that these women had returned to learning in a period marked by the growing force of the women’s movement, responding to the trends of the
day along with the flow of social history, and questions if the transformation that was studied was by accident and not by design. Newman continues to argue that learners recognize that they know something new, that they could not perform a certain task but now can, or that they have a new viewpoint. An example shared by Newman is “teach a person to strip down and reassemble an irrigation pump, and that person has changed” (Newman, 2012, p. 40).

Merriam (2004) questioned the role of cognitive development in Mezirow’s transformational learning theory. Her critical response centers around two components integral to Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning, which were 1) critical reflection and 2) reflective discourse. Merriam (2004) questioned whether one requires a certain level of maturity and developed thinking in order to participate in the critical reflection and reflective discourse processes. Her questioning of transformative learning attributes opens the door for educators to objectively assess how transformative learning can occur as well as to be cognizant of attributes and conditions that may hinder the use of transformative learning when creating developmental opportunities for learners.

Kucukaydin and Cranton (2012) critically examine the way discourse is aligned with transformative learning theory from a psychological perspective. These scholars are primarily interested in the extra-rational perspective—feeling, imagination, intuition, and dreams—which tend to be used to describe transformative learning, without critical analysis or a common understanding of the meaning of these concepts in relation to teaching and learning. They continue to argue “if we view knowledge about transformative learning as practical knowledge based on Habemas’s (1972) framework, we can use this understanding to critically analyze knowledge claims within the extra-rational approach to transformative learning theory” (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012, p. 44). Kucukaydin and Cranton postulate that the current
epistemology has no consensus about the validity and legitimacy around this knowledge, with no area to question the validity of knowledge claimed by transformative learning theorists.

**Group Development**

Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work *Developmental Sequence in Small Groups*, is a linear stage model that is widely used when referring to group’s setting, behavior, and stage of development (Bonebright, 2010, as cited in Garfield & Dennis, 2012). This mode is also considered when approaching a group’s collaboration process. Tuckman (1965) indicates several stages in group bonding and interactions: (a) *forming*: creating group norms and getting acclimated to the task, (b) *storming*: conflict is present among group members, inconsistency in group interactions, polarization may occur, demonstration of team resistance, (c) *norming*: display of open communication and expressions of various opinions, bridging group cohesiveness/common goal, mutual consensus around action, cooperation and support, and, (d) *performing*: group demonstrates productivity and interdependence around tasks and goal achievement. As a team matures when working collectively as a cohesive unit, they will experience these stages. Tuckman and Jensen (1977) conducted a follow-up review thirteen years later that noted several subsequent empirical studies that suggested adding a termination stage; Tuckman and Jensen integrated into the model of group development the fifth stage named adjourning (Thorpe, 2010).

Groups gradually learn to cope with the emotional and group pressures faced as they address their task (Scholtes, Joiner, & Streibel, 1996). The benefits of collaboration in groups have been confirmed in literature in terms of higher academic achievement, developing higher levels of reasoning and critical thinking, deeper engagement and improved analytic skills, and improving teamwork skills and interpersonal skills (Smith, 2008, as cited in Jahng). Argyris and
Schon (1974) shared two types of theory: espoused theory—refers to the worldview and values that people believe guide their behaviors—and theory-in-use—refers to the worldview and values reflected in the behaviors that actually drive their actions (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). These theorists elaborate that people are unaware of and cannot effectively manage the behaviors that drive their actions, which may result in unintended and undesired consequences (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Therefore some learning will be required. “One must learn what values and beliefs actually guide one’s actions (theories-in-use) and how they differ from the values one espouses (espoused theories)” (Savaya & Gardner, 2012, p. 146). Scholarly attention continues to be devoted to group development, effectiveness and performance (Chou & Garcia, 2011).

**Summary**

This chapter provides the groundwork for this study. It begins with the literature review illustrating various definitions of intercultural competence based on several disciplines and usages. This narrative also shared the literature on cultural development approaches and theories defined by scholars in the adult education field when building the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to achieve intercultural competence. Resources found during the literature review were instrumental to identifying the theoretical frameworks for this research project. The works of several theorists, (Mezirow (1991), Taylor (1994), M. J. Bennett, (1986), and Tuckman, (1865)) provided further insights for the study’s problem statement, purpose, and questions around the development of emerging adults’ intercultural competence.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Global events and inventions that are now changing the world suggest that university graduates are expected to enter a work force that is culturally, politically, and socially diverse (Friedman, 2006). This will require knowledge, personal principles and skills respectful of the differences among people (Devine, et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore an action research approach to program planning used by a leadership team working to enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. The three central research questions that guided the research study were:

4. How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?

5. What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?

6. What elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence?

This chapter will begin by describing action research as the primary research design methodology used for this study. The chapter will also share the influence of case study methodology, the use of qualitative data collection, along with acknowledging that quantitative data was used only as a diagnostic mechanism during the research process. Furthermore, the
rationale for using these research design approaches will be shared in addition to describing the client system and the research participants, data collection strategies, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness. The narrative will also detail the process for reporting the findings and discuss the limitations of the study.

**Research Design**

Creswell (2009) defines research design as plans and procedures shared that outline decisions of detailed methods of data collection and analysis. He also indicates that “research design is based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researchers’ personal experiences, and the audiences for the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). This segment discusses the use of action research as the primary methodology.

**Action Research**

In the field of education, action research has become an important part of research and understanding organizational problems through the eyes of stakeholders as well as research participants (Glassman, Erdem & Bartholomew, 2012). This study uses action research methodology: a collaborative, active, inquiry approach to problem-solving that uses continuous cycles of planning, acting, and evaluating in order to address a practical problem that will result in some form of change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Stringer, 2007). Action research is a participatory process and democratic partnership that involves stakeholders —individuals who are affected by the problem being studied —who are engaged in systematic inquiry and investigation of a problem (Stringer, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005). “Stakeholders are individuals or groups that have interests, rights, or ownership in an organization and its activities” (Hellriegel, Jackson, & Slocum, 2008, p. 99). Stringer (2007) indicates that “the primary purpose of action research is to provide the means for people to engage in systematic
inquiry and investigation to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness” (p. 6). Unlike traditional research approaches, action research employs problem solving tactics that apply the scientific method to practical problems through a participatory inquiry process of diagnosing a problem, planning action steps, implementing the steps, and evaluating outcomes (French & Bell, 1999). Action research’s foundation is a participatory and unrestrictive approach to data-based problem-solving. Stringer (2007) further posits that this methodology implies the need to develop cooperative approaches to work and harmonious relations between and among people that emphasizes collegial relationships. The researcher and the participants are collaborators in the study with the notion that people who participate are committed to the process and invested in the successful application of the findings (Ozanne & Sattcioglu, 2008).

Lewin “believed that knowledge should be created from problem solving in real-life situations” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 11). Merriam (2009) supports this concept and indicates that action research aligns individuals tasked with collectively finding practical solutions to real world problems. Lewin (1946) perceived that action research is a cyclical inquiry process of diagnosing a problem, planning action steps, implementing and evaluating outcomes (Lewin, 1946 as cited in Merriam, 2009). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) amended this four part cycle to these phases of action research which will be used in this study:

1. Constructing (exploration of context and purpose);
2. Planning Action (describing how to implement the action);
3. Taking Action (implementing plans and creating interventions); and
4. Evaluating Action (examining the outcomes of the action).
The action research process tends to be complex and often fluid. Various findings can emerge which may produce other courses of action. Coghlan & Brannick (2010) further explain that these phases are done in a cyclical non-orderly movement that may or may not present intended results. The action research cycles often run concurrently. Meta-learning—learning about the learning process—is taking place when these cycles are operating in parallel. One cycle is the review of the achievement of the project’s purpose and goals whereas the other cycle is reflecting on using the actual action research stages. The latter is “a reflection cycle which is an action research cycle about the action research cycle” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 11). Incorporating evaluations of each phase assist in making appropriate adjustments based on evidence of actual behaviors and/or outcomes as well as for the evaluation of what is being learned through the process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The iterative cycle is a mechanism for developing understandings of the action research practice (Kemmis, 2009).

Action Research is about real-time change that links research to collective work and group activities to generate information that promotes and manages change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; DiVirgilio, 2004). Action research aims to produce multiple forms of change: change in practitioners’ practices, change in their understandings of their practices, and change in the conditions in which they practice (Kemmis, 2009). Some form of change or development should take place that will enhance the lives of the people engaged and invested in the process. “If an action research project does not make a difference, in a specific way, for practitioners and/or their clients, then it has failed to achieve its objective” (Stringer, 2007, p. 12). The changes envisioned by the stakeholders in this action research project were to incorporate new approaches and innovative programming that will encourage emerging adults to build intercultural competence. Education around intercultural experiences requires content and
pedagogy radically different from traditional instructional practices; provision of a functional awareness of cultural dynamics may produce experiences that can be emotionally intense, challenging and scary to some learners (Paige, 1993b). New interventions identified and used by the stakeholders included a rigorous curriculum that focused on global engagement, self-assessment around levels of cultural awareness and skill sets, reflection exercises and a study abroad opportunity where it was required to do a cultural study on the country along with reaching out to peers from that country prior to the sojourner leaving the states.

An action research approach fits this study’s purpose of creating specific interventions to build intercultural competence of emerging adults for several reasons. One, the institution used in this research project has a vested interest in producing interculturally competent graduates. Because of this academic goal, the organization was open and receptive to leaders taking an innovative and collective approach in developing and implementing programs with the intention of building these specific skill sets. Secondly, the senior leaders sanctioned the use of a leadership team with the purpose of facilitating emerging adults’ learning around cultural awareness and global engagement. An action research team was created to design and implement this specific programming. The process allowed for the facilitators to use reflection to understand the effectiveness of the selected interventions, as well as a democratic process to discuss and evaluate the collective work being done by the team. Stake (2005) suggests the inclusion of diverse perspectives enable the researcher to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomena are being perceived (Stake, 2005, as cited in Stringer, 2007). Lastly, the use of a qualitative method of inquiry allowed for deeper insights directly from the participants on behavior changes after the implementation of interventions. Action research investigates and reveals the way participants describe their actual experience (Stringer, 2007). Through direct
engagement with my study’s participants, it was my desire to create a safe space for open conversation to occur without the fear or anxiety around sensitive issues that are perceived and may arise when discussing cultural awareness.

**Qualitative design.** For this study, qualitative design was the primary form of collecting data. Action research is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm with the purpose of obtaining greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue (Stringer, 2007). Data for this project was collected through qualitative design strategies (e.g. historical documents, observations, field notes, interviews, and journal entries). Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 232). The key concern of qualitative design is “understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Stringer (2007) describes this inquiry process as initially seeking to clarify the issue investigated and to reveal the way participants describe their actual experience of that issue—how things happen and how it affects them. Merriam states four characteristics of qualitative research:

- *Focus is on meaning and understanding:* determine how people make sense, interpret, and make meaning of an experience

- *The researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis:* the researcher understands the goal of the study and expands this understanding through the means of collecting and analyzing data, clarify/summarize information, check accuracy of interpretation, and explore anomalies
- **The process is inductive**: as oppose to starting the research process with a preconceived hypothesis or expected findings, the researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories; and

- **The product is richly descriptive**: use of words and pictures are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon.

Additionally, Merriam (2009) shares that “a qualitative study is emergent and flexible; it responds to changing conditions of the study in progress” (p. 16). Qualitative research methodology draws on various unique forms of data collection and data analysis. With this inquiry method there is no single approach to conducting the research. Creswell (2009) states the following regarding the qualitative design process:

  The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants’ setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors and inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

There are multiple approaches to meaning making when using qualitative research. This research study utilizes qualitative methods to understand how an action research approach to program planning produces interventions that enhance emerging adults’ intercultural competence in higher education. Using a qualitative design allows the researcher to delve deeper into conversations around sensitive issues regarding cultural awareness. The research topic of building intercultural competencies may cause emotional stress and anxiety for some participants in the study. This includes both the emerging adults as the end-users of the programs developed and executed as well as the leadership team as the facilitators of the programs being administered. Paige (1993) shares that intercultural education as a function of its content and pedagogy is psychologically challenging and goes on to share that the progression through the
different stages of personal development around culture learning can challenge “one’s sense of self, cultural identity, and worldview” (p. 2). This method of data collection allowed for a more personal approach to building relationships and rapport when the primary investigator was having these sensitive and sometimes difficult conversations with respondents.

Case study. Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009). Yin (2009) defines case study as a research method used to contribute to the body of knowledge of individual, group, organizations, social, political, and related phenomena. He continues by stating, “The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena that allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Wolcott (2009) describes case studies as a genre for reporting research than as strategy for conducting research. Yin (2009) finds that in some situations “case studies are used as a form of record keeping” (p. 5). However, Merriam (2009) defines a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). These theorists have identified unique approaches to using case studies. Wolcott’s (2009) approach is more strategic, where Yin’s (2009) uses it as a “checks and balance” mechanism. This specific research draws on Merriam’s definition of case study. It will share the voice of the researcher in a more storytelling approach in describing the stakeholders and the events around the research process. Similar to qualitative research design, case studies include the logic of research design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis (Yin, 2009). Case study research can also comprise examination of a single case or a combination of multiple cases (Yin, 2009). For this research a single case study design was used. This method was appropriate for this project as the primary investigator and the leadership team examined the circumstances and
conditions that implementing interventions with the intent of building intercultural competence will have on emerging adults in higher education.

**Bounded Client System**

Purposeful sampling is defined as consciously selecting people on the basis of a particular set of characteristics and in action research, a specific attribute is identifying a group that is affected by or has an effect as well as vested interest on the problem or issue (Stringer, 2007). “A typical sample would be one that is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). The following sections will share information on the bounded system used in this study. The interest in working with this client system was not only because of the nature of the research topic, but also due to the credible reputation that the organization has locally and nationally when promoting global engagement and multi-cultural development programs. As an emerging scholar in the field of cultural awareness as well as a practitioner working within the client system, it was intentional that the researcher conducts the action research project within my own organization as an insider researcher. Pseudonyms will be used as identification for both the organization and all research participants.

The research was conducted at a public comprehensive four-year institution of higher learning located in the southeast region of the United States. As of the Fall 2012 school term, the enrollment at this university for undergraduate and graduate degree programs consisted of close to 25,000 full-time equivalent emerging adults. For this study the term emerging adults refers to undergraduate students. The school offers baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degree programs. In addition, it continues to be committed to providing global and diversity programs along with specific curriculum to its student population. One specific unit on campus is charged with
providing interdisciplinary programs with the aim of cultivating meaningful and measurable experiences in leadership development, multiculturalism, and civic engagement for undergraduate students. This unit has been very instrumental in exposing emerging adults in a cohort learning environment to domestic and international diversity issues.

**Participants**

A group of stakeholders is charged with managing the emerging adult’s cohort. This group, known in this study as the leadership team, consisted of three administrators, (a program manager, the professor who instructs the honors curriculum, and me, the researcher and co-facilitator), and two peer leaders (two emerging adults who are undergraduate students and were previous participants in the unit’s program. Both are upperclassmen who, through an application process, applied to assist incoming emerging adults with their college experience and transition into this particular interdisciplinary program). Action research is used through collective thoughts and actions by individuals who are vested in a situation and/or change (Stringer, 2007). My work with the leadership team was a collaborative effort around our role in designing, implementing, and evaluating the interventions being executed for the learner’s intercultural development. The group’s primary oversight was to coordinate the design, delivery, and evaluation of all curriculum and co-curricular activities implemented to expose the participants to learning that will promote intercultural competence. Table 5 provides a brief overview of the leadership team.
Table 5

Leadership Team — Individual Roles and Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calvin **</td>
<td>Program Manager: Coordinates co-curricular activities and administrative logistics for leadership program and study abroad activities.</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Instructor: facilitates learning opportunities around global engagement, multiculturalism, and civic interactions.</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>Practitioner/Researcher: insider researcher collaborating with stakeholders in providing programs that enhance emerging adults’ intercultural dexterity.</td>
<td>African-American Female</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy**</td>
<td>Peer leader: provide services and support to emerging adults who are recipients of the interventions to assure their success in the program.</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda **</td>
<td>Peer leader: provide services and support to emerging adults who are recipients of the interventions to assure their success in the program.</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms used for names

**Previous participants in the program

As our collective work continued to evolve, we decided to add a cross comparison research project as an intervention that would connect the emerging adults with their peers in another country, specifically, the emerging adults who attend Unifacs University in Salvador, Brazil. There is a need for programs to bring domestic and international students together in meaningful interactions (Deardorff, 2011). It was the intent of this specific intervention to bridge the cohort’s learning of cultural awareness through collaborative work with international peers in a partnership to research cultural differences surrounding current global issues. It was the leadership team’s desire to strengthen the emerging adults’ intercultural competence by interacting with people that possess different world views. To do this effectively we needed more
leadership expertise on the team and added Peggy to work with us to incorporate a global research component to the course curriculum. Peggy is a white female that holds the role as an associate faculty member at the institution; she specifically works in the area of undergraduate research. Further details about the leadership team and the client system studied will be shared in Chapter Four, Context and Case.

As noted earlier, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) state that multiple action research cycles can operate concurrently: the core action research cycle—achieving the project’s aim, and the reflection cycle—what you are learning about the process of the action research. There are two constituent groups in this action research project working in tandem: (1) the leadership team and (2) the cohort of emerging adults. Both stakeholder groups experienced two forms of learning operating in parallel. Simultaneously a cyclical movement of learning, action, and reflecting were occurring for both constituent groups. Action research is a study that is concurrent (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Paul (2003) proposed the application of Argyris’ (1985) concept of double-loop learning—an action-knowledge conceptual framework—is a strategy to enhance initiatives that create intercultural competencies (2003). An action based methodology informs people of the appropriate strategies needed to be executed in order to achieve certain outcomes (Argyris, 1993). Single-loop learning is the process of acting to achieve a desired result without reflection upon the value of that action and its intended results, whereas, the incorporation of double-loop learning involves careful reflection upon the actions along with recognizing the appropriateness of the outcomes those actions are intended to achieve (Paul, 2003). The leadership team’s sessions and interactions with the emerging students were co-construction opportunities where collaborative efforts were made in planning other potential interventions that would help address intercultural learning and evaluating the impact of these developmental
programs for the emerging adults. Having these interactive and collaborative dialogues between the leadership team and the emerging adults operationalized the use of action research in several iterative/cyclical steps that were transpiring at the same time. The emerging adults are in a cyclic motion of learning, action, and reflection when they are exposed to the intercultural programming and experiences and the leadership team is in their cycle of learning, reflecting and taking action on the implementation and evaluation process of these interventions for the emerging adult participants. Dialogue between the two constituent groups allowed for mutual understanding in the learning process and a collaborative approach to designing other interventions that would assist in the development of the emerging adults’ intercultural dexterity. An action based methodology informs people of the appropriate strategies needed to be executed in order to achieve certain outcomes (Argyris, 1993). Details on the project’s action research cycle with the integration of both constituent groups are outlined in Figure 3.

![Action Research Project's Framework - Methodology](image)

Figure 3. Action Research Project’s Concurrent Cycle.
Data Collection

The researcher and the leadership team gathered qualitative data from the emerging adults through specific questions reflecting on activities, course readings/assignments, reflection essays, and through conversations via focus groups or individual interviews. The interviews were conducted with specific questions around the development of intercultural competence and the impact the interventions had on the participants’ development of cultural awareness. I also used similar qualitative data collection methods with the leadership team (e.g. observations, field notes, and use of recorders to capture conversations from meetings, interviews, and focus groups) to get their insights on our collective work, the evaluation process and their perceptions on the use of action research in our study. The interview questions for both constituent groups are listed in Appendix C.

Individual learner and program assessments are vital to determining whether the intervention efforts are achieving their objectives and making a difference in advancing the learner towards behavioral changes (Hammer, 1998). Cultural assessment instruments can be defined as any measurement device that identifies, describes, assesses, categorizes, or evaluates the cultural characteristics of individuals, groups, and organizations (Yu, 2012). The use of proprietary software to collect quantitative data further helped the researcher and the leadership team to understand the emerging adults’ current level of intercultural competence. Using this data helped the leadership team determine what effective interventions should be designed and implemented for skill development that would build our participants’ intercultural skill sets. These instruments, similar to other measurement tools, produce profiles that indicate where the learners’ level of cultural understanding and experiences are measured on some form of
continuum. The assessment results can also be used to gain knowledge on how to interact with people who have different cultural profiles and learning experiences.

Although these instruments are theory-based and beneficial in identifying intercultural competence levels, assessment tools come with strengths and challenges. Determining which measurement or instruments to use when doing an assessment will depend on the learning objectives, audience, and learning constraints of the specific adult learners targeted for the study (Yu, 2012). When assessing intercultural competence, these tools can help educators specifically identify characteristics of intercultural competence that can be prioritized and translated into clear learning objectives that are actually measured or evaluated. The developmental approach presents a holistic perspective on intercultural competence; it views acquiring competence as a consciousness-altering process, rather than a matter of adjusting certain attitudes and modifying certain behaviors (Yershova, et al., 2000).

“Assessing intercultural competence as a learning outcome is not only possible but also necessary as postsecondary institutions seek to graduate global-ready students” (Deardorff, 2011, p.76). The leadership team decided to use the Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI), based on the DMIS shared in Table 3. The rationale for using this specific instrument is that the stages of the DMIS describe how people see, think about, and interpret events happening around them from an intercultural difference perspective. The IDI is a theory-based instrument which measures the first five stages of the DMIS (Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation) from participants’ responses to a Likert-type scale (refer to Table 3 and Figure 2). The IDI can be used to assess the initial baseline for developing intercultural competence (McElravy, 2012). The questionnaire consisting of 50 questions which allows participants to respond based on their initial reaction of agreement or disagreement to statements that reflect a
series of viewpoints toward cultural differences. The results show how individuals and groups perceive their intercultural orientation level in comparison to where they actually fall on the IDI continuum, indicating the level in which one can recognize and identify cultural development opportunities. Based on the Intercultural Development Inventory Manual (2005), IDI developmental scores range from 55 points to “145 or higher at the highest end” (p. 16), which illustrates movement from an ethnocentric mindset to an ethnorelative perspective. The instrument generates a graphic profile of an individual’s or groups’ predominant stage of development along with a textual interpretation of that stage and associated transition issues (Hammer, 1998). Another reason for using this instrument, the client system for this study had utilized the IDI as the instrument to measure intercultural orientation levels in previous development programs. Dr. Milton J. Bennett made several visits to the institution to speak on his DMIS model and met with faculty, staff, and senior leaders along with sharing strategies on how the tool could be used to enhance cultural skill development at the institution. Because of the familiarity with the instrument, the history of its previous use on campus, and the collaborative relationship that the institute has with Dr. Bennett, it was determined to also use the IDI for this research project. The IDI instrument was used in this study as a diagnostic tool to identify both the leadership team’s and the emerging adults’ intercultural orientation levels. This was done in a pre and post assessment process in order to measure any individual and group intercultural development over the course of the study. As an IDI Qualified Assessor the primary investigator is trained and authorized to use the instrument to provide feedback to individuals or groups on their assessment results with the intent to help further develop participants’ intercultural competencies. Pre and Post IDI results for the leadership team and the emerging adults are shared in Chapters Four, Case Study Report and Five, Findings.
Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) defines data analysis as the process of making sense out of the data collected. I interpret this definition as procedures around reviewing all the data collected, determining what specific data to use in the findings that will add to the body of knowledge and validity to the study, and generally making meaning of the data findings. For this research project proprietary software, known as the IDI, was used that gave reports on the statistical findings from the online self-assessment administered to the study’s participants. Data was also analyzed for all recurring themes and pertinent statements taken from the qualitative data collected. Ruona’s (2005) Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Data Analysis was primarily used for analyzing qualitative data through the lens of four general stages: data preparation, familiarization, coding, and generating meaning. The use of qualitative data collection along with the quantitative data gathered to capture a baseline, gave deeper understanding as well as confirmation on specific themes along with identifying outliers. Triangulation employs multiple approaches to collect the data which will confirm data findings (Roulston, 2010). The rationale for using triangulation is also shared in this section to emphasize the importance of capturing a comprehensive approach to collecting and analyzing data findings.

Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Data Analysis

Ruona (2005) defines qualitative data as narratives derived from observations, interviews, or documents. The qualitative data for this study were collected from the participants after they had been exposed to the identified interventions. Ruona’s (2005) constant describes a framework of four general stages (Data preparation, Familiarization, Coding, and Generating meaning) was used to capture recurring themes, outliers, and robust statements during the data analysis process. In conducting the analysis, the four general stages of qualitative data analysis were incorporated...
Table 6 illustrates and defines each stage of the Constant Comparative Method as well as how these stages were aligned with the approach to analyzing the data for this action research project.

**Table 6**

*Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Data Analysis and Action Research Study Approach*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Stages</th>
<th>AR Study Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Preparation:</strong> organizing data findings;</td>
<td>Transcribe all recorded sessions/discussions/interviews in Word document;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>categories based on important/key findings (cleaning);</td>
<td>highlighted key quotes/narratives; created electronic files saved on designated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create filing system.</td>
<td>USB drive. Deducted any findings that wasn’t pertinent to research questions and/or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>study’s purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarization:</strong> In-depth review of data collected</td>
<td>Listen to recorded sessions, discussions, and interviews; share aggregated findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to gain a sense of the information and reflect on its</td>
<td>with leadership team for their insights and collaborative approach to understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overall meaning.</td>
<td>the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coding:</strong> Assigning a label/designation to various</td>
<td>Assigned code numbers for each emerging adult participant in the study to create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aspects of the data to be easily retrieved; placing</td>
<td>concealment of identifying specific sources and reduce researcher bias when reviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data into specific categories.</td>
<td>the data; color-code key quotes and statements directly associated with research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questions and/or study’s purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generating Meaning:</strong> interpretation of the data;</td>
<td>Reviewed preliminary findings that were consistent themes and relevant to research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifying recurring themes/messages</td>
<td>questions and study’s purpose. Compared qualitative data findings and how it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aligned with the quantitative data findings; reduced the potential impact of my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>own personal biases by having one of the leadership team members (peer leader) also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>review and interpret the findings —a comparison between our analyses was reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to assure that triangulation occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As more in-depth data was collected, the entire leadership team was involved in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reviewing and analyzing the data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants’ responses were captured through open-ended questions. These specific questions were addressed during class sessions and group discussions. Data were also collected through debriefing opportunities after interactive activities, as well as through course assignments, written reflective essays, and online discussions.

**Proprietary Software**

To expedite the analysis of the qualitative data collected, the software, NVivo© was used to analyze 32 interviews that produced over 300 pages of data. Using this electronic tool allowed for sections of the text to be coded, combined into similar themes, and identified quickly those items that stood out from reoccurring incidences. Additionally NVivo produced reports of the data analysis and was a convenient resource to make comparisons as well as reconfirm my initial data analysis process. This form of analyzing the data provided robust features that reduced time in the data reduction process.

Other software was also used as a diagnostic mechanism to collect quantitative data to establish baseline data of the emerging adults’ intercultural competence level. This data were drawn from participants’ responses to the Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI). The IDI is a theory-based instrument that measures the first five intercultural orientation levels of the DMIS (refer to Table 3 and Figure 2). Hammer (1998) postulates that the IDI can be used to assess the initial baseline for developing intercultural competence and to evaluate the effectiveness of various training, counseling and education interventions that are appropriate for the individual’s specific level of learning. The instrument generates a graphic profile of an individual’s or groups’ predominant stage of development and a textual interpretation of that stage and associated transition issues (Hammer, 1998). This online instrument provided statistical analysis reports of participants’ intercultural competencies level, the quantitative
percentages of their demographics, and shared how often the respondent was exposure to various interventions that focus on intercultural develop.

There are numerous tools available that will measure intercultural levels that are used to give adult learners feedback on their level of intercultural development or measure learners’ knowledge and attitude change over an identified course of time. These instruments are often developed based on theoretical frameworks of culture and are available for purchase through commercial vendors or diversity practitioners. Some of these proprietary tools literature sources identified are popular and often used in higher education when developing students’ intercultural competencies.

**Triangulation**

Roulston (2010) defines triangulation analysis as multiple approaches to collect and analyze data findings. This approach is used to integrate quantitative data and qualitative data in order to better understand data findings and the relationships between the research questions, identified theories, and both data collection methodologies used (Creswell, 2009). For this study, utilizing the qualitative results by themselves would fail to fully capture the nuances of those multiple learning dimensions that the emerging adults experienced when exposed to the interventions. Furthermore, the quantitative data alone was also insufficient. Although the proprietary software was used as a diagnostic tool to measure levels of intercultural orientation, it alone could not determine and describe the specific ways learners interpreted the learning experience, its impact on their understanding, and the influence of any levels of behavior or attitude changes as the use of qualitative inquiry can demonstrate. Table 7 outlines Roulston’s common approaches of triangulation and how these attributes were utilized with the participants in this research project.
Table 7

**Triangulation Approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Triangulation definition</th>
<th>Data from Emerging Adults</th>
<th>Data from Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data triangulation</td>
<td>Multiple sources of data about a phenomenon across groups of people, settings, place and time are sought</td>
<td>IDI Pre/Post Assessment Results, Reflective Essays, Global Village Poster Assignment, Observations during course work, social events pertaining to cultural awareness, short term study abroad trip</td>
<td>Use of historical data previously used by the team when designing and executing programs, transcripts of recorded team meetings, data collected through interviews and group discussions, researcher’s journal notations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator triangulation</td>
<td>Multiple researchers study a topic in concert</td>
<td>Researcher and one team member code data separately and merge findings; shared preliminary findings with leadership team for discussions at team meetings.</td>
<td>Team discussions on progress and evaluation of programs/interventions, review of reflection assignments, assessment results, and outcomes from specific activities/events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical and methodological triangulation</td>
<td>Multiple forms of data are used</td>
<td>Focus groups conducted to discuss IDI group results, individual interviews conducted on group activities, impact on the individual, progress in their learning of intercultural skills. Online assessments for evaluation on assignments, activities and events provided.</td>
<td>Team reviews overall data from group and individual assessments, researcher shares observations on team’s work on the action research project which allows the group to self-reflect and re-evaluate their progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Roulston, 2010)
Triangulation determines data accuracy, by employing multiple approaches to collect the data which will confirm data findings (Roulston, 2010). The smoothing of the data—the process that attempts to capture important patterns in the data, while omitting non-essential data that can aid in robust data analysis of a phenomena (Simonoff, 1998)—allowed understanding between the different levels of analysis and aims for a more comprehensive sharing of the results of the study. I and another member of the leadership team conducted preliminary analysis of the findings from the data collected. This was done in order to prevent my personal biases toward the data and to control the personal interest I have on the subject matter. After smoothing the data, key recurring themes were shared and discussed with the leadership team. It was during this process that an attempt of member checking was used in order to get a group consensus and confirm the findings.

**Trustworthiness: Data Validity and Reliability**

Trustworthiness is a checks and balance system that is in place to ensure researchers have rigorously established accuracy from the information and analyses that have emerged from the research process. Action research is grounded in qualitative data and uses different criteria for establishing the reliability and validity of the study (Stringer, 2007). “Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (Gibbs, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009). Yin (2009) indicates that “the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (p. 45) and suggests that qualitative researchers need to document as many of the steps of the procedures of their case studies as possible (Yin, 2003, as cited in Creswell, 2009).
For this research project several strategies were employed to assure verification and trustworthiness. The primary approach used in this study was triangulation—data captured through a variety of methods (Roulston, 2010). Methodological triangulation—“in which multiple forms of data are used (e.g., individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents)” (Roulston, 2010, p. 84) was incorporated. Data were collected through group and individual interviews, observations, field notes, and recorded sessions. The primary investigator took the lead in capturing data via recorded sessions. Leadership team meetings would be conducted weekly to discuss the study’s operation and progress. On an average the team would meet for two hours. When meeting with participants one on one, these interview sessions would be conducted for one hour. All leadership team meetings were recorded as well as the group and individual interview sessions. Recordings for meetings and individual interviews with the team leaders were submitted to a transcriber and written transcriptions for documentation purposes were produced. During scheduled team meetings discussions among the leadership team involved noted observations of the cohort’s engagement and the emerging adults’ understanding as well as their reactions to the interventions and cultural learning being introduced to them. On these occasions the primary investigator also observed the collective work being demonstrated by the leadership team during these discussions and in other interactive sessions. It was common practice for the researcher to capture all observed activities in daily journal entries to reinforce evidence of data findings and analysis. Roulston (2010) shares that throughout the research process, qualitative researchers should keep a journal to record the day-to-day decision-making entailed during the research process and excerpts from these journals are included within reports of findings.
Member checking is defined as following up with participants to confirm findings are accurate (Creswell, 2009). This process can be conducted: with participants of the study reviewing transcriptions of interviews to check and/or add to the narrative; researchers might include a discussion of preliminary findings in another interview with participants (known as member check interview); or participants might be given a copy of the report from the study and be asked to share their comments (Roulston, 2010). This strategy was attempted by the leadership team, where transcripts of meetings and group debrief sessions with the emerging adults was shared. The information shared with the leadership team was only utilized as documentation for reference when planning future programs and interventions. However, ongoing dialogue between the researcher and the leadership team often took place in a form of peer examination of the findings in order to ensure the true value of the data, an opportunity to approach any differences between the researchers’ and the team members’ interpretation about the findings, and to alleviate any of the researcher’s personal biases. These conversations during the course of the study were captured as an audit trail—peers are invited to examine the evidence that researchers have generated and how data have been analyzed (Seale, 1999: 141-142, as cited in Rouston, 2010). To do this, in weekly meetings the leadership team continued to review details around the methods, procedures, and decisions made by the team when conducting the study, make adjustments to the process according to findings that would emerge, as well as revisit other items and/or resources that may be helpful in the work with the cohort’s intercultural development.

There was also the issue of addressing those unexplained discrepancies in the data and how the leadership team needed to understand these inconsistencies as well as make meaning of those outliers. To determine how to address these anomalies the leadership team considered the
particular circumstances, actors involved, and their part in creating this gap in learning before
taking some form of corrective actions. The team would anticipate dilemmas, such as time
constraints in conveying lessons, unexpected schedule changes, etc. but would have to address
unusual findings as they emerged on a case by case basis. The leadership team’s best practice
was to followed up with any participant who showed inconsistencies in the findings and
conducted an additional interview to confirm if what was captured originally was correct data.
During this process the initial data collected was confirmed.

The leadership team’s interaction with the emerging adults consisted of three weekly
class sessions for a duration of 50 minutes each. Additionally every Friday, the cohort was
required to attend a one hour and 15 minute colloquium session. It was during these sessions that
the emerging adults were exposed to various programs and interventions that exposed them to
multicultural education with the intent of building intercultural competence. The group was also
required to participant in an external service project, field trips, social activities, and individual
interviews regarding their participation in the study and the sharing of their individual IDI
assessment results.

During these various interactions, the leadership team was able to build a learning
environment that was conducive to discussing cultural differences with the assurance of
confidentially in order for all conversations to be conducted freely and openly without judgment.
During all gatherings (both leadership team meetings and cohort meetings) permission was asked
by the primary investigator if the session could be recorded. There were also opportunities for
participants to request during any point of the session for the recorder to be turned off if they felt
uncomfortable going on record with something that needed to be shared with the group.
Additionally, the names of the leadership team members were listed as pseudonyms and each
emerging adult participant was assigned a code to ensure their anonymity and quotes will be attributed to their code (i.e. Participant 1 will be listed as P1, Participant 2 will be listed as P2, etc.).

Other specific steps were taken to assure the rights and privacy of the study’s participants. During the initial stages of the research process the primary investigator had to be cognizant of any at-risk factors that may affect the participants and the client system. Every institution in higher education has an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that is charged with reviewing and approving the research of all human subjects before any study can proceed (Yin, 2009). “These committees exist on campuses because of federal regulations that provide protection against human rights violations” (Creswell, 2009, p. 89). Information collected by this governing body includes, but is not limited to, how a researcher plans to interact with study’s participants, protocols or data collection instruments that will be used in the study, and how the researcher will ensure such protections as informed consent and confidentiality (Yin, 2009).

Authorization was received in July 2011 from the institution where the primary investigator was participating in their degree program and in August, 2011, permission to conduct the study was granted by the institution where the research was being conducted. A consent form was required and signed by all participants in this study. Permission was also sought and granted to use the client system and the specific unit for the research project by the Vice President for Student Success and the Dean. Consent forms and the letter from the senior leaders can be found in Appendix B.

Limitations of the Study

Action research is a cyclical process using collective thoughts and actions by people who are vested in a specific situation and/or change (Stringer, 2007). This research undertaking had
some challenges when identifying who exactly was the interactive team that is being studied. Although both constituent groups, the emerging adults and the leadership team, interacted with each other and each group was experiencing simultaneously the four stages of action research methodology, at times it was difficult to really distinguish which group was the actual focus of the research project. As data findings emerged, the true focus of change leadership was demonstrated by the leadership team’s collective work and learning process of designing and executing these programs and interventions with the intent to enhance the emerging adults’ intercultural competence.

Another limitation was the interview process with the emerging adults when soliciting their feedback on the specific program’s and interventions’ that may or may not have impacted their intercultural skill development. The entire leadership team could not be involved in this process. In order to share IDI results you must be a trained certified IDI assessor. Only two members of the leadership team are IDI certified and information collected from the interview sessions were based on confidentiality. Data collected in these interview sessions had to be interpreted by the two assessors when sharing information collected from these sessions with other team members. Also, Peggy was added to the leadership team in the middle of the action research project and was not part of the leadership team’s initial constructing and some of the preliminary planning stages, as well as not a participant of the IDI pre assessment process. However, she was added in the post IDI assessment and participated in the post interview sessions. This may have skewed data initial collected on the team’s original intercultural competence level in comparison to the post data collected on the team’s current intercultural competence level.
It was also challenging to find solid literature specifically around exploring the effect of an action research approach (or any aspects around collaboration) by a team of educators comprised various social demographics, such as race, age, and gender, working to develop intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. This is a potential gap in the literature and reiterates the need for conducting this specific collaborative project.

The literature suggests that short-term programs can have a positive impact on the overall development of cross-cultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). Assessing the emerging adults’ response to programs and interventions was conducted during a short period of time. In order to determine the long-term effects of being exposed to these learning opportunities that were intentionally put in place for the development of intercultural competence, a longitudinal study should be considered.
CHAPTER 4
CASE STUDY REPORT

The objective of this chapter is to share the action research steps that the researcher and the leadership team utilized when exploring approaches to develop and execute programs that enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. This study investigates three questions: (1) how do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?, (2) what learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?, and (3) what elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence?

This chapter will tell the story of the events that occurred when the leadership team utilized Coghlan and Brannick’s (2010) action research cycles of construction, planning, action, and evaluation. The following narrative will share my voice in a storytelling approach in describing the case studied, the client system, and the key events around our research process. The chapter will also include commentary on the influence social demographics—such as race, gender, and age—had on building synergy within the leadership team and my personal reflection on key attributes that impacted the action research process. I will conclude by describing the new knowledge that was gained as the insider researcher and the transformational process that occurred through the collective work of the leadership team when conducting this research within my own organization.
Context--My Story

Before sharing the specific research logistics of my study, I would like to give some context on what brought me here in pursuit of a deeper understanding of building intercultural competencies in higher education. I am an African American female who grew up in Washington D.C. during the early sixties. During my tenure as an undergraduate, I was not afforded the appropriate learning opportunities to prepare me as an emerging adult to address issues around race relations and diversity. Nor was I prepared for ways in which these factors would directly impact my capabilities in integrating into a diverse work environment after I left college with my undergraduate degree. Many of these lessons were learned through self-direction and experiences around uncomfortable situations. For example, I once questioned a professor during a social economics class about why the focus on black history only takes place during one month out of the year—he replied, “Because it just does.” As a young, impressionable freshman in college at the time, I was disappointed by my professor’s response to my inquiry. However, I was still curious and self-directed to seek other avenues for learning more about diversity and inclusion with the intent of developing my own intercultural skills. My tenacity paid off. I discovered through my own self-efficacy and personal inquiry that the precursor to Black History Month was created by the African American historian, Carter G. Woodson. In the late 20s it was announced that the second week in February would be dedicated to “Negro History Week” which also marked the birthday of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass (Wikipedia, 2013).

Today, diversity has a much broader meaning well beyond just race differences. As an emerging scholar and a continuous learner, I wonder whether our institutions of higher education are meeting current expectations in providing knowledge around diversity and inclusion.
Additionally, I wonder whether schools are appropriately educating our newest generation of adult learners with the opportunities to become more globally aware and culturally sensitive in the 21st century. When engaging with society’s current realities, I perceive that colleges and universities are now aligning teaching and active learning practices with the realities of the new global environment. I know from my experience in higher education and when conducting this research project that our schools now need to understand collaborative learning approaches that can be adopted by academic educators in order to facilitate as well as support emerging adults’ intercultural competency development. This will not only contribute to the growth and development of the individual learner, but also create a change in higher education to enhance best practices that are used by educators and facilitators in the academy with the intent of producing emerging adults who are astute in different worldviews.

To undertake this journey I engaged with key stakeholders within a public university in the southern region of the United States to address the concern of the impact of critical interventions with emerging adults when developing intercultural competencies in higher education. The bounded client system has a strong desire to promote intercultural competencies in its student population. This and the support from key decision makers within the organization made the organization an ideal place to conduct my research.

Setting

The unit selected within the university being studied for this project is charged with providing interdisciplinary programs with the intent to cultivate meaningful and evidence-based experiences in leadership development, multiculturalism, and civic engagement for undergraduate students. This unit has been instrumental in exposing their emerging adults in a cohort learning environment to leadership development opportunities aligned with issues on
domestic diversity and international worldview. The leadership development program administered is an additional learning opportunity that supplements the emerging adults’ degree program. When the participants complete this three year co-curricular activity, they receive a certificate. A small leadership team within this unit is charged with providing primary oversight and program development for one of the cohorts of emerging adults who participate in the unit’s co-curricular leadership initiatives. This specific cohort consists of high achievers just entering the institution as freshmen for their four-year degree program. This condition is in place to assist these learners in a seamless transition into higher education and to give them the opportunity to participate in a learning community that focuses on global engagement and leadership development. These emerging adults are introduced to a wide variety of academic experiences, such as rigorous course work, co-curricular activities, mentoring opportunities with campus and community leaders, and opportunities to study abroad during their academic school tenure. My interest in working with this client system was not only because of the nature of the research topic, but also due to the credible reputation that this university has locally and nationally when promoting global engagement and multi-cultural development programs. This specific unit within the organization has a stated intention of producing emerging leaders who are well prepared with leadership capabilities for entry into a global society. It was my desire as a change agent to influence the facilitators of this specific leadership development program to utilize an approach that allows leaders to work collectively in designing, implementing and evaluating their programs for emerging adults.

Point of Entry

During the summer of 2011 I was asked to conduct a series of diversity workshops for all of the various groups of emerging adults who are at different stages in the leadership
development program within the unit being studied. The goal was to introduce diversity sensitivity and awareness to all of the participants within the program. These sessions included members who were at various levels of learning; some participants were just completing their first year of the program, while others were at the point of completing their certification. It was through this engagement with the emerging adults and my interactions with the facilitators that I found myself wanting to dig deeper in studying about leading change that explores the production of intercultural competencies with emerging adults in higher education. I shared my research interests with the director of the unit and discussed the possibilities of working with the stakeholders around jointly studying this topic. This included identifying a specific cohort of emerging adults who would serve as participants in our investigation. During this dialogue I expressed to the director the purpose of action research, the benefits that can be produced through a collective approach to resolving current challenges when developing programs with a focus on intercultural competence, and the potential for enhancing current, along with creating new, processes within the organization. Torbert (2004) shares that action inquiry intentionally brings the concerns of stakeholders to the project’s investigation in order to evaluate procedures that will lead to organization change. My goal was to convey to decision-makers that this action research project would not just contribute to the literature, but would also produce usable knowledge that will be relevant to future operation of the unit’s programs and will enhance the learning process of those who are charged with facilitating these programs in order to improve the services provided to the emerging adults. An initial understanding was reached between me and the unit’s director that my project would be beneficial to the emerging adults accepted into the program for the Fall of 2012 and that I would work extensively with the leadership team that facilitates the program for that specific cohort.
To gain full support of my action research project and to express the desire to create a change in the organization’s approach to best practices used when producing culturally dexterous learners, it was important for me to meet with senior leaders within the organization. As a researcher conducting research within my own organization, it was vital for me to also extend professional courtesy to those senior level decision makers. Burke (2008) explains that “it is critical to consider multiple perspectives” (p. 83); therefore my purpose was not only to get their sanction for the study, but also to get their perceptions on the subject area being addressed and their views on potential challenges in pursuing this research.

My next step was to meet with the Vice President of the Student Success Programs and the Dean of the college in which the leadership development program and other co-curricular activities are housed. I again explained my potential work and the action research methodology. After soliciting their support on my topic focus, I was granted permission to work in collaboration with the unit’s leadership team. It was also mutually agreed that as the researcher I would directly share updates and the project’s process based on the team members’ input and involvement. This included the team’s collective approach to the collecting and analyzing the data. As a result of the team’s work, future collaborations are being considered to assist faculty, administrators, and instructors in the utilization of action research methods when developing not only intercultural programs, but other pertinent initiatives in the organization. A benefit of insider collaborative inquiry is that it allows insider researchers to collaborate with other insiders as a way to do a mutual and democratic method of research that adds impact to the setting (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Potential scenarios were also discussed for future studies that might employ a collaborative approach when functioning with work teams. Examples mentioned for
consideration for using this process for impending endeavors were project management and strategic planning.

**Leadership Team**

The small group of stakeholders within this unit, known as the leadership team, provides primary oversight and program development for the cohort of emerging adults just entering the leadership development program. The group’s primary task is to coordinate the design, delivery, and evaluation of the programs that are implemented to expose these learners to leadership development, civic engagement, and the promotion of intercultural competence. This group is the same one which I currently serve on as an active member and assessing our process in enhancing, managing and implementing the current learning modules for the emerging adults is addressed in this research project. The leadership team consists of a total of five individuals, including me, with various roles within the unit and within the organization. The following shares more about the roles and backgrounds of each member on the team. All of the names used in this section are pseudonyms.

The leadership development program manager is Calvin. His role is to coordinate co-curricular activities and administrative logistics for the leadership program, study abroad activities, and local civic engagement projects. Calvin is a white male who is a graduate of the university. During his undergraduate work, he also participated in this leadership program for emerging adults. Calvin was hired as the manager after completing his undergraduate degree at the institution and has been with the organization for four years. He is knowledgeable of the program’s objective and has a clear understanding of the caliber required of the emerging adults to participate in such a rigorous leadership program. He is currently obtaining a Masters degree in Health Science Management.
Kevin is a white male and is full-time professor at the university. He serves as the lead instructor for the required honors course on global engagement trends and the foundation of global leadership curriculum that the cohort is required to take during their first semester at the institution. He is also instrumental in working with external partners, such as other domestic and international institutions of higher learning that interact with the participants of the leadership program. The purpose in having these outside relationships is for our students to engage with other peers who come from different backgrounds, life experiences, and worldviews, as well as those who will enhance the shared learning experience in the leadership program. Kevin has been with the institution for eight years. He not only works with this group of undergraduate students but also other emerging adults who are involved in other global engagement programs offered on campus. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Human Resource Development and a Master’s in Organization Development.

The other two members, Cindy and Amanda, are both white females and upperclassmen who were selected through an application process to work with the team in the role of peer leaders. Peer leaders are usually upper level students or students familiar with an aspect of a program and/or learning objective that have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their contemporaries with the intention to assist in the adjustment, satisfaction, and persistence of students towards attainment of their educational goals (Shook & Keup, 2012). The purpose of using peer leaders is to provide services and support to fellow students who are recipients of these development programs. This is not a funded role, but an opportunity for emerging adults to lend academic support and be a resource to other emerging adults at the university. In this specific study Cindy and Amanda are to help the new participants in the leadership program make a seamless transition into the academic environment and to assist in a
smooth integration into the expectations of the leadership program. As the result of interactions with more experienced and well-trained peers, students can develop a stronger sense of community, greater social and academic integration, and a rich network of resource and referral agents dedicated to their success (Shook & Keup, 2012). Both of the peer leaders are juniors at the university and are completing their last year in this leadership development program. Cindy is a biology major and Amanda is studying to become a nurse. Both are active within their own leadership cohort and in other registered student organizations. Cindy has been accepted into a pre-med program at a flagship university within the state and Amanda has been accepted as a Fulbright Scholar, attending school in Wales, England during the summer of 2013.

It was important for team membership to remain the same throughout the project in order to have some continuity with our action research process along with an understanding of the team’s charge—however, as findings emerged during the evaluation stages, there were new opportunities to design and deliver other pertinent interventions to reinforce key learning objectives. The team was intact as a working unit until the fall of 2012. At that time, the team brought on an additional member, Peggy, who was instrumental in leading the emerging students through an undergraduate research assignment that allowed the participants to work with peers from a university in Brazil. Peggy is a white female and an associate professor of psychology. Her background includes working specifically with undergraduate research and with faculty members’ who also work with emerging adults on research projects and scholarships. Peggy holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and has worked at the university for five years.

**Researcher’s Role**

Stringer (2010) indicates that the role of the researcher in an action research project “is not that of an expert who does research but that of a resource person” (p. 24). I see myself in the
role of a change agent. As a practitioner working within my own organization, I have the advantage of existing relationships with some of the colleagues on the leadership team. As an insider, I believe I have established credibility within the organization as a person who can facilitate change, provide strategic direction, and offer administrative support. The researcher conducting a participatory study serves “as a catalyst to assist the stakeholders in defining their problems clearly and to support them as they work toward effective solutions to the issues that concern them” (Stringer, 2010, p. 24). As a member of the leadership team, my role was to work with other team members in identifying, implementing, and evaluating interventions that are designed to enhance the emerging adults’ intercultural skill sets. My engagement with the emerging adults was intended to create interactions that would encourage open dialogue to promote and encourage collective thoughts, learning and meaning making—the sense we make of our lived experience with respect to the cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of self (Drago-Severson, 2009)—on issues of diversity and inclusion that supports building intercultural dexterity. As I interacted individually or simultaneously with both constituent groups, my role as the researcher took various forms (e.g. collaborator, mentor, advisor, supporter, liaison, conflict manager, and facilitator) that were important to the progress in meeting the project’s aim. It was also my role to create a safe and welcoming environment so that the study could be conducted openly and under no form of duress. Paige (1993) indicates that education for intercultural experiences can be emotionally intense and challenging for some participants; there is a need to have pedagogy that is different from traditional instructional practices. Procedures that guard against unwarranted intrusion and maintain participants’ rights and privacy will be discussed under the Ethical Consideration section. I am also mindful of my role as a leadership team member as well as one of the facilitators conducting the interventions
with the emerging adults. Wearing many hats and holding various positions in this study, I am also aware that my roles are impacted by a number of extrinsic factors such as age, race and gender.

**Action Research Cycles and Timeline**

The following section will share the team’s approach to their work using the action research stages of construction, planning, action, and evaluation. The study examined the leadership team’s engagement when exposed to the action research cycles prescribed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010) when designing and executing programs that enhance cultural knowledge for emerging adults—it will also outline the timeline for each stage along with describing the team activities and outcomes that occurred during these segments.

**Stage One: Construction (January 2012 – February 2012)**

During the construction stage—exploration of context and purpose—I focused on my point of entry into the client system. I had the opportunity to familiarize myself with the work of the unit, the background of the team members, and the logistics of the leadership program. This period reflected Miles and Huberman’s (1994) understanding that it is the researcher’s initial role to gain a comprehensive overview of the context under study. Following the point of entry and the recruitment of the leadership team as participants in the project, the next step was to determine our timeframe for conducting our work and how we would go about achieving our goals. This included the initial conversation around our charge in creating development programs for the emerging adults. Recorded data from the first team meeting reflects a comment by Calvin around our projected work and the expected outcome that he feels will take place:

We are kind of doing this with an eye towards a new program structure, which is introducing a few changes from the last time. We were talking about the competencies for the cohort as a group. I think the new structure may influence what a particular...
competency is focused on, and in what ways we can identify some specific learning outcomes and programs.

We also established meeting logistics, developed a mechanism for evaluating the work being done by the leadership team, and determined how to measure the team’s success in achieving the desire outcomes. At this stage considerable time was spent on emphasizing and reiterating the team’s understanding of our mutual goals and objectives. From my journal entries I’ve captured a summary of a team discussion on this aspect of the construction process, dated on October 5, 2012:

Journal entry: The group decided to take time at each team meeting to talk about the feedback that was received from the emerging adults on assignments along with any observations of the cohort’s response to learning objectives in order to help identify, or to respond to any perceived confusion that the cohort may have on these assignments, discuss how we can offer clarification to the emerging adults, and as a way to kind of connect back to the previous week before launching into new areas of our work. I think that’s going to help us start to bridge these topics together a little bit better, create structure in our work as a collective unit, and build a comprehensive process in providing these programs and interventions to our emerging adults.

During my first one on one interview with Kevin, when asked his thoughts on how the team demonstrated the construction stage he shared:

When we are planning our weekly things, I would try to come in and have a sketch of what I want to do this morning, this is for next Wednesday or whatever it is, and I hoped that I threw it out on the table and Amanda would say, ‘Well, this isn’t going to work; how about this?’ Everybody seemed to be able to interject kind of what their thoughts were.

Stage Two: Planning (February 2012 – July 2012)

The second stage, planning action—deciding how to implement the action—built on and expanded the initial construction stage. The action research cycles often run concurrently and stages often overlap and are operating in parallel. It was necessary to conduct some aspect of planning during the construction stage of the project. These iterative cycles allowed for me to make my point of entry, get to know the team members and obtain background on the work of
the unit, but also segue into the planning process that was necessary for the leadership team to move forward with their charge. The planning action segment of the team’s work involved determining the team’s individual and collective roles, creating a timeline for implementing specific program logistics, and establishing meeting dates/times. The team met weekly for planning sessions. Cervero and Wilson defines planning as a social activity whereby people construct educational programs by negotiating personal, organization, and social interest in contexts marked by socially structured relations of power (1998). At this time members discussed, evaluated, and designed all programming functions appropriately based on students’ learning needs and previous classroom observations. There is no more crucial aspect of the program development process than objective setting; the need to set objectives provides a forum for deciding on major program thrusts and levels of expected achievement (Galbraith, Sisco, & Guglielmino, 1997). During the team’s brainstorming and planning process it was determined what new modules and/or restructuring of current modules were needed to produce effective learning materials and activities for the participants.

For example, at each weekly meeting the team would do an informal round robin—individually sharing updates and ideas—and then engage in thorough discussions pertaining to upcoming sessions and programs with the emerging adults. Discussions would also include the implementation of future learning experiences for the cohort given the current response to curriculum already introduced. Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own (Kuh, 2008). Other activities consisted of identifying tools to assess students’ learning and program content. Some of these items were identified in the constructing stage and carried over into the planning stage. My journal notes identified Kevin delegating specific roles among
the team to help us move forward in our charge. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community (Kuh, 2008). Specifically, Kevin requested that Amanda and Cindy take the lead in coming up with volunteer opportunities for the emerging adults to engage in civic engagement, such as visits with local hospice care, food shelters, environmental services (i.e. global soap project), and retirement facilities, as well as identify social functions that will promote fun and building group cohesion.

During the planning stage it was important to identify the learning outcomes and how the leadership team was to plan events, programs, and educational experiences around the rubrics that address intercultural competence. J. M. Bennett (2009) shares that intercultural knowledge and competence is a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills as well as the characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts. The leadership team reviewed three core competencies, knowledge (the understanding of cultural self-awareness and cultural worldview frameworks); skills (demonstrate empathy towards intercultural experience and recognize cultural differences and complexities); and attitudes (ask questions, display curiosity, receptive and conveys openness to cultural differences without judgment) that are referenced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). To promote the understanding of cultural self-awareness and cultural worldview frameworks, the leadership team emphasized developing knowledge by planning a rigorous course curriculum for the cohort. This included readings from journal and current news articles, Skype sessions with experts in the field of multicultural education and individuals working and/or studying abroad, as well as research projects that required the cohort to investigate other worldviews. The leadership team also encouraged the emerging adults to discuss their current perspectives of the worldviews that they were researching and make a comparison of that worldview to their own. When planning
activities for skill development, the leadership team identified several opportunities for the emerging adults to reflect on their learning experiences. Plans were made to administer to the emerging adults several self-reflections written assignments. In addition, classroom discussion questions were developed to further enhance shared learning between the leadership team and the emerging adults. It was the intent of these assignments to further expand developing the emerging adults’ attitude towards being more curious and open about intercultural development. A field trip was scheduled to Kia Motors Corporation’s production plant, the first US auto assembly plant for the Korean based company located in West Point, Georgia. The purpose for this excursion was to give the cohort exposure to a global company working within the states; how this company’s national culture was emerged into the business and local community in Georgia; as well as for them to experience a different worldview perspective in a working environment.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a tool that measures the specific intercultural stages of the DMIS, interprets an individual’s or group’s level of engagement in diversity and intercultural competencies, and identifies the associated transition issues around that specific orientation (M. J. Bennett, 2009). The IDI was used to assess the five intercultural orientation levels of the DMIS to establish the initial baseline of the emerging adults’ intercultural competence. The leadership team needed to consider this information in order to design, execute and evaluate the effectiveness of the various training, learning experiences, and education interventions that are appropriate for the cohort’s specific level of learning as well as the learning levels of each emerging adult. Table 8 outlines what actual activities that were designed during the planning stage when addressing each specific intercultural orientation level from the DMIS.
Table 8

Learning Activities Developed for Each DMIS Orientation Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation Level</th>
<th>Developmental Task</th>
<th>Suggested Activities</th>
<th>Actual Activities Developed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial</strong>: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one and there is a disinterest in cultural difference.</td>
<td>Recognize the existence of cultural differences - Reconciliation of stability and change - Develop comfort level with being culturally curious</td>
<td>Facilitate structured contact with other cultures through films, slides, panel presentations, interactive games and exercises.</td>
<td>- XY Game- introduction to competition vs. collaboration - True Colors®-Personality assessment exercise - In-depth discussion, review panel discussion, and videos on the 7 Global Challenges (population, resource management, technology, information/knowledge, economic integration, security/conflict and governance).</td>
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<td><strong>Defense</strong>: the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is superior and other cultures are inferior.</td>
<td>Recognize cultural similarities - Ability to distribute criticism equally and find commonalities</td>
<td>Use of conflict mediation and team-building; promote cooperative activities such as peer-to-peer dialogues or leadership development programs</td>
<td>- Strength Finders®-Individual strength characteristics assessment exercise - Iceberg Model-distinguishing surface differences from deeper unknown characteristics - Rope Course- promote team building - Online discussion board topics on course curriculum and current issues surrounding globalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimization</strong>: the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal and similarities are highlighted.</td>
<td>Develop cultural self-awareness - Reconcile unity and diversity - Use of open-mindedness and being</td>
<td>Structure opportunities for difference-seeking (i.e. attend diversity conferences, workshops or courses); interact with selected and trained ethnorelative resource</td>
<td>- Annotated Bibliography Assignment-based on country being research for global village poster project - Visit and tour Kia Motors Corp. - discussions around international business being conducted in the USA and</td>
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nonjudgmental
- Gain knowledge of own culture for understanding other cultures
- Persons; participate in study abroad experiences; motivate further cultural exploration through experiential learning and community services.

Acceptance: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews.
- Ability to refine analysis of cultural contrasts
- Recognize your own culture exists in a context of equally valid cultures
- Build respect for behavior and value difference
- Enhance cultural frame of reference shifting (i.e. take a foreign language course, host a foreign student); use of experiential learning (i.e. simulations and role plays that require intercultural empathy).

Adaptation: the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture.
- Develop cognitive and intuitive empathy
- Expand repertoire to allow a broader range of authentic behavior
- Improve co-shifting frames of reference to
- Interact in unexplored cultural context; address levels of culture shock; develop alternative communication skills; increase living experiences in another culture (i.e. study
- Visit to Salvador Brazil
- Review data findings from cross comparison research project with international peers

addressing the global challenges technology and economic integration.
- Attend panel discussion with experts within each of the 7 global challenges sharing their views on globalization as it pertains to their specific area
- Cross comparison research project with international peers in Brazil
- Social Activities: Brazil night – emerging adults who have previously travel to Brazil share their experiences/Brazilian partner conversation with cohort via Skype, and lunch at a Korean restaurant/Brazilian restaurant

Acceptance: the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews.
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- Review data findings from cross comparison research project with international peers

82
**Integration:** The state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to include fluid movement in and out of different cultural worldviews.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>effectively function in other perspective.</th>
<th>abroad, homestays/hostels, Peace Corp).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Resolve/perfect the multicultural identity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ability to recognize new cultural patterns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to feel at home in the world and enjoy co-shifting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore the nature of being a multicultural person; taking on new work assignments abroad or more study abroad opportunities; and create opportunities for marginal peer group interaction.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue intercultural development through planned activities, field trips, research in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year of the leadership development program. Interventions will be designed and implement collectively between the leadership team and the emerging adults.</td>
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The planning stage also allowed for the leadership team to verify our work and to be in a safe working environment where we can speak openly and engage actively without fear of judgment as well as obtain clarity and understanding of our work. I distinctly recall myself saying several times at each of our initial team meetings: “so, going back, just so I am clear and let’s make sure we’re all on the same page with this……”

**Stage Three: Taking Action (April 2012 – May 2013)**

The third action research stage is the taking action phase—actual implementation of plans and continuous creation of interventions. Activities that the team participated in during this stage were on-going interactions with the emerging adults, facilitating the programs, re-evaluating the intervention’s outcomes, and administering assessments. Activities included the students’ welcome orientation and social events held during the summer of 2012, and the implementation of the honors course conducted in the Fall semester of 2012. These programs were mutually developed by the leadership team and delivered by myself and specific facilitators on the team. Outcomes from these sessions were assessed by the team around their degree of success in meeting the learning outcomes. For example, during one session, the leadership team incorporated a reflection exercise with the emerging adults for them to think deeper around cultural differences when using the Iceberg Model. This model uses viewing the top of the iceberg to visually interpret and see about individuals or various cultures. The intent was for the cohort to look below the surface of the waters around an iceberg in order to see culture differences beyond what is viewed on the surface. When implementing this exercise, the leadership team not only observed the cohort’s response to the exercise, but was also actively involved in the exercise by sharing their own reflections. Kevin shared during this process that he also is guilty of seeing only surface differences and that his new approach was to take more
initiative in learning more through reading articles and books as well as engaging more with others with different worldviews. By sharing this example with the emerging adults he was able to model behaviors around developing intercultural competence and taking action by being part of the cohort’s learning process.

From a research perspective this stage also included observations of group dynamics and the leadership team’s interactions when working together on the delivery of the interventions to the emerging adults. During both my initial and follow up individual interviews with team members I asked the same question around how they would describe the characteristics of the leadership team’s engagement with each other. Team members responded to this question as follows:

Calvin: I think it’s a pretty well-oiled machine. We all have some strengths that we share in common but then I also think that a lot of us have some areas that complement others who may be weaker.

Cindy: We work very well together. We treat each other equally, we treat each other with respect, we listen to each other’s ideas and we try to help each other.

Peggy: It felt like a team of equals.

Kevin: Seamless process. There’s respect, there is commonality, there are mutual goals, and there is shared accountability. The team worked beautifully together and maximized the process.

Stage Four: Evaluation (April 2013 – July 2013)

In the fourth stage, the team evaluates the action—examining the outcomes of the action. Our team collectively evaluated the learning process for the students as well as assessed our collaborative work as designers and administrators of the program. Throughout the
implementation stage the team was also evaluating and making changes as appropriate. These sessions were also an opportunity for members to point out what was working successfully with the overall program as well as dialog around what needed to be improved. A major outcome for this portion of the team’s collective work was to schedule a full day retreat in the summer of 2013 to review all findings around the work of the leadership team, the cohort’s learning outcomes, and to revise procedures as needed to improve the leadership program for the incoming Fall of 2013 participants. For example, when the leadership team met at the full day retreat to review the work that was conducted with the emerging adults, comments addressing what worked and what needs to be done differently included:

- **Cynthia:** the cohort at times seemed overwhelmed with information shared during the session. In the future we may want to consider a longer scheduled session as opposed to the current fifty minutes allocated now.

- **Kevin:** I didn’t like the way the room was set up; it didn’t allow for team exercises and didn’t allow for the group to interact with each other.

- **Calvin:** The three-day-a-week thing just was not a good fit for what we are trying to do here because you cannot get done what you need to get done in fifty minutes. It did feel rushed quite a bit. It felt like we were rushing things and we might have cut off some good conversations because of time.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) state that “doing any research in an organization is very political” (p. 126). Engaging key stakeholders and organizational members in the action research cycles is viewed as crucial to the effort’s success (Coghlan & Shani, 2005). The Dean of the college, in which the unit that provides these programs to the emerging adults resides, was also present at the retreat. It was important to have him as a participant to our evaluation process in order for
him to gain more understanding of the leadership team’s work and to engage in the conversation from a senior level perspective. He added comments around additional resources to help with the implementation of future programs and suggested other ways of approaching the international travel. Specifically he noted:

Although the study abroad is a great opportunity for our students, during these stringent economic times we may not have the financial resources to allow for travel each year during the course of the program. Perhaps an opportunity to view culture differences on a domestic level will not only help with the budget, but allow for a different lens to consider when developing cultural awareness.

Coghlan & Brannick (2010) states that action research cycles often run concurrently and that these phases are done in a cyclical but non-orderly movement. Amanda shared her observation around the action research project and the team’s demonstration of the action research stages:

If you look at what we are doing, I think our general efforts have been outlined by a movement from planning, to taking action, and then evaluating the work. At the beginning, we asked ourselves what is this experience going to look like this year? And then we planned out the people that would take the lead in instructing and doing specific duties to help us create this learning opportunity for the cohort. It was only natural that assessments of the overall process would take place and from those evaluations we asked if it worked; from that we once again took action. So if you take that perspective, it’s sort of a linear progression but at the same time, from the very beginning, we were constructing, we were planning, we were taking action, we were evaluating – all throughout the process. So you have almost these loops of all the processes - while we do linearly move from one step to the next, it’s grabbing from each stage at all times as a team.

Details of the key action stages and the impact these activities had on the study are listed in Appendix A. The table delineates the key steps in the research process and the outcomes. It also identifies how these steps aligned with action research attributes as well as the research questions.
Team Dynamics

Forsyth (2010) defines team dynamics as the influential actions, processes, and changes that occur within and between individuals in a team environment over a specific period of time. He also indicates that the diversity of a team is determined by the extent to which members are different from one another (Forsyth, 2010). During the course of this action research project it was important to observe not only team dynamics and interactions, but also how the social diversity of the group influenced the action research process. The following narrative will describe how the team’s demographics and its stages of group development impacted the study.

Demographics

Diversity can be defined as the presence of human beings with perceived or actual differences based on a variety of human characteristics (“Understanding,” 2010). Allen (2011) defines difference as a characteristic of identity such as gender, race, or age. Davidson (2011) expands on this by stating “differences certainly may be based on demographics such as race, gender, or age, but are also based on functional differences, personality, attitudes and values, cognition, and even emotional states” (p. 60). The team’s social demographics consisted of two white males, three white females, and one African American female. Ages varied from 19 to 56 and all members identified as citizens of the United States. Consequently the team reflected some diversity in the traditional areas of gender, race, and age, and also showed some functional differences of personality and work style. Calvin shared his reflections on the social demographics of the team and their influences on our collective work as follows:

I think it really enriched our partnership and relationship to have those different perspectives at the table. It really allowed us to model what intercultural skill development means as far as what we were demonstrating as a team to our students. Our leadership team was really congruent with what we were trying to tell them about the value of including different viewpoints, perspectives, and worldviews when using us as an example.
Since the action research methodology requires teamwork, then it is important for the team members to self-reflect, both collectively and individually, on how the group is functioning as a single unit. The team must also consider whether the social demographic differences among the group add another dimension that need to be addressed when actually working together in designing and implementing intercultural programs in order for the action research process to be effective when measuring the team’s success in their charge. Additional probing questions were needed around collaboration since the team membership consisted of a variety of dynamic complexities such as race, sex, and age. During this process we discovered how our individual culture differences affected our approach to developing the programs for our emerging adults and how this might have influenced the team’s collaboration and collective work. This examination created additional probing questions around the team’s group dynamics such as: What were the characteristics of the team’s engagement? What attributes demonstrated team collaboration? And how did the team’s demographic indicators and positionality influence the action research process? Comments shared by Amanda addressing the team’s social demographic differences and the influence it had on our collective work are as follows:

At the very beginning, the perception was that age difference accounted for specific roles. For instance, the course work was designed more for the older team members to take on and the duties around doing volunteer work and planning social events were more for peer leaders. As the year progressed, I think the separations disappeared and there was true collaboration on all aspects of the team’s work. Initially I felt like I was just a young person on a team where others were more mature and experienced. Now I feel like an equal member and that age is not an issue.

Kevin also alluded to positionality and his perception of roles within the team membership:

I hope that I was respectful and was like, ‘Hot Dog! Let’s hear what you think!’ as opposed to being defensive and being like, ‘I’m the professor here; I’ve got this, you worry about that.’ I just didn’t feel like that; being defensive about my title and specific role on this team. I felt like everyone brought something to the table and we rally around each other and our collective efforts.
The Intercultural Developmental Inventory© (IDI) is a tool that measures the specific intercultural stages, interprets an individual’s or group’s level of engagement in diversity and intercultural competencies, as well as identifies the associated transition issues around that specific orientation (Bennett, 2009). This theory-based instrument measures the first five stages of the DMIS—denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation—listed and defined earlier in Table 2. The IDI was used in this study as a diagnostic tool to identify participants’ intercultural orientation levels through the use of pre and post assessments. To explore how the leadership team builds synergy through their diversity in order to effectively do collaborative inquiry—which is the foundation of action research—it was necessary to assess the team’s intercultural competence. Addressing social-category differences when team membership consists of a variety of diverse characteristics such as race, gender, and age, better navigates potential barriers in bridging team cohesiveness in order to effectively conduct the action research process. The leadership team took the IDI as a self-assessment diagnostic tool to measure our intercultural competence level as well as use the results as a tactical approach to determine how we thought about cultural difference and how that influenced the creation of a cohesive team.

Most people assume that their proficiency level is high and tend to hold overly favorable views of their abilities in many social and intellectual domains; they expect to succeed at achievement tasks (Brown, 1990; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Argyris and Schon (1974) discussed the espoused theory that refers to the worldview and values that people believe guide their behaviors, and the theory-in-use, which refers to the worldview and values reflected in the behaviors that actually drive their actions (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). The graphic illustrated in Figure 4 is the results of how the leadership team perceives their collective orientation level and
their actual developmental orientation level. Figure 4 shares the results of the team’s pre IDI assessment results.

Figure 4. Leadership Team’s IDI Pre Group Profile.

The results of our group’s pre IDI assessment indicated that the team perceived themselves in the beginning stages of adaptation—the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture. The IDI developmental orientation results indicated that the team was actually located in the Minimization stage—the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal and similarities are highlighted. According to Bennett’s (1986) DMIS model and the IDI Manual (2005), score of 100 is the center of the Minimization orientation with 85 indicating the lower limit and 114 representing the upper limit. As stated in the literature review, Minimization is the orientation stage within the DMIS that acknowledges surface differences, but only focuses on similarities.
among cultures, masking a deeper understanding of cultural differences (Bennett, 1986). There is an experience of dissonance if behavior differs sharply from expectations; if a person expects to do well and don’t, they will experience dissonance and attempt to minimize this performance (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962). Cranton (1996) defines critical reflection as a process one may identify assumptions governing one’s actions, question them, and develop alternative ways of acting (Cranton, 1996 as cited in Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Recognizing the IDI results, the team made a conscious effort in improving their own intercultural competence in order to model the behavior they wanted the emerging adults to exhibit.

When reflecting on the group’s IDI results the focused turned to the social demographics of the leadership team which are identified through gender, age, and race. The team acknowledged our differences but still recognized that the collective work done by the group created unity and synergy. In support of this Cindy stated:

I think we are, as a team, all very different people so we bring different things to the group that strengthens our collective work. The combination in the variety of age, gender, and race, allowed for us to grow as a team when recognizing our uniqueness and how we can capitalize on bridging all those various traits, skills, and attributes together to achieve a common goal and task.

Specific team activities conducted to continue to build team synergy were sharing of literature around diversity and team building, benchmarking intercultural activities and programs used at other institutions of higher learning, and participating in interactive cultural learning activities. What emerged during these activities and team interactions were opportunities to enhance members’ intercultural skill sets and experience the identified activities prior to engaging in them with the emerging adults. For example, the team would review news articles and other studies that focused on cultural awareness that allowed for team discussions around potential reflection questions to be used in the classroom. As a result of developing the potential questions, the team would further take part in dialogue where each member shares their own
reflections as it pertains to the designated questions. For example, during one team meeting Kevin shared an article, *Mind the Gap* by Peter Passell (2012) which highlights economic inequality and its impact on global issues. This was an article that he wanted to get the team insights on as a potential discussion session for the emerging adults. As the team reviewed the document comments from members were:

Kevin: I think this can be relevant to the emerging adults use of critical thinking about global issues and for them to make comparison in our own economy’s impact around this.

Calvin: We could also ask them to think about these issues when we discuss specific topics that align their views with the views of Brazilian peers prior to their visit to Brazil.

Cynthia: I would like to also incorporate this into a reflection exercise that will perhaps create deeper thinking around the DMIS and the group’s perceived IDI results and where that influences their thinking around their current intercultural competence level.

Another incident involved the team actually conducting an interactive exercise that required listing words to describe intentional ways of developing cultural awareness. For this specific activity words are selected that must start with each alphabet. (e.g. *Appreciate* people from different cultural backgrounds, *Break* the usage of stereotypes, etc.). Once again the team found themselves indirectly building their own cultural awareness as well as enhancing interactions with each other. Comments shared among the team around this specific exercise were:

Kevin: this can also be fun for them; I would like to see them also state why it’s important to develop deeper awareness and what that looks like.

Cindy: It could also be “apprehension”, it would be nice to see not only intentional usage but those words that they see as causing some challenges for them to achieve cultural awareness.
Cynthia: I could probably think of a lot of words that would reflect my lack of knowledge around culture awareness; one that comes to mind is “stuck”. Often I can’t get beyond a specific way of thinking, could be my thoughts around being a minority and the time era I was raised.

These incidents promoted and continued the team’s pursuit of effectiveness when working as a cohesive unit on this project as well as the chance to prepare and practice prior to using the activities with the emerging adults.

Interactions between individuals with different norms and perspectives can create conflicts and tensions that may prevent teams from fulfilling their tasks, even though creative tensions associated with diversity may encourage mutual inspiration and encourage collaboration (Van Der Zee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004). The next section describes the leadership team’s attributes within Tuckman’s stages of group development. Also activities and examples revealed the behaviors demonstrated by the teams during each stage.

**Stages of Group Development**

As noted in the literature review, Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work as it pertains to group development addresses four stages: (a) *forming*—creating group norms and getting acclimated to the task, (b) *storming*—conflict is present among group members, inconsistency in group interactions, polarization may occur, demonstration of team resistance, (c) *norming*—display of open communication and expressions of various opinions, bridging group cohesiveness/common goal, mutual consensus around action, cooperation and support, and, (d) *performing*—group demonstrates productivity and interdependence around tasks and goal achievement. The following narrative shares the team’s performance during each of Tuckman’s stages of group development.
**Forming.** The first stage of the group dynamics model is the forming stage. It is during this stage that the group is building its structure and focusing on the task. When a team is forming the group meets and learns more about the task, agree on goals and begin the implementation process. During a series of weekly meetings, the group started to show incremental signs of bonding as a cohesive unit. One of the characteristics of group forming is that a leader will emerge (Tuckman, 1965). This part of the forming stage was noticeable when Kevin, the instructor of the honors course, took more initiative in facilitating the work of the group and became more vocal during team meetings. The group further engaged in orienting themselves, as well as understanding the work and goals of the team. For example, at the initial forming stage, Kevin always took the lead in facilitating the team discussion. In time, as we all got acclimated to our individual roles and how that integrated with the collective work of the team, the meeting process started to shift and leadership roles were less noticeable. Our process incorporated a standard for team meetings to begin with what was addressed at our last session, what we were to discuss during our time together, and conduct a round robin for everyone to share any updates or announcements that was relevant to our work. Although Kevin would still start our conversations, it was no longer seen as him taking full leadership in facilitating our discussion. Amanda added:

> To my knowledge, the weekly meetings had never happened before with everyone in the room so the fact that we had everyone in the room and everyone was providing insight was a needed change. Everyone knew who was doing what; there was no, ‘wait, I thought you were supposed to do that? Wait, no, you were.’ Everyone was on the same page.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) indicate during the construction stage of action research, team members collectively explore the context and purpose of the task or project. When a team is forming—the team meets and learns about the opportunities and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks—members cautiously explore the boundaries of
acceptable group behavior (Scholtes, Joiner, & Streibel, 1996; Tuckman, 1965). Kevin noted the following observation about the team’s ability to work collectively:

The fifty dollar word is ‘synergy’. I just felt like this collection of six bodies listened, played off of each other, leveraged each other, relied on each other, certainly knew when to draw boundaries, respected each other’s opinions and what they brought to the table.

**Storming.** In the storming stage group members start to demonstrate resistance to team interactions—“When conflict occurs in a group, the actions or beliefs of one or more members of the group are unacceptable to and resisted by one or more of the other group members (Forsyth, 2010, p. 380). The leadership team’s level of storming was very minimal and movement through this stage was virtually unnoticeable. Although we would question or challenge each other during our planning meetings, I would describe our conflicts as quiet storms. During the researcher’s one on one session with Calvin he shared his concerns around stress and a minor conflict that he was feeling with one of the team members.

My biggest stressor through the whole process was trying to keep a certain team member under control; I’m not a morning guy and this individual comes in with guns blazing after two cups of coffee. It’s not a bad stressor; it’s just kind of like a difference in personality types sometimes. Again, it’s one of the great things about our team is the personality variations.

Many of the disagreements were around personalities and work styles and were normally discussed apart from the group setting and often these conversations would take place between group members who shared similar feelings. However, from my observations at team meetings, none of the perceived conflicts were displayed, nor was there any initiative taken to address potential issues around perceived team conflict. Stringer (2007) indicates that during the inquiry process researchers may have to negotiate through diverse opinions with stakeholders. When working with the team, I discovered that the preference was to avoid team conflict with the hopes that any specific underlying conflict issues will work themselves out during the course of
our work. The behavior demonstrated by the leadership team during the storming stage shows similarities to the group’s IDI stage of being in minimization—cultural worldview are experienced as universal and similarities are highlighted (Hammer, M. J. Bennett, & Wiseman (2003). Thomas (1996), recognized as one of the world’s leading experts on diversity management and was a key proponent of the diversity and inclusion movement in early 1990, states that focusing on similarities is just a mechanism for avoiding challenges and conflicts associated with differences. Thomas (1999) expands on this notion of team diversity and differences by stating “differences exist; whether they are good, bad, or neutral depends on the context and whether the difference has any effect, either positive or negative on the organization’s ability to accomplish its goal” (p. 19). Amanda shared comments around team conflicts and avoidance of addressing team conflicts:

I think if we had actually addressed some of the minor conflicts it would have probably made more intense conflicts, you know, the calling-out thing. That might have inflamed a situation. The workarounds – everyone in the room knew it was a workaround without having a meeting to say … everybody was willing to work through the workaround to make the thing happen because we all respected each other. We all have different strengths and we all respected those strengths and realized we sometimes butt heads and we don’t see the same solution to a problem but we are going to incorporate more types of solutions in order to get through the problem together.

Similar to Amanda, Peggy also expressed her concerns around how the team addressed conflicts.

It’s fairly minor stuff from my perspective and in my field I’ve seen much, much worse. I feel that everybody on this team has the emerging adults’ best interests at heart. So if we all have that as the end goal, I think we could eventually talk about any perceived team conflicts and I think it would go fine. So if everybody has a good heart, which I perceive to be the case, then I think that team is going to be just fine when the time comes for any type of difficult discussions around team conflict.

**Norming.** The norming stage expresses group cohesiveness where there is demonstration of mutual consensus around action, cooperation and support. This was strongly evident within the leadership team. Initially during the team norming process, there was a sense that ownership
of the project was only tied to the researcher and that the team’s work was supplemental to her study. However, after continuous team interactions and building camaraderie, trust, and a strong rapport, all members were actively engaged and felt mutually committed to the work. Amanda vocalized her insights on this process as follows:

The weekly meetings of the leadership team reinforced the collaborative approach that was taken in this process. It provided us with a time to ‘take a pulse’ on how we are progressing, how the cohort is capturing the learning, and an opportunity to discuss methods of teaching that worked or needed improvements so that we could ensure that students were fully understanding the course content.

**Performing.** At the performing stage roles are more flexible, productive, and interdependent around tasks and goal achievement. Coghlan (2007) aligns performing with the active role of creating change within an organization. He states that performing during the action research process involves the public role of being active in the change process, building participation for change, and pursuing the change agenda rationally and logically (Coghlan, 2007). Although the group was socially demographically diverse, the group shared a strong mutual interest of being intentional in their approach to program development and teaching best practices with the emerging adults. The team focused on designing, implementing, and evaluating appropriate interventions and learning opportunities for enhancing emerging adults’ intercultural competence. This focus was not limited to the work conducted for the cohort, but also for the process that the team used to engage in a collective group approach to design these specific programs. Members elaborated on this aspect as follows:

Cindy: We must continue to be intentional in our process in promoting the learning and the development of intercultural skills.

Kevin: Your work has kept us focused and reminds us that we have to continue to connect the learning as we go along; critical to have someone focus on this because other members may miss vital aspects to the collaborative work being done; this needs to be
done periodically [evaluating our process] to continue to measure and assess our work; benchmark where we are, what is working, and what needs to be done differently.

The IDI post-assessment results indicated a shift in our intercultural competence level. Figure 5 shows the post-assessment results as they pertained to how the group now perceived their orientation stage and where we currently fell on the developmental orientation level.

*IDI Group Profile*

**Perceived Orientation (PO)**

- Denial
- Polarization: Defense/Reversal
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

**Developmental Orientation (DO)**

- Denial
- Polarization: Defense/Reversal
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

*Figure: 5. Leadership Team’s IDI Post Group Profile.*

The results of our group’s post IDI assessment indicated that the team still perceives themselves in the beginning stages of adaptation (shows a slight movement from 129.83 to 132.20). The IDI developmental orientation results indicated a movement from our pre IDI assessment results of Minimization to the Acceptance orientation level—the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). This outcome might be the result of the social demographic makeup of the leadership team and how the understanding of cultural differences
allowed for the team to use individual strengths and backgrounds to promote a collaboration process that enhanced team synergy and performance. Calvin shared the following around our differences and it’s alignment with our collective work:

I think that there is a good bit of experience and diversity in our group that makes us work well together. Understanding and recognizing these differences, along with respecting these various characteristics, at the beginning may have seemed hard to do, but as we continued to work and bond, we were able to reach a higher degree of inclusiveness.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

Coghlan (2007) describes reflection as the process of stepping back from an experience to sort out what the experience means; it is a critical link between the concrete experience, the interpretation and taking new action. I lean more towards the aphorism, “it’s not the destination but the journey.” I am inspired by my study as I observed the work of the leadership team and the collective approach to our work. I used the word “inspired” because I’ve never been with a team that demonstrates such focus and intentionality in providing learning opportunities to our cohort of emerging adults. My initial interpretation when observing the engagement and comfort level of the team during our first round of team meetings was one of trepidation. As a novice researcher, I was afraid of not being academically equipped to conduct a participatory study. Because of this, initially my own engagement with team members was slow and very deliberate when working together to develop the programs. It was my hypothesis that this could have contributed to my perceptions around individual’s assumption of authority and positionality. Coming in as the researcher, it was often assumed that I would take the lead in facilitating the project. As an African American, it also felt at times that I was labeled the subject matter expert on all things pertaining to diversity and inclusion. To perpetuate this, one team member constantly communicated during team meetings that I was working on my dissertation and that the work that I was conducting with the team was relevant to my study. Although this aspect was
true, the emphasis was more on my dissertation versus the potential impact of the research’s outcome when attempting to create organizational change through a collective team approach. This put me in a very precarious position when trying to establish a mutual relationship as a team member as well as trying to promote team cohesiveness—the last thing I wanted to occur was for my research work to influence the engagement and collective efforts that needed to occur naturally when teams work together as stated in Tuckman’s theoretical framework. Also noting that I was much older than the majority of my team members, I also perceived to be in the role of the nurturing mature matriarch. For example, once I found myself taking more control over a meeting then I intended to, all because at that moment the team focus wasn’t specifically on our charge and I wanted us to move forward with agenda items. Again, this was my own perception and perhaps an example of my own personal biases that I, as the researcher, brought to the table.

As time moved on, and as the leadership team continued to meet and build rapport, I found that understanding the stages of group development eased a lot of my apprehension as a researcher and a team member. Stringer (2007) often states that conducting action research is not a linear or easy process. I am fortunate to have had the role of an inside researcher within my organization. There was always a sense of familiarity and security when working with my colleagues on this project. It was also comforting having the support and resources needed from senior decision makers to assure successful outcomes in the leadership team’s work. In full support of my research at the institution (See the institutional consent letter in Appendix B), the Vice President of Student Success and the Dean of the college in which the unit I’m working with in this study reports to stated:

We and our colleagues understand that this study will benefit the larger academic community. This research promises to add to our knowledge of how institutions of higher learning develop and advance intercultural and international competences among
undergraduates, our emerging leaders, as well as promote organizational learning and change.

However, there were also challenges as the inside researcher. Coghlan (2007) shares that there are a number of challenges that insider researchers face—such as pre-understanding of the problem may not fully reveal deeper functional or hierarchical boundaries and how that may create personal biases both for the researcher and for stakeholders, the balancing of role duality, and addressing organizational politics. It was very difficult for me to shift between the role of the inside researcher and an active member of the project’s team. Many times my position as the researcher would surface. It was during these specific moments I would have to redirect the focus away from my role as a researcher and emphasize our work as a collective team. For example, in one meeting I requested that my skills as a facilitator be considered when working with the cohort on other areas of learning in order for me not to be solely identified as a researcher. I also emphasized my appreciation to the team for letting me join them this year in our work in developing and implementing programs and interventions for the emerging adults. Re-stating my role as a member of the team was an attempt to temper any perceptions around my presence as just being the researcher.

Creswell (2009) warns the researcher to not marginalize or disempower the study’s participants. My challenges stemmed around balancing my role as the employee and one as the researcher. As I often found myself emerged in my required responsibilities as an educator, I failed to note the importance of reviewing my process as the researcher working with stakeholders. For example, my faculty contract requires 10% of research and scholarship. Knowing this, my focus was trying to meet that expectation of a final written product as opposed to engaging more deeply into the process of producing that product.
Another important aspect I pondered is that our individual and cultural differences didn’t create any barriers in our communication or in our work together. We as a collective unit were able to utilize our differences in work styles as well as social demographics as an advantage in creating unique synergy when implementing our team goals. Kevin noted how the team used our various social demographics as a mechanism to work as a cohesive team. He stated:

I think those demographic labels came off during our work as a team and we understood that everyone had something unique and valuable to add to our collective work as a team.

At times I was disappointed that we didn’t experience more storming stages; it would have been interesting to facilitate deeper dialogue around those characteristics as they pertain to our work, as well as discovering interventions to address those types of team challenges—but who knows, as we continue our work together, perhaps I still may get that opportunity. This makes me question if the leadership team actual achieved higher levels of development as a group. Perhaps continued study of the group’s progress in the future as they continue to work with the cohort during the three year duration of the curriculum program will allow for sufficient long-term learning to occur.

As I reflected, I realized that this project has not only created a mechanism for change around best practices for the unit’s operations, but also to be considered within other units, colleges that use teams to address other specific initiatives. This also relates to my own personal transformation. I have developed my skills as a researcher, but also as a facilitator working with groups comprised of various experiences, perspectives, and social demographic backgrounds. After this project, I take away attributes that will enhance my role as a change agent with the desire to move forward with other projects/opportunities that will create change within my organization. The study didn’t go without some challenges. Although these encounters were very minimal, some were even expected, the occurrence of them did create some stress and setbacks.
to the team’s planning and execution process. For example, as the researcher I found it difficult to inject the action research concepts as the team moved forward in our work. It wasn’t because I didn’t have the opportunity to do so during our weekly meetings, I felt that it would put the focus back on me and the study as opposed to letting our collective work move forward naturally. After conducting the post interviews, I realize that reiterating the action research methodology would have given the team a better understanding of the process that the team went through during our two years of working together. I’m still pleased that the study revealed the team’s action research process, and in the end the team members realized that our work was aligned with action research methodology. I just would have preferred for the team to see that our work was connected to a specific theoretical framework during the entire process as opposed to having that epiphany at the end of our project.

Another area of uncertainty was how the team handled conflicts. There was rarely a time where visible conflict occurred within team meetings. My perception is that it contributes to the fact that we were a small group, committed to our work with the emerging adults’ best interest in mind, and that minor disagreements were not significant enough to hinder our collective work as a team. Some may view this as an anomaly as it pertains to group development, but this was the case when working with this specific group of leaders. When asked about team conflicts Cindy’s perception was viewed as follows:

I think that we work better together because with any team, it’s a little rocky at the beginning – not necessarily with personality differences but just getting used to who you are working with and how your personalities interact with one another. I think over time we have gotten to be very good about how we work together and how we communicate with each other and we have been very organized with our Friday meetings all the time and staying on task generally.

Lastly, I want to share my thoughts around my personal development throughout this process. During my point of entry, I realized that this was the topic I wanted to study along with
the targeted group of colleagues I wanted to work with on this project. However, I had no idea how much growth as an emerging scholar would occur during my participation in my doctoral program. What started as an assignment took on more meaning and ownership. For instance, I started taking things really personal when my team would wander away from the action research methodology—as if I didn’t convey the importance of the steps adequately for them to understand the potential for change that can occur during this process. I also felt lost as a novice researcher, not sure if the questions I’m asking were on point with the topic of the project or would generate enough pertinent data to reflect the outcomes of the work being conducted. I’m sure others have been in these shoes—doctoral students—and have questioned their abilities in living up to the expectations of their major professor and committee members. Initially I was very insecure and doubted my abilities of doing work that met academia standards. But throughout the years I know I have grown. As a beginner conducting research I have made mistakes, but have learned from them. I know I have made a difference to my client system and I am proud that what I have done with my leadership team has created a change within the unit and had created the potential to influence how the organization as a whole considers how to approach intercultural development. This makes me feel good. This makes me feel like I have selected the right program, for the right purpose, which will allow me to continue to be a change agent in higher education.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore an action research approach to program planning used by a leadership team working to enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. The primary research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?,

2. What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults? and,

3. What elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence?

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings are organized in response to the research questions and are illustrated with excerpts from interviews with the leadership team and the emerging adults who participated in the study as well as the researcher’s journal entries from observations and interactions with the study’s participants. The chapter begins with the reoccurring themes from the emerging adults’ response to the programs and interventions created and executive by the leadership team. A portion of this narrative will also include the cohort’s pre and post IDI assessment which measured their intercultural competence orientation levels prior to the implementation of programs intended to build cultural skills as well as the
assessment results after the execution of these initiatives. The chapter will continue with the findings that contributed to the learning that the leadership team experienced throughout their process along with the specific attributes that promoted group development when conducting an action research approach to program development intended to enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. Table 9 provides an overview of the data findings.

Table 9:

*Research Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>RQ1: How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed</td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by a cohort learning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>at developing intercultural competence?</td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by engagement with facilitators.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by reflection processes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by identifying intercultural competence level.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by recognizing stress and anxiety levels.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emerging adults enhanced learning by unplanned learning experiences.</td>
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<td>RQ2: What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative</td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to recognize the assumptions about leadership/positionality roles.</td>
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<td>approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for</td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to value the collaboration and synergy process.</td>
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<td>emerging adults?</td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to identify intercultural competence level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ3: What elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using</td>
<td>• Utilizing a structured process contributed to the team’s development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults'</td>
<td>• Promotion of collaboration and synergy contributed to the team’s development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>intercultural competence?</td>
<td>• Opportunities for self and team reflection contributed to the team’s development.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Systemic change contributed to the team’s development.</td>
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Emerging Adults’ Responses to the Program

The first research question was, “how do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence? The findings showed that these emerging adults enjoyed being in the program and being exposed to opportunities that focused on intercultural competency development. Although the emerging adults felt some anxiety throughout the process, they also found the learning experience highly beneficial in affording the opportunity to engage with individuals that possess different perspectives and worldviews, participate in an education abroad experience to Salvador Brazil, and develop reflection skills that perpetrated deeper cultural awareness. There were six reoccurring themes related to how the emerging adults’ learn in response to the programs and interventions provided by the leadership team. Table 10 shows the findings from research question one (RQ1).

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question One</th>
<th>Findings from Data</th>
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| How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence? | • Emerging adults enhanced learning by a cohort learning process.  
• Emerging adults enhanced learning by engagement with facilitators.  
• Emerging adults enhanced learning by reflection processes.  
• Emerging adults enhanced learning by identifying intercultural competence level.  
• Emerging adults enhanced learning by recognizing stress and anxiety levels.  
• Emerging adults enhanced learning by unplanned learning experiences. |

There were a total of 27 emerging adults who participated in the leadership program conducted by the unit and led by the leadership team. All participants, as a cohort, were enrolled in the same honors course where they were exposed to the interventions that the leadership team
designed to build their intercultural competence. Similar to the process with the leadership team, I, along with the leadership team observed and recorded the emerging adults’ engagement and learning behaviors during classroom sessions, co-curricular activities, field trips, and in social settings. Meetings were also recorded via an audio recorder in order to produce transcripts made available to the leadership team for our review. Each participant was assigned a code to ensure their anonymity and quotes will be attributed to their code (i.e. Participant 1 will be listed as P1, Participant 2 will be listed as P2, etc.) in the sections to follow.

Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by a Cohort Learning Process

The leadership program for the emerging adults was based on a cohort learning environment. A cohort is defined as “a tight-knit, reliable, common-purpose group (Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Popp, Broderick, & Portnow, 2001). The emerging adults felt that the cohort environment increased their intercultural development. Statements from some of the participants that illustrate this finding are:

P1: I feel like I’ve gotten a lot out of working with my cohort this semester. What I like the most so far is that everybody’s so different and I like being around people that are completely different than me. I like seeing things from different perspectives.

P4: Our group actually wants to reach goals in life so it kind of encourages me to work as hard as everyone else in the cohort is working.

Drago-Severson, et al. (2001) expand on the notion that interpersonal relationships developed in a cohort make a critical difference to peers’ academic learning, emotional and psychological well-being, as well as their ability to broaden their perspectives. Participants referred to this notion of building better relationships and new perspectives as a result of learning in a cohort environment.
P8: I like the learning community, like, having a group of people that know you better than say the people in your other classes.

P11: Being in other classes, I found a lot of people that were from this honors class, so we got together and studied for this course as well as our other course; that made learning easier.

P18: I met a lot of good people in this cohort that have a lot of learning goals and it’s going to help me in the long run to encourage me determine my own learning goals.

P19: Like everyone’s more mature in our group and we all kind of seem like we are on the same level. We can meet and have discussions without the fear of being judged or having people say, “Well, you’re stupid.” I think it’s fun learning together.

P21: I like that I have a program that I fit into, a group of people that meet every week that I can get along with and connect the learning with; we are all different—so many things you can learn from others from different backgrounds and experiences.

From these comments it was clear that the cohort approach to learning was particularly effective for these emerging adults.

**Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by Engagement with Facilitators**

During the fall semester, members from the leadership team along with external speakers presented on various intercultural topics. Some lectures in class included speakers sharing personal stories, group activities, and Skype sessions from those facilitators who were located outside the state or in another country. The findings indicated that the emerging adults responded positively to the experiential learning and cultural expertise shared by the leadership team and guest speakers. Learning was leverage through the influenced and engagement with the leadership team and guest speakers who shared personal stories, research, and work experiences.
that focused on globalization and multicultural education. Several participants shared that they preferred learning from a variety of speakers:

P1: I like learning from different instructors; they all came with different perspectives and different enthusiasms. I think that really helps because when you have a mix of people, you learn more and you want to be more engaged. If it was just one instructor, the same person all the time, you kind of like … flat line a little bit. So having a variety of speakers was helpful to my learning.

P2: I really enjoyed and walked away with a lot of new knowledge from the two guest speakers that we had. Because international relations is a possible major I’m considering, it was really cool to hear about being in the U.N. and all the other countries that these ladies have lived and the intercultural experiences that they had.

Others elaborated on learning from the leadership team and the value of having peer leaders as facilitators in the program:

P1: I also liked how there are peer leaders our age; we can relate to them and they can teach us from their lens as one of our own.

P14: The facilitators (leadership team) did a wonderful job teaching it to us and providing all the tools necessary to learn in a good environment but I have to say that picking Amanda and Cindy as peer leaders was definitely a good choice. I owe a lot of my success in this class to them. They have been really great in helping me understand the subjects and in my transition into higher education.

P15: It seems like the whole leadership team is very determined and very motivated which helps me be motivated to participate and learn and develop these intercultural skills that they were teaching us about.

P26: The whole leadership team made it a very comfortable learning process.

These comments reinforces that the leadership team was committed to the focus on the cohort’s learning and that the participants found them to be a great value in sharing their expertise and experiences in order to assist their learning.
Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by Self-Reflection Processes

The emerging adults were required to enroll in an honors course that would expose them to rigorous course curriculum, co-curricular activities, and other academic experiences as part of their participation in the three-year leadership development certificate program. This honors course garnered three credit hours and is credited towards each participant’s discipline being studied at the institution. The course exposed the participants to various programs and interventions with the aim of cultivating meaningful and measurable experiences in leadership development, multiculturalism, and civic engagement. During the learning process the use of self-reflection essay assignments, peer dialogue during debriefs addressing specific learning outcomes, and the use of personal journal entries. The promotion of self-reflection and group discussions were intended to raised self-awareness around cultural difference and introduced new knowledge through experiential/shared learning in order for the emerging adults to build on their intercultural competence. Several participants shared their thoughts on how the curriculum promoted self-awareness around cultural difference and their specific response to these programs and interventions.

P5: Being exposed to the different videos we would see in class shared different perspectives that I realize was an important piece to the syllabus and learning. A lot of that stuff I had never seen before and it was eye-opening to see what different cultures in the world are doing this and make comparisons to what we’re doing… the class has been an eye-opener.

P7: The assignments opened my eyes to what was going on because previous to then I was just focused on getting ready for college and what my major would be. The curriculum in this course makes you step back, take a hard look at other things in the world [and] that makes me think.

P19: I’ve watched the news and stuff like that but I hate how depressing it is all the time so I got away from it. I knew kind of what was going on around the world but I didn’t put the effort out there to find out. When we’d talk about it in class, it was really cool to hear, and that made me want to learn more about how much the world is interconnected and
how we need to develop culture awareness. So it, I guess you could say, the curriculum shared opened my eyes a lot more than I thought it would.

There was also a specific assignment known as “the global village.” The emerging adults were put into teams of three and were each assigned a specific country to research. Each team’s findings were shared on a poster presentation. Data indicated that learning more about the specific countries and their life styles along with discovering other cultural aspects gave the emerging adults new knowledge around cultural difference as well as the opportunity to understand another cultural frame of reference. Two specific participants reflecting on the assignment and the value of the project when self-reflecting were as follows:

P4: I liked the global village project. It was just a way to really put yourself into the shoes of someone else from another country. It wasn’t, “Read this article and tell us about it.” You actually had to do your own research and more hands on work. This was my favorite assignment because I was able to learn through the lens from another worldview.

P22: The Global Poster Project was so good because it got us researching. Instead of telling us about another culture, we had to go find out things for ourselves. So it was in-depth or as surface as we wanted to make it—and besides it is the only way I can retain learning is by actually doing some kind of assignment, as opposed to listening to lectures with the expectations of regurgitating what was being said.

The comments shared indicate that experiencing other perspectives, use of media and social networks, exposure to experiential learning, and interacting with others with different worldviews were critical factors that enhanced the cohort’s learning in the program. As the results show, in a program like this incorporating interventions that allow for dialogue, engagement, and constructivism seem to be critical for student learning.

**Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by Identifying Intercultural Competence Level**

Very often assessment tools are used to diagnose levels of learning or competence. Yu (2012) defines an assessment instrument as a measurement device that identifies, describes,
assesses, categorizes, or evaluates the specific characteristics of individuals, groups, and organizations. The IDI was used to assess the initial baseline of the emerging adults in order to facilitate the development of intercultural competence and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and interventions that the leadership team identified as appropriate for the cohort’s specific level of learning. This section shows how the relations between the IDI results and the interventions provided to the emerging adults enhanced intercultural competence. The purpose of assessing the emerging adults was to assist the leadership team in understanding how the students currently construe cultural difference and to design and employ suitable interventions that would address their current level of cultural awareness with the intention to enhance their intercultural dexterity. Hammer (1998) supports this use of the IDI, postulating that it can be used to assess the initial baseline for developing intercultural competence and to evaluate the effectiveness of various training, counseling, and education interventions that are appropriate for the individual’s specific level of learning. The data from the cohort’s pre IDI assessment assisted the leadership team in determining the appropriate interventions to be used with the emerging adults. The following narrative will also share statistical results that showed a shift in the emerging adults’ development of intercultural dexterity after the execution of the customized interventions for the emerging adults.

To administer the IDI assessment, facilitators must take a three day IDI Qualifying Seminar to obtain certification. Certified IDI administrators are trained and authorized to provide feedback to individuals or groups on their IDI assessment results to assist in furthering the development of intercultural competencies. Only two members of the leadership team are IDI certified assessor. Kevin and the primary investigator are the IDI qualified assessors and are the ones who conducted the individual sessions that revealed the IDI results to the participants. The
instrument generates a graphic profile of an individual’s or groups’ predominant stage of
development and a textual interpretation of that stage and associated transition issues (Hammer,
1998). During these sessions we shared the assessment results and also inquired about which
programs and interventions the participants perceived were effective in building their
intercultural competence as well as discussed other opportunities for the participants to further
develop their cultural awareness. Appendix C contains a copy of the interview questions used
with the emerging adults during a pre and post assessment process. The respondents provided
several examples of incidents which they thought were key factors when building intercultural
skills through the interventions provided during the study. Kevin and I shared a synopsis of the
interviews with the leadership team. The team discovered and discussed reoccurring themes
related to how the emerging adults responded to the programs and interventions. It was during
these team sessions that we continue to review and evaluate our process and made adjustments as
needed.

Similar to the leadership team’s results shared in Chapter 4, Figure 6 illustrates the pre IDI
assessment results of the emerging adults’ cohort. The graphics illustrate the collective results of
how the emerging adults perceive their orientation level and their actual developmental
orientation level.
Figure 6. Emerging Adults Pre IDI Group Profile.

The results of the cohort’s pre IDI assessment indicated that the emerging adults perceived themselves in the adaptation stage—the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). The IDI developmental orientation results indicated that the group of participants was located in the Defense orientation. The denial and defense orientations towards cultural difference have a midpoint score of 70 points and ranges from 55 to 84 points on the DMIS continuum (Bennett, 1986 and the IDI Manual, 2005). Defense is the orientation stage within the DMIS that demonstrates the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is superior and other cultures are inferior (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). In the defense orientation level, Bennett (1998) recommends developmental strategies that will introduce basic culture frameworks.
After exposure to the programs and interventions the emerging adults were given the IDI as a post-assessment four months after completing their first year at the University and after their study abroad experience. Of the initial 27 emerging adults participating in the study, only 21 completed the post IDI assessment. Attrition was due to several factors; several did not meet the grade point required to be in the honors program, some left the University, and some decided that they were no longer interested in being in the co-curricular program. Results indicated a shift in the participants’ intercultural competence level. Figure 7 shows the post-assessment results as it pertains to how the cohort now perceives their orientation stage and where the participants currently fall on the developmental orientation level.

![IDI Group Profile](image)

**Figure: 7.** Emerging Adults Group’s IDI Post Group Profile.

The results of the remaining emerging adults’ group’s post IDI assessment indicated that the cohort still perceives being in (shows a slight movement from 116.81 to 120.76). The IDI
developmental orientation results indicated a movement from the cohort’s pre IDI assessment results of Defense to entry into the Minimization orientation level—the state in which culture awareness is focused on similarities. Bennett (1993) noted that the developmental movement out of defense is facilitated by emphasizing the commonality of cultures, even though this seems to be against achieving an ethnorelative mindset, it is a necessary developmental process to get one from the “us versus them” reframe of reference. The emerging adults were given time during learning activities to debrief their thoughts or were asked to submit a one page personal reflection about the interventions being shared to enhance their intercultural dexterity. These times of reflection were particularly significant in solidifying the emerging adults’ learning and indicated a reoccurring theme as an indicator of their response to the programs and interventions. Mezirow (1991) posited that participation in critical reflection and discourse is essential to transformative learning. Some stimulating insights from the participants are as follows:

P9: I realize obviously that I’m not anywhere near globally competent—just how in the ways I’ve grown up, how I was raised, and where I was raised. The exposure to these programs just really opened my eyes more than anything and made me realize I know nothing, really, you know? I’m not interculturally developed at all. And, I don’t know—it’s definitely made me think about it more and realize how important it is to have these skills.

P10: Before, I never really thought about it. Being exposed to these programs and speakers gave me an actual chance to sit down and think about my own development.

P13: Being a part of this has made me think about a lot of things that I haven’t really thought of before. I don’t know as much as I should, but I never really watched the news or anything like that and this actually makes me want to do that and start being more intentional in my development of these kinds of skill sets.

Additionally, Mezirow (1991) shares that having an open mind, listening empathetically, making no premature judgment, and seeking common ground are assets for participating in discourse
Participants’ self-reflection also aligned with the course and the interventions shared during the duration of the school term. Comments that project this alignment were:

P17: It’s definitely helped a lot, because going into the course I didn’t really have a lot of background on what is going on in the world so I didn’t really have that back knowledge. So I think a lot of it is just developing a general awareness of what exactly is going on, and I think the course helped me to connect that realization. It then becomes easier to understand everything being taught; allows me to dig deeper into looking into those kinds of things on my own.

P22: It makes me want to work harder and be more conscious in the effort to raise my cultural awareness. At times I feel like it’s kind of an uphill battle to stay up-to-speed on current events because I’m not plugged in through technology like a lot of my peers, so I don’t get updates about what’s going on as quickly as others do……….I need to be more intentional in doing so, after all technology is just one mechanism for me to learn from.

When analyzing the quantitative data from the emerging adults’ individual pre and post IDI assessments, findings also showed movement within the DMIS continuum. This may have contributed to the exposure of the interventions that the leadership team developed and executed to enhance intercultural competence. Figure 8 shares the emerging adults’ individual pre and post IDI orientation levels and Figure 9 further illustrates these results in a bar chart format.

*Participants who did not go to Brazil
Figure 9. Bar Chart of Emerging Adults’ Individual IDI Pre/Post Assessment Results.

When conducting a comparison of the participants’ pre IDI individual assessment results to their post IDI individual assessment results statistics shows a significant movement along the DMIS intercultural orientation continuum. Table 11 outlines the descriptive statistics that illustrates this change.

Table 11
Descriptive Statistics Analysis N=21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>83.35904762</td>
<td>89.8419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>83.54</td>
<td>89.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>13.45141625</td>
<td>16.29328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>180.940599</td>
<td>265.4709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>50.39</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, to show significance level—the risk associated with not being 100% confident that what you observe in an experiment is due to the treatment or what was being tested (Salkind, 2000) a t-test for dependent means—indicates that a single group of the same subjects is being studied under two conditions (Salkind, 2000)—was calculated on the participants’ individual pre and post IDI assessment results. This will allow for a comparison of
pre and post results with a focus on the differences between the scores (Salkind, 2000). Table 12 shares the results of the cohort’s t-test comparison.

Table 12

Paired t-test Analysis N=21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>83.35904762</td>
<td>89.84190476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>180.940599</td>
<td>265.4709362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Freedom</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>-2.25186947</td>
<td>2.085963447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.035726644</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the t-test in table 11, there is 3.5% chance that we will be wrong in saying that there is a difference in the pre and post assessment, therefore there is a 96.5% indication that the difference in the pre and post assessment results can be stated as a positive significant movement on the DMIS continuum which reflects on the participants’ response to the programs and intervention that the leadership team developed and executed with the intent of enhancing intercultural competence. This also includes both the significance in the participants moving forward as well as acknowledging those who moved backwards in the process.

When reviewing the overall statistics, 48% of the emerging adults showed a substantial forward movement on the DMIS continuum. These individuals actually moved from one orientation level into a higher orientation level. According to Bennett’s model this indicates a noticeable increase in their intercultural competence and can be contributed to being exposed to the programs and interventions aimed at building cultural awareness. Post assessment results also showed that 29% of the emerging adults showed small amounts of movement or no movement at all along the DMIS continuum. This may be due to several reasons; individuals not connecting to
intercultural learning objectives from the programs and interventions that the leadership team implemented or there was a lack from the individual to take ownership or to put effort into self-directed learning around cultural differences. There were also 23% whose post assessment results showed a shift backwards from their pre IDI assessment results. Bennett (1993) shares that it is not assumed that progression through the stages is one-way or permanent; progression through stages can be reversed. To better understand backwards movement, Taylor (1994) addresses the aspect of cultural disequilibrium—the catalyst for change and its emotional nature is the driving force that pushes the participant to become interculturally competent—creates intense emotions challenging the participant to rectify and bring a balance back into their life when making meaning of culture differences.

Research has shown that preliminary results on intercultural development suggest that short-term study abroad programs can have a positive impact on the overall culture awareness (Anderson, et al., 2006). Of the 21 participants who took the post IDI assessment, only four did not participate in the ten-day visit to Brazil. However, these individuals’ IDI post assessment indicated that two of the four increased their intercultural orientation level. This particular data finding highlights that some form of learning and/or behavioral change toward cultural awareness can occur through exposure to other cultural programs and interventions that are conducted domestically.

**Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by Recognizing Stress and Anxiety Levels**

Challenges and frustrations can often occur when learners are going through the process of cultural immersion (Paige, 1993). For example, “high anxiety or tension, also known as stress, is common in cross-cultural experiences due to the number of uncertainties present” (Barna, 1994, p. 183, as cited in Bennett, 1998). Stress and anxiety may emerge when exposed to
learning outside of one’s comfort zone; Some of the cohort members shared that stress and anxiety around developing intercultural competence along with the course workload was another reaction to the programs and interventions administered and was very prevalent to their learning process. However, the majority in the group indicated that they did not experience any stress during the learning process and found that it was interesting and fun to be exposed to these specific learning opportunities. Of the 27 emerging adults participating in the study, only eight shared that they had experienced stress or anxiety, whereas 18 members of the cohort indicated that they experienced no stress or anxiety. Table 13 displays statements that several emerging adults shared about their own levels of stress and anxiety.

Table 13:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress and Anxiety Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Stress/Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8: It’s stressful when you think about it on a large scale, like oh, there are so many cultures of people that I don’t know about. So when you think about the whole world and how many cultures you do know about versus what you don’t know about … that’s stressful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5: Yes because it forces you to come out of your comfort zone and you have to face your fears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1: Oh, it’s nerve wracking, definitely. Personally, I like to learn as much as I can and I’m a perfectionist, so I want to be able to be good at really connecting with different cultures and going into a different country and stuff like that – but it’s scary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P20: I think the IDI was kind of stressful; being in a test-taking environment causes anxiety for me and also nobody wants to be that person that’s not completely culturally fluent and competent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emerging Adults Enhanced Learning by Unplanned Learning Experiences

On May 10, 2013, 19 students and four members of the leadership team participated in a study aboard trip to Salvador, Brazil. During the ten-day stay, the cohort was exposed to the country’s culture and Brazilian lifestyle, directly engaged with local residents, and interacted with peers from one of the local universities. There was also a service project conducted in a rural fishing village, where the group engaged with children in the area, met their parents and other family members, and visited homes in this low-income community. The group toured one of the largest corporations in Brazil, Odebrecht Foundation, which is known for its environmental services to the country as well as many of their non-profit organizations that helps in community development. The Odebrecht Foundation works in the Southern Bahia, Brazil—a region with some of the worst human development indexes and lowest social investments in Brazil. The foundation concentrates on the program, the Integrated and Sustainable Regional Development, with a focus on developing its productive, human, social, and environmental capital while valuing the concept of the family unit and prioritizing adolescents and their interaction with their families (Odebrecht, 2013). There were various opportunities to enjoy the local art, culture, food, and beaches. The group attended a Brazilian ballet, rode boats as one major means of transportation, went to the local markets, visited parks and museums, and experienced numerous local restaurants and cafes.

The interventions executed prior to the study abroad excursion were in place to prepare the students for their immersion into the Brazilian culture and their interactions with the people. During our stay, several debrief sessions occurred periodically after specific programs and activities in order to keep the cohort’s learning on track and to make sure the participants were reflecting on their experience in real time. Themes that emerged during the Brazil trip related to
how the emerging adults responded to the trip as well as to interacting with the people. The trip reinforced the importance of developing intercultural skills and even with preparation, stress and anxiety were noticeable experienced by the participants around communication barriers and overall culture shock. Deeper awareness and learning was capitalized due to this unexpected reaction to the reality of the exposure to the new worldview.

**Need for intercultural development.** Many of the emerging adults acknowledged that prior programs, activities, and interventions gave just a slight preview of what to expect when visiting another country. The following are statements that noted that previous exposure to developing intercultural skills reinforced the importance of having these proficiencies.

- P2: I came to Brazil with preconceptions based on what people had told me and thought the class gave me a good foundation to integrate into a new culture. I found that I need to build my skills more.
- P17: What really resonated with me was living different perspectives; we talked about it and experienced among ourselves, but to actually live it and see it in a different lens while in a totally different environment was eye opening.

It was also noted that cultural awareness needs to be a continuous learning process.

- P4: Discussions in class gave us a general sense of what to expect; actually being in the country and seeing how others are adapting to American culture and we are not [adapting] only tells me that we need to also adapt to other cultures and build more awareness.
- P8: I loved learning about different cultures in class and the trip reminded me of that passion for continuous learning.

The findings that indicated the need to reinforce and to continue intercultural skill development is a reflection on the preparation work developed by the leadership team. It was the anticipated outcome that this international trip would support the learning from the programs and
interventions that the participants were exposed to prior to the Brazil visit and the international experience would create the desire of the participants to want to continue building their intercultural competencies.

P5: I want to continue to travel and perhaps study abroad. To do so effectively I need to continue to build my intercultural skills.

P10: This trip motivated me to continue developing intercultural competence because almost everyone in Brazil that I came in contact with knew some type of English. I now want to learn another language and be just as well-rounded as some who live in other countries that have an understanding of mine and other languages.

P22: I was at the “minimization” stage; I think this was mostly due to the fact that I have traveled abroad several times and when looking for ways to relate to those in other countries I would look for similarities which I now know that this minimizes the deeper cultural differences. This trip has given me a new approach to furthering my intercultural skills. After seeing some of the struggles as well as the beauty that Brazil offers, I now see the culture through the residents’ lens. It was through this that I can truly begin to see that there are culture differences to celebrate and understand.

P26: This trip motivated me to continue development of my skills. It was the simple exchanges, like ones between grocery store clerks, that showed me that people are generally good and I now desire to connect with them on a deeper level.

**Communication barriers.** Statements shared by the emerging adults pertaining to stress and communicating with the Brazilian locals are as follows:

P3: I couldn’t enjoy my experience at the market because I was afraid to interact with the sellers because I could not understand them. I didn’t attempt to communicate let alone find out if anyone spoke English; was embarrassing and afraid to.

P5: Not knowing the customs or the language was a huge stressor and disconnect when we tried to talk to people at the market. For example, I personally had an issue where a man was trying to warn me that my pocket on my bag was unzipped, but I though he was angry because he was yelling. If I would have known the language better and understood the different body language, it wouldn’t have been a problem.
P19: Every time someone would talk to me in Portuguese, I wanted to be able to talk back. It was frustrating wanting to communicate, but not being able to do so made it feel like there was a wall between us.

The challenge in communicating with others in Brazil also motivated some participants to learn the language or gain knowledge in a second language to be better equipped to communicate when visiting outside of the States. Comments made by participants in regards to learning the language were:

P1: This experience made me realize that people in other countries want to learn our language (English), I now want to learn another language and be fluent in whatever language I learn, so I will not feel so lost with my communication when visiting another country.

P5: For me if I can learn another language I would feel like it would help me develop my intercultural skills and prepare me for communicating with others who speak the language that I learn. I think this will be helpful. I know some Spanish, and that helped some, but I plan to brush up on it so I can feel comfortable when visiting another country that uses it.

One participant aligned the communication challenge with a sense of empathy. P25 stated:

There was no comfort in knowing that other people didn’t speak English. Sometimes we as American don’t always have the patience when someone doesn’t know English; I’ve learned through this experience to be more patient when international visitors come to the States since I’ve been in their shoes now and realize now how frustrating and stressful that can be.

One of the emerging adults who is from Brazil also shared compassion and understanding of her cohort members who were having difficulties speaking the language but sharing:

P6: Although I am from Brazil and speak the native language, I saw how others struggled with their communication. This made me want to avoid that for myself when I travel to other countries in the future.
**Culture shock.** The literature indicates that it can be disorienting entering another culture for a student without any previous cross-cultural experience (La Brack, 1993, as cited in Paige, 1993). Paige (1993) defines culture shock “as emotional reactions to the disorientation that occurs when one is immersed in an unfamiliar culture and is deprived of familiar cues” (p. 2). Consequently, many of the participants were not fully prepared for some of the encounters that occurred with the difference in the Brazilian culture in comparison to our culture in the States. Some of the participants experienced culture shock, especially when exposed to the social challenges that Brazil is enduring around poverty. The group participated in a service project in a fishing village where they were exposed to the residents living in extreme poverty. Although these same challenges exist in the States and the emerging adults are fully aware of these same issues in America, it resonated more with them when experiencing it from another frame of reference. Bennett (1998) posited that learning to cope and channeling culture shock allows for personal growth; the personal characteristics of self-awareness, nonjudgmental, cultural empathy, recognition of cultural complexity can allow for transformation from defensiveness around cultural awareness to a stimulating cross-cultural learning opportunity (J. Bennett, 1998 as cited in M. Bennett, 1998). Comments shared showed compassion, humility, and reflection on how their perceptions of normal amenities are taken for granted by those who are more fortunate.

P1: I think the trip to the fisherman’s village in rural Brazil was a good example of how we truly immersed in Brazilian culture of those less fortunate than us. We experienced what it felt like to not have the normal comfort of technology, transportation, and other amenities that Americans are used to having. I was not used to some of the living conditions that I saw in the village and without that experience I don’t think I would have understood their daily living conditions and stop taking for granted what I have in the States.
P17: I didn’t have any expectations of what Salvador would be like, but the things I saw were nothing that I had not ever experienced before nor was prepared to see. Between the poverty seen where houses were upon each other, the overcrowded buses and huge number of people waiting on public transportation, but most importantly I was shocked at how people would look at us like we were aliens—I assumed it was because we were a large group of Americans.

P19: I realized how naïve and ignorant I have been to cultures outside my own. I’ve been around people from other parts of the world but being in Brazil for ten days and experiencing the culture first hand, exposed to some areas of poverty there has really opened my eyes.

Additionally, the emerging adults indicated the value of interacting with their counterparts in Brazil and having the opportunity to share with each other different worldviews. It was also noted by the minority participants the Brazilian social demographics, how that compares to race relations in the United States, and how that impacted these specific emerging adults’ study abroad learning experience. Comments shared on the interactions with Brazilians peers are as follows:

P8: When we were talking to the students at UNIFACS and discussing the differences between government systems, education, technology, etc., I had to be open and objective and it really allowed for me to understand the true nature of intercultural skills.

P16: Our visit to UNIFACS was very powerful to me because I felt like I learned a lot about Brazil’s culture when talking to people my age.

P19: Talking with the students from UNIFAC—through a translator—we realized that we each had stereotypes and assumptions about each other that weren’t necessarily true. If we all had a better understanding of different cultures, we would be able to move past those stereotypes much easier. The opportunity to conduct the research and to interact with my Brazilian peers was helpful to my cultural awareness.

Evidence shows that this exchange between the cohort and the Brazilian students was a powerful tool in bridging cultural awareness through interactive activities and communications. Although the communication was only successful through an interpreter, as the process of engagement continued to occur, the interactions between the two emerging adult groups became more free
flowing and easier. There were also some Brazilian students who did speak English and also served in the role as interpreters.

P3 shared the aspect around assumptions and perceptions the two groups had about each other’s culture:

P3: The cross-comparison research project with the Brazilian peers showed that both student groups had pre-conceived notions of each other’s culture that were not true. When actually discussing the research with each other there were interactions with the students at the university in Brazil that indicated that there are ways we can collaborate and understand each other’s culture; it just takes patience and a good translator.

This statement also validates the development process that the leadership team endured around assumptions of leadership roles and positionality. It also indicates that both the emerging adults and the leadership team in some form experienced learning regarding personal perceptions and preconceived notions.

**Various array of one race.** As the researcher I found that this portion of data findings was very interesting: observations around the Brazilians’ diversity make up and the recognition by our black participants that Brazil’s diversity consists of a vast array of one specific race. For these participants, they were surprised by Brazil’s huge black population. P18 explained, “What has stood out for me are the number of Black people. I’ve seen one or two maybe three white people. One culture is major dominant—one color.”

There were obvious comparisons made around the numerous social demographics in the United States and that Brazil is perceived to have a population made up of only Black people.

P18: In America it is one big melting pot—you see different races all the time. But here, it takes forever to see anyone of different races, the concentration of one race in one area.

P4: I just find it really cool how the African culture is really embraced here. I was under the naïve impression that it was only embraced in Africa. It was cool going to the market and seeing all the paintings and I was like, “Black people!” I was just blown away how
Blacks are really appreciated in other places in the world. You really don’t see that much in America unless you play sports or are a rapper or something like that. They are proud of being Black and it was just so cool to see your culture being appreciated for once.

This reaction from our Black emerging adults may have been strengthened by currently being enrolled in a predominately white institution of higher learning. Although research on the country’s population along with other aspects of the country was done by the cohort prior to the study abroad excursion, once fully emerged in the culture and actually experiencing the Brazilian lifestyle created a real-time experience for these participants. It also may show why race theories are relevant to the foundation around building intercultural competencies and the influence that the issue of race has on building these skill sets. Critical race theory is a lens allowing for the interrogation of social, educational, and political issues by prioritizing participant voices (Chapman, 2007, as cited by Martin, 2013). I wonder too if the white participants had the same feelings around the Brazilian race, but were hesitant to acknowledge it for whatever fears or sensitivity around being white and having these types of conversations. Furthermore, the hesitancy from the white participants could also be attributed to being at the “minimization” stage—focus is on similarities—and they were reluctant to notice any differences because of this frame of reference. Culturally responsive educators take the extra time necessary to research the experiences, individuality, and learning styles of all of their students in order to better reach and teach them by meeting them where they live (Martin, 2013). As a black female, the observation around the lack of the white emerging adults could also be my own personal bias and how I perceived why this subject was brought up by our black students as oppose to the other participants.
Summary of RQ1 Findings

The emerging adults’ favorable response to the programs and interventions showed learning was enhanced through several attributes. Research shows that the cohort found value in participating in the honors program and being exposed to those interventions that promoted cultural awareness. The participants also noted that learning from the experiences and expertise of the leadership team and guest speakers assisted in developing intercultural competence. Also with the advantages of learning about culture differences as a cohort and having the opportunity to visit another country allowed for the interactions with individuals who come with different cultural backgrounds and worldviews. Findings also indicate that there were some levels of stress and anxiety around developing intercultural skills. The results shared gave the leadership team further data to review as it continued to conduct program planning with the intent to enhance emerging adults’ intercultural dexterity. Further adjustments from the leadership team around these findings contributed to systemic changes in the unit’s leadership program and created a huge change in the way educators consider their collaborative approach to working in designing and executing these specific programs.

Leadership Team’s Learning Experience

This segment addresses the research question, what learning opportunities takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults? The findings indicated that assumptions around leadership roles and positionality influenced the collective approach to the team’s work. Also noted from the data findings are factors that assisted the team in valuing the collaboration and building team synergy process. These factors included acknowledging team dynamics, creating a
safe work environment, and the importance of the team’s intentionality towards the work in building emerging adults’ cultural awareness.

The leadership team utilized action research steps when exploring approaches to develop and execute programs that enhance intercultural competencies for emerging adults in higher education. Tuckman (1965) suggests that a natural group environment should occur when teams are created to do a task or professional function. Consistently I observed and recorded the group’s engagement and the team’s comfort level during meetings, classroom instructions, and in social settings. Individual interviews were also conducted with each team member to assess the team’s collective approach to our work. Appendix C contains a copy of the interview questions used with the leadership team. Each respondent provided several examples of incidents which they thought were key factors to the team’s process and creation of appropriate interventions during the study. Reoccurring themes related to the team’s work in designing and executing programs for the students emerged. These themes included addressing the assumptions around leadership and positionality, The team’s ability to value the collaboration and building team synergy process and recognizing team members’ individual intercultural competence levels and its influence on the team’s relationship. Three sub-themes emerged from the data findings regarding collaboration and building team synergy. These topics are, (1) the influence of team dynamics (including the group’s demographic make-up and the diversity of personalities and work styles), (2) the incorporation of a safe work environment, and (3) the intentionality and commitment showed by the team to the work process and the learning success of the emerging adults. Table14 shows the findings from research question two (RQ2).
### Table 14

RQ2 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question Two</th>
<th>Findings from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?</td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to recognize the assumptions about leadership/positionality roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to value the collaboration and synergy process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The leadership team learned to identify intercultural competence level.</td>
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**The Leadership Team Learned to Recognized Leadership/Positionality Assumptions**

Since members of the team held various levels of authority and roles within the institution, that influenced how they were perceived as team members. For example, as the researcher and the only member who is African American, I perceived that the team assumed that I was the one who could share the perspectives from the lens of a minority. I recalled a journal entry dated August 4, 2012 that alludes to this assumption:

> It is obvious I’m the only member on the team from an underrepresented group. But whenever we talk about potential topics around diversity or approaching race related issues with the emerging adults, it seems like I’m the go-to person for this specific subject area. It is assumed that I will be the one facilitating these specific conversations—I do have a human resource development background and can facilitate other topics/workshops. I appreciate the support from the team with my research, but I really wish they would spread out my talents in other areas so I can be seen by the cohort as one of the leadership team co-facilitating this leadership program, not just a facilitator on the team specializing in diversity and inclusion.

I also believed that I was viewed as a subject matter expert due to several positions that I held within the university and my decision to write a dissertation on developing undergraduates’ intercultural competencies in higher education. The perception of me as an expert was reinforced because I realized that my work with the team, the students, and the overall organization would add enhancing cultural awareness to this program’s curriculum as well as have the potential to
influence other programs within the organization. Again, I had recognized this earlier in the process and noted my feelings in a journal entry dated July 17, 2012:

I’m coming to the table with a different approach to the learning around building cultural awareness for the leadership program, which being in the interim Chief Diversity Officer role has introduced me to new knowledge around intercultural skill development. This tactic in building these skills is new to the unit and to those who have managed the program in the past. I just wish Kevin would stop pointing out how the process is my baby and for my doctoral research. He keeps stating my expertise in the field, when really I’m just as new to this subject as well as this approach too. I want and need to also learn from other members.

Consequently, my perceived status initially caused other team members to slightly hold back rather than freely participate. Part of this was due to age and my current status at the time as the interim CDO.

My perceived role also impacted the youngest team members. During the first team meeting the two peer leaders, Amanda and Cindy, were noticeably hesitant to fully engage with members that they were not familiar with and allowed the perceived levels of authority, the three administrators, to drive the meeting agenda. Both noted that the variety of diversity among the team was a benefit, but also stated age as a factor to their perception of maturity and experience levels. This could just be the respect students have with professors and/or younger individuals honoring their elders. Cindy commented:

As a team, we all are very different people so we bring different things to the table that add various strengths to the group. You are much older and have had more school; I and Amanda are in classes so we might have some new ideas. Calvin has been doing the program for a while, so he is very organized and knows what’s going on.

And Amanda added:

Diversity in age, gender, and race provided a beautiful array of perspectives in the collaboration process. Cindy and I, two twenty-year olds, were able to contribute perspectives on the curriculum, more closely aligned with what the students might think
while those members of the team who are older than us provided insights on the curriculum that incorporated more ‘real world’ experience.

Finally, when wearing many hats and holding various positions in the organization and as an insider researcher, I had to be cognizant of the potential of personal bias. I continued to keep an open mind and went to great efforts in bringing other perspectives into consideration. I recalled sharing this fear of being biased at one of the team meetings. I said the following at the August 10, 2013 meeting:

This is starting to merge into one thought that I have in my head and I’m trying to block that out because it is making me lean towards one side as opposed to being open to other perspectives.

Acknowledging my personal biases helped me negate any preconceived notion around the study and the findings. I also did not want my research to be the main focus and influence the team’s engagement along with the collective efforts that needed to occur naturally when teams work together as stated in Tuckman’s theoretical framework. However, the team and I overcame this issue in time.

Amanda reiterated this point when stating:

At first I perceived that your work (researcher’s study) was the key component and driving force to our changes in the way we conduct our work, but I realized it really introduced us to another way of doing things and empowered us to work together towards something better.

I also found myself asking the members to take the focus off of me and readdress the research process by introducing new items for group discussion as it pertained to our combined work. The following statement at a team meeting on September 14, 2013 conveys how I approached redirecting the focus to other pertinent work of the team:
Yes, the dissertation will include that, but let’s look at what we can work on as a team to approach how to get the cohort to openly discuss their feelings about their group IDI results.

I was openly welcomed into the group and found that my assumptions of positionality, for the most part, did not influence members to treat me any different from other team members. As the team continued to meet, further explanation and understanding of the team’s purpose was shared as well as the value of a collective approach when using action research. The two peer leaders started to become more relaxed and interactions increased among the team to enhance the team forming process. For example during the post interviews Amanda indicated the following:

I felt like I had to prove myself because I was the student/peer leader in the room and had certain rules that were outlined for me. I felt like I needed to address these roles and responsibilities in order to earn respect in the leadership team even though I knew all of the other group members. Being put in that new structured environment with them, I felt like I kind of had to earn something to be accepted as a true member—which was weird because I knew everyone else already. Now, I find myself on the Dream Team, dreaming alongside everyone else. There is no compelling feeling that I have to earn anymore. Now it’s a joy to give and a joy to contribute. It’s not a job to earn trust anymore.

The leadership team’s activities and interactions also created the opportunity for individual growth and development. When asked what specific individual learning that has occurred, Calvin shared with me the following:

I think that this experience has increased my comfort level with delegation and with trusting others to complete tasks. Our members bring so much to the leadership team with a variety of expertise that has really helped me to be more comfortable as a leader promoting change. I think it has also inspired me to work a little harder at my job seeing the dedication that you guys have put into this process and it was volunteered and not something members were required to do; it is almost supplementary for you guys but you do it because you enjoy it and because it adds value to the program. I am really, really thankful for that so it’s inspired me to do more for our cohort and future participants in our program. I think it has made me more passionate about my job.
The Leadership Team Learned to Value the Collaboration and Synergy Process

Initial team interactions were slow and very deliberate. As the leadership team gradually got to know one another and move forward with the charge of the group, members started to demonstrate more rapport with each other and showed an increase in collaboration. Also, there was a sense of camaraderie that was tied to creating this synergy. After continuous team interactions and building friendship, trust, and a stronger rapport, all members were actively engaged and felt mutually committed to the work. Cindy expressed:

Whenever we had team meetings, we pretty much put everything out on the table for the week; what to expect from each other, what we expect from the class, what we’re going to do, make plans for upcoming weeks and stuff like that. This structure really helped us be more organized and have everything come together neatly and in an orderly way.

Team meetings were often informal and refreshments were made available at the start of each session for us to slowly engage in social conversations before addressing the business agenda. This allowed for social connections and the development of team rapport. Kevin commented during one session: As we work this out, I thought I would bring us donuts today to get us relaxed and going this morning with our work.

When asked about what influenced the team’s collaborative efforts around action research and the team’s collective approach to their work, three reoccurring themes were the impact of team dynamics, a safe work environment, and the intentionality of the group’s approach to program development. These attributes were very influential in building team synergy and assisted in the group’s development process.

Impact of team dynamics. The leadership team’s demographics reflected some diversity in the traditional areas of gender, race, and age, and also showed some functional differences of personality and work style which are reflections of the team’s dynamics. By understanding and appreciating the diversity make-up of the group, members gained the opportunity to really
leverage our differences into a cohesive team as opposed to minimizing differences at a superficial level of just accepting obvious social demographics. If the team had only recognized surface differences, then our different strengths and the benefits from our diversity would not have allowed for us to develop our cultural awareness and would have reflected on the work produced by the team.

**Safe work environment.** During the constructing stage, establishing a safe environment of mutual respect and open communication was important. This allowed for all members to be comfortable in sharing insights on intercultural learning regardless of their role at the university or the assumed positionality within the team. As the planning process continued, there were new discoveries of team members’ experiences and the sharing of new knowledge garnered further development of team cohesion. Calvin stated, “What I can appreciate about our work as a team, there is an open atmosphere and respect we have for each other; everyone’s input is equally considered regardless of your role at the institution.”

Collaboration among team members can be a challenge if the ability to genuinely learn and work together is not present (Nissila, 2005). The team successfully used collective engagement by synthesizing the various degrees of experience and knowledge among the team membership. Regardless of power or position within the university, the team integrated the various levels of members’ expertise to foster collective ownership of producing appropriate programs for the students. For example, during weekly team meetings Kevin would take the initiative in seeking everyone’s input and made a point to always indicate that his thoughts and ideas might not be perfect; other insights were needed from everyone. This allowed for not only building rapport, but also established a safe working environment where all team members’ input was heard and the use of free flowing ideas was not judged or criticized. The team continued to
gain trust and a comfort level with each other where shared vision was developed and a collective dialogue was demonstrated when exploring the action research process. I shared this specific statement with a team member:

There is a comfort level that makes me feel that we are all on the same page and an easy work flow as we learn more on how to merge our styles into a collective whole. I believe conflicts are naturally to occur, but we as a group have minimal conflicts and work well together.

**Team intentionality towards the work.** Although the group was socially demographically diverse, the group shared a similar interest when being intentional in their approach to program development and teaching best practices. The team focused on designing, implementing, and evaluating appropriate interventions and learning opportunities with the intention of enhancing students’ knowledge, skills, and attributes. This focus was not limited to the work conducted for students, but also for the process that the team used to engage in a collective group approach to their work in the program. Key comments from members were:

Calvin: We must continue to be intentional in our process in promoting the learning and the development of academic skills.

Kevin: The approach of experiential learning versus traditional classroom approaches and pedagogies is much more impactful with high achievers in this environment around these types of issues.

The team’s perception was that the emerging adults should be exposed to learning opportunities that would provide the knowledge and skills that are necessary to be productive at the university, as well as beyond their college experience. I shared with the team the following about the commitment to educating learners:

As educators, I think it is our role to help students build the skills needed that will not only make them successful in a specific profession, but also to be effective when
interacting with others that have different backgrounds and cultures from their own. As
the world continues to become smaller and the need to understand different worldviews
are becoming more prevalent and the norm, it is important for institutions of higher
learning to prepare students for entry into a global society once they complete their
college experience.

The Leadership Team Learned to Identified Intercultural Competence Level

The IDI was used as a tactical approach to determine how the leadership team thought
about cultural difference and how that influenced them when actually working together in
designing and implementing intercultural programs for the student cohort. Since the action
research methodology requires team work, it was important for the team members to self-reflect,
both collectively and individually, on how the group was functioning as a single unit. IDI pre and
post assessment assisted us in understanding cultural differences not only to assist with the
emerging adults' cultural awareness, but to build our own level of cultural awareness and its
impact on our collective work as a cohesive team. The group’s pre IDI assessment results placed
us in Minimization—the focus on commonalities and masking true understanding of cultural
differences (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). As we continued to work together in our
charge, our post IDI assessment indicated movement in our orientation level from Minimization
to Adaptation—the stage where appreciation of cultural differences yields new perceptions and
behaviors appropriate to other cultures (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Kevin
elaborated on his thoughts regarding the new knowledge he and the team gained when
participating in the IDI assessment:

Well, there’s no doubt in my mind that we got closer and we are more sensitive and in
our own individual ways, we have deepened our own cultural awareness; I would hope
that our own IDI results would support that and show how we have developed our own
skills throughout the year. Because we have matured in our own work with that, I think
we have a fresh appreciation of individual situations and we are able to observe more keenly what was happening with the cohort and take advantage of that and what was occurring within our own process.

The IDI assessment instrument also measures individual’s movement through the orientation stages. Figure 10 illustrates the team’s pre and post IDI individual assessment results.

![IDI Pre-Assessment Individual Results](image1)

**IDI Pre-Assessment Individual Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnocentric Stages</th>
<th>Ethnorelative Stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
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![IDI Post-Assessment Individual Results](image2)

**IDI Post-Assessment Individual Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnocentric Stages</th>
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<td>Minimization</td>
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Figure 10. Leadership Team’s Individual Pre and Post IDI Assessment Results on DMIS Continuum.

Individual movement can be attributed to the continued interaction that the team experienced throughout the course of the study. These opportunities lead to further learning among the team’s collective work and the recognition of how individual differences, when brought together form a singular goal, enhanced team synergy. Drago-Severson (2009) posits that learning takes place when a shift occurs in “how a person actively interprets, organizes, understands, and makes sense of his or her experience” (p.11). The influence of team diversity brings about an understanding of broader ranges of expertise, knowledge, insight, and ideas (Forsyth, 2006). Recognizing individual’s diversity also prompted team dynamics that fused opportunities for transparent communication, deliberate use of individual skill sets when building team collaboration, and gaining new knowledge. For instance, often this collective learning
among the team was observed during team meetings and noted as follows by several team members:

Amanda: I find learning from each other’s experiences to be much more impactful to the team’s process when collectively designing development programs.

Kevin: The demographics of our team enable us to think deeper around intercultural learning, based on our own experiences and then collectively bridge our individual knowledge toward creating new knowledge for ourselves as a team and for our students.

The team’s weekly sessions continued to focus on the program needs along with reflecting on the work being done by the team. This allowed an opportunity to continue to build and establish team cohesion. When asked by the researcher about the team’s working relationship, members commented:

Cindy: This is a great team; I’ve never seen a group interact and work so well together.

Calvin: The diversity amongst us creates synergy that helps with our work with the emerging adults. It’s nice to have that connection with a more diverse group of colleagues.

Opportunities to connect in a social environment also added to the development of team synergy. This expansion in our cultural orientation level resulted in not only a strong collaboration, but also strengthened group relationships that led to stronger social engagement and camaraderie.

When addressing noticeable team development some of the statements shared by team members were:

Amanda: I think we are a lot closer together. At the very beginning, it was, “What’s your job? What are you bringing to the table? What are you going to focus on?” Now, it’s “What are some of the ideas that we have? Who would be the best fit for taking on these ideas and working together to do these ideas based on who we know and what we know of them as a person? Do they tend to like these types of things or would that be a better fit for someone else?” We went from, “Let’s have a weekly meeting and talk about
business,” to “Let’s grab coffee or let’s get chips and let’s hang out and talk about things and dream together.

Peggy: Open communication and the comfortable work environment that we have established as a group make the teamwork easy.

Calvin: I think we have gotten tremendously close which is awesome. I think it has kind of shifted from being more of colleagues committed to the success of the emerging adults’ learning. But now I think we are kind of friends and colleagues and partners in their learning. I think we have gotten tremendously close and I think the cohort of participants in our process benefit quite a bit from that.

**Summary of RQ2 Findings**

The recognition of individual levels of thinking around cultural awareness prompted deeper levels of recognizing and understanding other members’ diversity and influenced the work of the team as a collective whole. The findings from the IDI assessment illustrate the quantitative data of team member’s individual growth as it relates to development of intercultural competence. Although the individual IDI rate of change was low, variable and subject-dependent, the small growth in developing cultural awareness for individuals may have contributed to a new deeper understanding around differences and built better working relationships within the team. Also qualitative data findings associated with the first research question indicate that initially building group cohesion was slow and was hindered by assumptions around leadership roles and positionality. What I learned through this specific portion of the study is that when the team convened there needed to be time allocated for group bonding in order to address any potential group challenges. Whenever people act in social and organizational structure the issue of power—who has it and what they do with it—are considered in those group relationships (Wilson & Cervero, 1996). The notion of personal biases and positionality assumptions can hinder the collaboration process if these items are not addressed

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openly within the group. Because this leadership team made the effort to create a safe environment where ideas along with any challenges within the team could be freely communicated without apprehension, this made it easy for everyone to adjust their preferences and preconceived notions. The literature shows that planning theory tells practitioners to simply follow the steps, as if the constraints and opportunities of the social and organizational context that creates assumptions around power and positionality do not matter (Wilson & Cervero 1996). The group developed a collaborative approach to the work by recognizing the team dynamics, creating a safe work environment, and maintaining as its focus the emerging adults’ learning around building intercultural dexterity through a collective process in developing and executing effective programs. As time passed and as we continued to work collectively on the team’s charge, we discovered a better understanding of each of our strengths as well as developed a strong rapport. We also acknowledged the value to understanding the diversity makeup of the group and gained a greater appreciation of our individual experiences and background. As we became a better leadership team this contributed to the success of the emerging adults’ learning process when exposed to the programs and interventions that were collectively produced by the leadership team.

**Group Development Attributes**

The third research question is what elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence? Findings showed that the team felt that the experience of using an action research approach to their work provided a structured planning process, promoted team development, encouraged self and team reflection and created systemic change that will impact future team process, adjustments in the program structured and procedures, as well as provide
other innovative programs and interventions with the intent of enhancing intercultural competence for the participants. Table 15 shows the findings from research question three (RQ3).

Table 15

RQ3 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question Three</th>
<th>Findings from Data</th>
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| What elements contributed to a diverse team’s group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults’ intercultural competence? | • **Utilizing a structured process** contributed to the leadership team’s development.  
• **Promotion of collaboration and synergy** contributed to the leadership team’s development.  
• **Opportunities for self and team reflection** contributed to the leadership team’s development.  
• **Systemic change** contributed to the leadership team’s development. |

**Utilizing a Structured Process**

Kemmis (2009) acknowledges that action research “aims at changing three things: practitioners’ practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice” (p.463). Throughout the duration of this action research project the team has observed changes to the team’s process that has created a more structured and intentional planning procedures. This action research project created new areas of processes for the leadership team. Such new procedures were establishing weekly team meetings, using meeting agendas, and use of an open forum for each member to feel free to share relevant information with the team. Comments that reiterated the findings relating to a structured planning process include:

Calvin: I think the biggest change was that our planning process was much more integrated and structured this year compared to other years. We were more intentional in how we planned out activities to align with learning objectives. When we met, Kevin gave us talking points to focus on for the week and together we worked through items.
Amanda: This meeting format allowed us with a time to ‘take a pulse’ on how our work progressed from week to week. To my knowledge, the weekly meetings had never happened before with all the program’s facilitators in the same room and everyone providing insight. This structure allowed for us to know who was doing what; there was no, ‘wait—I thought you were supposed to do that? Wait, no, you were,” This format everyone was on the same page. I think that’s going to be a model that will continue in the future.

Calvin also added by stating the following:

I think we, as a leadership team, were more purposeful and actually hitting some of those stages in action research, whereas in the past, I think we very much operated in the taking action stage only. I think we skipped some of the major planning steps in the past. We evaluated it in the past but I think we have done it much more realistically this year. I think the leadership team, our work together really helped us to hit that planning and construction stage more intentionally, which is thanks in large part to your work with the dissertation. I think we are still performing at a much higher level as far as actually implementing it and much more concrete in the evaluation of the cohort’s learning than we have had in the past. The structure has been so helpful in our process.

Stringer (2007) implies the need to develop cooperative approaches to work and harmonious relations between and among people that emphasizes collegial relationships. The members of the leadership team are collaborators in the study. There is the concept that people who participate in action research are committed to the process and are invested in the successful application of the findings (Ozanne & Sattcioglu, 2008). The changes implemented by the leadership team in this action research project were to incorporate new approaches and innovative programming that will encourage emerging adults to build intercultural competence.

**Promotion of Collaboration and Synergy**

Groups have to pass through a number of stages before they can perform efficiently (Van Der Zee, et al., 2004). There was consistency in the demonstration of the four action research cycles and its influence on the leadership team’s development. Through an action research methodology the leadership team use of a collaborative, active, inquiry approach to problem-
solving was aligned with Coghlan & Brannick’s (2010) framework using continuous cycles of planning, acting, and evaluating in order to enhance the intercultural competence of emerging adults in higher education. Stringer (2007) indicates that the purpose of action research is to provide a mechanism for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation in order to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness. As we continued to work together there was synergy created and a learning curve emerged while navigating through unplanned incidents during our process. Statements shared around the value of the leadership’s learning and development includes:

Kevin: The team worked beautifully together and maximized the process and we learned a lot from each other as well as from some of our mistakes.

Amanda also commented on the use of the team’s work around incorporating the new method of approaching the development of this year’s program. She states:

Given the fact that this was the first year that this cohort conducted extensive intercultural research and skill development, I think the work that was created by us and the results of the team’s collective work were superb. I think we also learned throughout the process more about ourselves and the interactive work that can be done with a group of leaders who are creating change. For me it was personal development as well as witnessing the team grow in our own collective work.

A newly formed group that shares common group routines quickly enact these routines and begin performing activities associated with the group’s task enabling them to quickly adopt these routines to guide their interaction without debate because group members know how to work together (Garfield & Dennis, 2013).

Tuckman’s (1946) stages of group development recognize that during the course of the group’s interaction leadership attributes will appear within individuals at the appropriate time. The Peer Leaders initially thought that they possessed less experience to be part of this team and
action research project as opposed to the perceived more seasoned members; however, after participating in this study they felt a mutual ownership to the team’s process. Cindy states:

I think kind of the dynamics of the group … I don’t know exactly how to word it, but sometimes when people are older than you or are professors, they don’t really talk to me as if I’m one of their peers. This was just a very different environment because the leadership team worked so extensively together, whereas if it would have been a different team or other professors involved, they may have had a different attitude toward working with peer leaders. So in that respect, it is has helped me grow to be able to communicate better with people that are older than I am and I think the entire team has grown because of working with the various dynamics that were present. I think it made it a learning experience for all of us.

Transformative learning is associated with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience (Cranton, 2006). The benefits of collaboration in groups facilitates: higher levels of reasoning and critical thinking, deeper engagement and improved analytic skills, along with improving teamwork and interpersonal skills (Smith, 2008, as cited in Jahng).

**Use of Self and Team Reflection**

The leadership team constantly evaluated and readjusted programs and interventions as needed when findings emerged from the cohort’s response to the programs and interventions conducted during the research project. This not only gave us the opportunity to evaluate what we were doing with the cohort, but also gave us the opportunity to re-evaluate our own reflections both as a team and as individuals. Reflections shared by Calvin around the team’s learning and the influence of his own development during this action research project were:

This is one of the more unique teams I have worked with in every aspect – age differences, cultural differences, and all that kind of good stuff. It has helped me appreciate the need for having those different viewpoints around the table. I think it has also highlighted the importance of really having experts working in your field on projects. For example, your research on developing intercultural competency in higher education, what Peggy has done with the research piece for our students’ academic development;
Kevin is really becoming recognized as one of the leaders with the global challenges initiatives nationally. So having experts in the field is good, but to collectively work together has made me change my perception on group work and team dynamics.

Cindy stated her personal growth and development as follows:

I really now see what I have to offer to a team, regardless of the diversity at the table. It has made me a better leader and I now see my strengths and what I can bring to a collective whole.

The environment of mutual respect and transparent communication built on the group dynamics which encouraged members to learn from each other. Kevin previously noted my work as the researcher as a mechanism that helped gets the team focus on our charge. In this role, introducing the action research methodology was part of the study’s process, but it was the team’s collaborative effort in our work that produced an opportunity for each team member to learn both individually as well as a cohesive team.

Create Systemic Change

The leadership team constantly evaluated and readjusted programs and interventions as needed when findings emerged from the cohort’s response to the programs and interventions conducted during the research project. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) states that action research promotes multiple forms of changes: a change in practitioners doing their practice, a change in their understanding of that practice, and a change in conditions in which they practice. Calvin shared the following statement when asked what systemic change was created from our work this year:

I think this really has potential to be sort of a national model for the way that student affairs professionals look at integrating educating intercultural competence to students. I think it is a great mixture of kind of an academic view of the topic with the IDI as a theoretical framework and the potential for innovative research. The programs that can be designed and implemented both inside and outside the classroom, is a unique combination of the academics, student affairs and the co-curricular as well as the integrated approach that we have had when integrating faculty from different backgrounds and different interests; the more integrated approach with planning and
developing and implementing and evaluating I think really has the potential to be a model that others in the field can use and appreciate.

Amanda also shared her thoughts about creating a systemic change as follows:

I think the entire model that we had this year – and it might have been due to your research, we were modeling effective change leadership in our group. As we are developing these programs, I think the emerging adults benefited from our work. They see the benefits of it and they hear about the meetings that we’ve had. Who knows – maybe they’ll take that into their realms when they have their group projects, perhaps when they become peer leaders. I think through my experience, I see that there are so many ramifications even outside of this program due to the way we approached our work this year.

Action research’s foundation is a participatory and unrestrictive approach to data-based problem-solving. Therefore, some form of change or development should take place that will enhance the lives of the people engaged and invested in the process. The changes envisioned by the stakeholders in the organization as well as the leadership team were to incorporate new approaches and innovative programming that will encourage emerging adults to build intercultural competence.

**Summary of RQ3 Findings**

The data results pertaining to the elements that contributed to the leadership team’s group development when using an action research approach showed that participating in this study provided an opportunity to utilize more structure to the process. As the data findings indicated, previous work conducted in the unit was not as organized and detailed in its operations and administering of the cohorts’ programming. Using the continuous action research cycles of planning, acting, and evaluating provided the blueprints needed for the leadership team to leverage learning around incorporating a more in-depth structured format. Action research methodology uses a collaborative, active, inquiry approach to problem-solving. Through this process the team was able to promote team collaboration and synergy. Data collected also
shared those opportunities for self and team reflections when assessing the work of the leadership team and innovative ideas and interventions established systemic change to be used not only in the program, but also consideration of the action research methodology in other aspects of the unit’s operations and potential collaborations with other colleagues at the university. Through this learning future team processes will be impacted along with purposeful adjustments in the program’s structure and procedures, other innovative programs and interventions with the intent of enhancing emerging adults’ intercultural competence can be designed, and possible partnerships external to the unit can be formed throughout the campus community when addressing intercultural skill development for emerging adults. The narrative also identified the leadership team’s individual baseline intercultural orientation levels and its influence on the group’s learning efforts.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The problem that informs this study is that many emerging adults are not developing the skills to interrelate in diverse environments and among individuals who are culturally different from themselves. Data collected through a pre/post comparison study of a specific sample group at the institution used for this research project indicated an initially low intercultural developmental level. There were 27 emerging adults who initially participated in the research project. A cultural assessment tool, the Intercultural Development Inventory© (IDI), was used to assess the initial baseline of the emerging adults’ intercultural orientation level. This was done by the primary investigator and the leadership team in order to develop and execute effective programs and interventions that are appropriate for the cohort’s specific level of learning. Data collected through the IDI pre assessment of the emerging adults’ intercultural skills indicated the results of a defense orientation stage—demonstrates the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is superior and other cultures are inferior (Hammer, M. Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). The IDI and its theoretical framework was outlined and discussed in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

It was the belief of the client system that there is a need for emerging adults to gain proficiencies around intercultural competence as globalization continues to be a formidable force in society. The client system found that there is a need for emerging adults to gain proficiencies around intercultural competence. The client system participating in this study recognized the need to enhance emerging adults’ intercultural learning proficiency in order to prepare them for entry into a global society once completing their undergraduate degree program at the institution.
Therefore understanding the approaches when designing and implementing multicultural education must be taken into consideration by facilitators and instructors in institutions of higher learning.

The purpose of this study was to explore an action research approach to program planning when used by a leadership team working to enhance intercultural competencies for emerging adults in higher education. The primary research questions that guided this study were (1) how do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?, (2) what learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?, and (3) what elements contributed to a diverse team's group development when using an action research approach with the intent to enhance emerging adults' intercultural competence? This segment discusses three major conclusions from the study:

1. Action research methodology leverages the use of individual diversity and expertise that contributes to and supports group work, team development, and the benefits of evaluating group intercultural competence;

2. Introducing multicultural education garnered responses in participants to increase cultural awareness; and

3. Creating effective conditions for multicultural education does not assure transformative learning

The narrative will also share implications for theory and practice to be considered by educators, practitioners, and teams consisting of diverse social demographics, as well as for universities and colleges. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.
Summary of Study

The research was conducted at a public comprehensive four-year institution of higher learning, specifically working with a unit charged with providing interdisciplinary programs aimed at emerging adults to cultivate meaningful and measurable experiences in leadership development, multiculturalism, and global engagement. A leadership team from this unit was selected for this action research project. The group primary task was to administered programs with a global and intercultural development focus to a cohort of high achieving emerging adults. The leadership team’s charge was twofold: to address the developmental tasks associated with enhancing emerging adults’ intercultural competencies in higher education and to effectively incorporate a process to develop and execute curriculum and co-curricular activities with the intent to build intercultural skills in learners. The team consisted of six members that represent various backgrounds, expertise, and diverse social demographics.

The study was based on theoretical and empirical frameworks surrounding intercultural competence, group development, and transformative learning. These frameworks formed the basis for developing programs for the emerging adults’ cultural awareness with the intent to build intercultural competence. The interventions developed and executed by the leadership team included group and individual reflection exercises, curriculum addressing multicultural education, interactions with experts in the field of multiculturalism, social events that reinforced cultural awareness and a short term education abroad trip to Salvador Brazil. The visit to Brazil allowed the emerging adults to be exposed to new perspectives and worldviews external from their own nationality and social environments. This also afforded the opportunity to interact and engage with Brazilian peers that leverage cultural awareness and the recognition of cultural differences in a collaborative cross-study research project.
Proprietary software was used as a diagnostic tool to measure the emerging adults’ intercultural knowledge level as well as identify gaps in their intercultural competencies. Originally this was done to assist the leadership team in designing appropriate programs and interventions that align with the current learning level of the cohort. However, this instrument was also used with the leadership team and was very beneficial in building their understanding and awareness of the social demographic make-up of the leadership team, how these differences influenced the team’s collective work, and the opportunity to enhance their own intercultural competence in order to model the behaviors that were expected in the emerging adults’ learning process.

Data collected on the leadership team was done through the researcher’s observations, personal journal entries, as well as recordings of leadership team meetings and group discussions with the emerging adults. The primary investigator also conducted one-on-one interview sessions with team members that was also captured on a recording devise. Similar data collection methods were used on the emerging adults. The classroom sessions, group discussions outside of the academic environment, and one on one interview sessions with the emerging adults were conducted and recorded. Also data was collected by the researcher and leadership team from the cohort through the use of field notes and observations. All recorded transcripts were transcribed into reports for further data analysis procedures. The use of triangulation methodology allowed the data to be captured in various formats and garnered the assurance of reliability and validity. The leadership team’s participation in the data analysis process contributed to avoiding the use of the primary investigator’s personal bias.

As a result of the study, insight was gained around teamwork procedures in designing and executing programs with the intent of building intercultural competence of emerging adults in
higher education. It also disclosed the impact a team’s social demographics have on the collaboration process when team membership consists of a variety of dynamic complexities such as race, sex, and age. The research’s findings also indicated that action research methodology influenced group development—for the emerging adults who were the recipients of the multicultural education and the leadership team who facilitated the learning process. Findings were organized in alignment with the three research questions and were shared in the previous chapter.

Conclusions

Three main conclusions were drawn from this research project: (a) action research methodology leverages the use of individual diversity and expertise that contribute to and support group work, team development, and the benefits of evaluating group intercultural competence, (b) introducing intercultural frameworks that offer developmentally focused programs and interventions garnered responses from participants to increase cultural awareness, and (c) creating effective conditions for multicultural education does not assure transformative learning. The following segment will expound on each of these conclusions.

Conclusion 1: Action Research Leverages Individual Diversity and Expertise

The first conclusion that was drawn from this study is that the action research methodology is strengthened by considering individual diversity and expertise which can contribute to and support the work of the collective group and its development along with the need to evaluate levels of intercultural competence.

Group diversity. Team membership can vary in degrees of diversity, both in perspectives and social demographics. Team diversity leads to increases in perspectives, cognitive resources, problem solving approaches that improve decision-making, a broader range
of expertise, knowledge, insight and ideas, with informal communication and social integration occurring concurrently (Grace, 2012; Forsyth, 2010). Since the action research methodology requires teamwork, then it was important for the team members to self-reflect, both collectively and individually, on how the group was functioning as a single unit when considering the social demographic make-up of the team. Existing literature on action research highlights the importance of human interactions collectively working toward shared goals (Glassman, et al., 2013). Action research is a participatory process and democratic partnership that involves individuals who are affected by a problem being studied or who are vested in a mutual solution of a problem by engaging in systematic inquiry and investigation of a problem (Stringer, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

By understanding and appreciating the diversity make-up of the group, members gained the opportunity to really leverage their differences into a cohesive team as opposed to minimizing differences at a superficial level of just accepting obvious social demographics. For example, during team meetings discussions would often focus on the design and implementation of specific interventions that will enhance cultural awareness in the emerging adults. These conversations would also give opportunity for the team to share group and individual reflections around our own intercultural knowledge. If the team had only recognized surface differences among them, then the individual strengths and the benefits from the diversity in the group would not have allowed for their own develop of cultural awareness to occur.

The team acknowledged their appreciation and value of the diversity amongst them and how these differences influenced the creating a cohesive team. Not recognizing the differences within the leadership team may have reflected on the work produced by the group. However, this recognition only demonstrates an evolution around the importance of team diversity as oppose to
the revolutionary nature of the change process when incorporating diversity into a collective task. Taylor (1994) explored perspective transformation—the process of how we change our meaning structures by examining why and how these structures constrain the way we see ourselves and others—as a possible explanation for the learning and the changes an individual experiences in becoming intercultural competent. Research also shows that the development of intercultural competencies is complex and generally a non-linear process where individuals make intermittent forward movements (Deardroff, 2010; Bourjolly, et al., 2006). Transformative learning is the process through which individuals become aware of their phenomenological assumptions and then learn to explore their own processes of knowledge construction (Mezirow, 1991). For the leadership team, the transformation process around team differences raised awareness of utilizing diversity of thought and expertise during the team’s collective approach to program planning intended to enhance intercultural competence of emerging adults. In this case, the transformative learning only allowed for revelations of getting past surface differences and acknowledging the strength of using diversity in a team environment.

**Benefit of group intercultural competence assessment.** The use of a diagnostic tool for assessing cultural knowledge levels, and offering interventions with the intent to develop intercultural competence enhanced not only the emerging adults’ self-awareness around building these skill sets, but also contributed to the leadership team’s understanding of cultural awareness and how that influenced the collaborative approach to the action research project. The Intercultural Development Inventory© (IDI) is the instrument used as a diagnostic tool to measures the specific intercultural stages based on M. J. Bennett’s (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The IDI interprets an individual’s or group’s level of
engagement in diversity and intercultural competencies, and identifies the associated transition issues around that specific orientation (M. J. Bennett, 2009).

Each stage indicates a particular structure that is expressed in certain way of thinking as well as specific kinds of attitudes and behavior related to cultural difference. By recognizing the underlying cognitive orientation toward cultural difference, predictions about behavior and attitudes can be made and education can be tailored to facilitate development into the next stage (Hammer, 1998).

The results of our group’s pre IDI assessment indicated that the team perceived themselves in the beginning stages of adaptation—the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture. The IDI developmental orientation results indicated that the team was actually located in the Minimization stage—the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal and similarities are highlighted. Recognizing the leadership team’s IDI results made the group take a conscious effort in improving their own intercultural competence in order to model the behavior they wanted the emerging adults to exhibit. Also, the leadership team’s perception of being in the beginning stages of adaptation—the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture—indicated a discrepancy in their actual stage of Minimization. Research states that most people assume that their ability level is high and if found to be differently than what was expected action is taken to revoke the inconsistent performance and replace it with one consistent with the expectation (Brown, 1990; Cottrell (1965). Therefore learning will be needed during this behavioral dissonance where one must learn what guides a specific action and how that differs from the action that one espouses (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). The team’s attempt to move beyond recognition of surface
differences (minimization level) to a deeper cultural awareness (acceptance level) may not have demonstrated consistent behavioral towards gaining cultural awareness, but the attempt did allow for engagement that was comfortable and communications that was intentional towards achieving the goals of the action research project.

**Team development.** The action research process allowed for collaborative inquiry as a method to also utilize and learn from the expertise among colleagues working in a team environment. Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work addresses a four stage linear approach to group development: (1) **forming**, creating group norms and getting acclimated to the task, (1) **storming**, conflict is present among group members, inconsistency in group interactions, polarization may occur, demonstration of team resistance, (3) **norming**, display of open communication and expressions of various opinions, bridging group cohesiveness/common goal, mutual consensus around action, cooperation and support, and, (4) **performing**, group demonstrates productivity and interdependence around tasks and goal achievement. Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work around group’s setting, behavior, and stage of development was evident in the team’s collective approach to their task in developing and executing programs and interventions with the intent of building emerging adults’ intercultural competence.

Tuckman (1965) suggests that a natural group environment should occur when teams are created to do a task or professional function. Consistently I observed the engagement and comfort level of the team during meetings, classroom instructions, and in social settings. Initially the team’s interactions were slow and very deliberate, which showed early challenges to the team formation. Whenever people act in a social and organizational context, they do so within structured power relationships (Wilson & Cervero, 1996). The peer leaders were hesitant at first to fully engage in the planning stages with team members who were perceived as more seasonal.
and mature. The social demographics around age were very apparent in the peer leaders’ interaction and forming process with members who were instructors, managers, and having faculty and/or administrative status.

Often the group displayed open communication and expressed their individual opinions during our team sessions that lead to openly creating a safe work environment. From the researcher’s observations this allowed for mutual consensus, cooperation and support. The leadership team’s level of storming was very minimal and movement through this stage of Tuckman’s (1965) team development model was virtually unnoticeable. Although team members would question or challenge each other during planning meetings, the team’s conflicts were best described as quiet storms. Much of the disagreements were around personalities and work styles and often these conversations were discussed apart from the group setting and would take place between team members who shared similar feelings. The process of handling conflicts was to avoid directly discussing them in the group setting. Several team members indicated in their one on one that the conflicts being experienced by the group are very minimal. Avoiding addressing these minor incidents may be best in order to prevent creating deeper levels of conflict and to continue moving forward with the team’s task. Changing the way people think does not automatically solve problems, issues, or crises being faced, however, it does reframe how people think about what is being viewed as a problem in the first place, and what preferable solutions might be considered to take (Cabrera, Colosi, & Lobdell, 2008).

Tuckman’s final stage of group development—performing—was not limited to the work conducted for the emerging adults, but also for the process that the team used to engage in a collective group approach to design and execute these specific programs and interventions. When team members were asked to reflect on their action research experience and what this
approach taught them, several articulated that the process kept the team focused, allowed for all to take ownership in the process, and enabled the team to use the expertise of members and shared vision to be intentional in their work. Also, the continuous evaluation of the team’s process allowed for readjustments as needed when working with the emerging adults. Figure 11 captures a diagram showing how these components (group diversity, team development, and the benefits of intercultural competence assessment) worked together to yield a more robust action research project and study result.

![Diagram showing relationship between group diversity, team development, and group assessment](image)

**Figure 11.** Team Components that Strengthen the Action Research Project.

The study not only examined the leadership team’s ability to create group synergy while using the action research methodology, but also monitored team dynamics and the group development process. “Team members need to understand that for the team to perform effectively, new and different conclusions must be drawn about collaboration . . . . depending on the cultural origins of the team members, this realization can be a significant step” (Schneider & Romberg, 2011, p. 46). This study yielded evidence of how addressing social-category differences better navigates potential barriers in bridging team cohesiveness. This finding not
only assisted the team in effectively conducting the action research process, it also strengthened the action research process.

Another aspect of the team’s collective approach was the influence of team dynamics around the group’s demographic make-up along with the diversity of personalities and work styles. “The fundamental enduring social relationship that structures the context in which planners routinely work is power: who has it and what they do with it.” (Wilson & Cervero, 1996, p. 9). Initially there were challenges around assumptions in demographics regarding race, gender, and age, and leadership roles and positionality that influenced the team’s interactions.

Tuckman’s (1965) theoretical work around group’s setting, behavior, and stage of development was not only evident in the team’s collective approach to their work but in how they approached team conflict and challenges. Little stress and few group conflicts occurred openly during the project among the leadership team members. This may be due to the size of the group, the purposeful use of developing relationships, and the group assessment results indicating the team’s minimization level and how they construe cultural diversity as being universal. This interaction could also been influenced by the assumptions team members initially made concerning leadership roles, positionality and power structures.

**Conclusion 2: Introducing Intercultural Developmental Frameworks that Garnered Responses in Participants to Increase Cultural Awareness**

The second conclusion drawn from the study is that introducing multicultural education garnered responses in participants to increase their cultural awareness. Intercultural development theories and empirical framework that offers developmentally focused programs are beneficial when understanding different perspectives and social demographics. Development programs for adult learners tend to vary in methodologies and formats (Caffarella, 2002). The leadership team
was intentional in their program planning. The interventions administered to the study’s participants were intended to expose the emerging adults to developmental opportunities to enhance intercultural skill sets. Exposing the participants to Bennett’s DMIS theoretical model assisted the learners in acknowledging how they construe cultural differences.

Introducing the DMIS’s theoretical framework through the use of the IDI as a diagnostic tool for assessing cultural knowledge levels served as a mechanism for establishing an overall baseline data. This allowed the leadership team to identify appropriate programs and interventions to meet the participants’ learning needs. Hammer (1998) states the value of recognizing cognitive orientation toward cultural difference gives insights about individual behavior and attitudes that will allow for education to be tailored facilitating intercultural development. Participating in diversity consciousness-raising efforts such as course offerings, co-curricular activities, study-abroad opportunities, diverse learning communities, and civic engagement activities (Deardorff, 2006; Wooten, et al., 2012) will effect changes in developing the learner’s intercultural competencies (Morris & McClure, 2011).

The emerging adults exposed to the identified programs and interventions responded in favor of the curriculum and interventions provided in the honors course. When asked to elaborate on their response to the programs produced by the leadership team, many replied that the information shared was totally new and that the facilitators and guest lecturers made it interesting to learn the content. Additionally the participants shared that learning from the experiences and expertise of the leadership team and guest speakers motivated them to want to learn more from the course work as well as taking the initiative to learn how to enhance these skills on their own. This gave evidence that there were increases in self-awareness and reflection by the participants to the interventions. Furthermore, many participants shared that what they were exposed to in
class was a foundation for future benefits, such as the preparation of study abroad opportunities and skills that can be used in the workforce. Although these are positive reactions to the interventions, some of the participants also indicated levels of stress and anxiety around developing intercultural competence and sometimes experienced these feelings of apprehension during the course curriculum.

There is the question if actual transformative learning took place just by exposing the participants to various programs and interventions with the intent to enhance intercultural competence. As described by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting—questioning the values, assumptions, and perspectives presented in the world—on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds (Mezirow, 1991). He continues to describe transformative learning as the process through which individuals become aware of their phenomenological assumptions and then learn to explore their own processes of knowledge construction (Mezirow, 1991). Although during the two year duration of the study, participants may have shared experiences and examples of some form of change, after being exposed to the interventions, but realistically was true transformation achieved during such a short period of time? Newman (2012) posited that the definition of learning is change, and these changes are of the kind to be expected from well-resourced, competently delivered programs, and examples of educational best practices. He argues against Mezirow’s claim that “we undergo significant phases of reassessment and growth in which familiar assumptions are challenged and new directions and commitments are charted” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101 as cited in Newman, 2012, p. 40) and that “any learning effectively done involves reassessment and growth” (Newman, 2012, p.40). Merriam (2004) questioned whether
one requires a certain level of maturity and developed thinking in order to participate in the critical reflection and reflective discourse processes. The emerging adults are just entering their first year of their college experience and may be viewed as just starting their developmental process and trajectory towards intercultural competence. Her questioning of transformative learning attributes opens the door for educators to objectively assess how transformative learning can occur as well as to be cognizant of attributes and conditions that may hinder the use of transformative learning when creating developmental opportunities for learners who may need to have more depth or maturity in their thinking processes.

Conclusion 3: Creating Effective Conditions for Multicultural Education Does Not Assure Transformative Learning

The last conclusion that was drawn from this study is that creating effective conditions for learning to occur does not assure Transformative Learning. Transformative learning theory has served as a model for various other cultural learning processes. As described by Mezirow (1991), transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting—questioning the values, assumptions, and perspectives presented in the world—on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously bringing about new ways of defining their worldviews. Kim (1988) sees intercultural competency as the foundation in an individual’s adaptive capacity to alter perspective in an effort to accommodate the demands of a different culture which moves an individual toward a more inclusive and integrated world view (Kim, 1988 as cited in Taylor, 1994). To implement the programs and interventions an appropriate environment was created for both constituent groups to develop behavioral changes towards cultural awareness.
The participants acknowledged that their reaction to the interventions empowered them to start making the necessary changes in behavior that will support them in building intercultural competence. The program and the interventions deployed by the leadership team allowed for the participants to develop these cultural competencies. The emerging adults who participated in this study experienced various consciousness-raising efforts such as course offerings, co-curricular activities, social events, and an opportunity to study abroad in Brazil when learning intercultural skill sets and bridging self-awareness with the empowerment to make behavioral changes towards cultural difference. Throughout the duration of the action research project, the leadership team was also developing skills around their own cultural awareness and use of team dynamics when exploring approaches to develop and execute programs that enhance intercultural competencies for emerging adults in higher education. In addition, the team recognized the benefits of including these specific interventions to enhance the participants’ intercultural skills and how integrating these programs will promote skill development for future participants in the program. Banks (1993b) posited five dimensions of multicultural education that would further the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in enhancing intercultural competence: contact integration— instructors illustrate key concepts principles, and theories through examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups; knowledge construction—build students’ understanding of implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline being taught, and develop critical thinking capabilities; equity pedagogy—use of a wide range of strategies and teaching techniques to achieve the learning; prejudice reduction—focus on the learners’ characteristics to develop more positive racial and ethnic attitudes; and empowering school culture and social structure—the restructuring of the
learning environment in order for social demographic groups to experience educational equality and a sense of empowerment (Banks, 1993b).

Other lessons learned by the team were the power of participating in an action research project and the potential of using this process to create systemic change within the unit as well as the organization. Action research’s foundation is a participatory and unrestrictive approach to data-based problem-solving that implies the need to develop cooperative approaches to work and harmonious relations among people that emphasizes collegial relationships (Stringer, 2007). The changes envisioned by the leadership team were to incorporate new approaches and innovative programming that will encourage emerging adults to build intercultural competence. The process allowed for the facilitators to use reflection to understand the effectiveness of the selected interventions, as well as a democratic process to discuss and evaluate the collective work being done by the team. When assessing the work of the leadership team data findings shared that self and team reflections promoted innovative ideas. The programs and interventions developed established systemic change to be used not only in the program, but also consideration of the action research methodology in other aspects of the unit’s operations and potential collaborations with other colleagues at the university. Through this discovery and with purposeful adjustments in the program’s structure and procedures, other innovative programs and interventions with the intent of enhancing emerging adults’ intercultural competence can be designed, and possible partnerships external to the unit can be formed throughout the campus community when addressing intercultural skill development for emerging adults.

Although mechanisms were put into place to create effective conditions for learning to occur, several factors emerged during the study that indicated true transformation could not have taken place. Wenger (1998) shares that learning cannot be designed; ultimately it belongs to the
realm of experience and takes continuous practice. To adequately address transformative learning with the study’s participants, the research needed to continue longer than a two year period and even then there still may not be assurance that total development of intercultural dexterity occurs. Wheatley (2002) shares that people need to be willing to change, take risk, and question their own assumptions, beliefs, and ideas when exposed to new knowledge and to do so individuals must be willing to move out of their comfort zone into a place of uncertainty. She posited that “sometimes we hesitate to listen for differences because we don’t want to change. We’re comfortable with our lives, and if we listen to anyone who raised questions, we’d have to get engaged in changing things” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 35). Livermore (2011) theorizes that cultural intelligence is much deeper than discovering new foods, languages, and currencies, but a willingness to undergo transformation in how we see ourselves, the people we encounter and the world at large; your multicultural interactions and learning experiences are personal and are individualized experiences. The leadership team’s efforts to create a learning atmosphere was conducive for exposing the emerging adults to multicultural education, but the research project, not surprisingly, couldn’t allot the time needed for real transformative learning to transpire. The comparison of the IDI pre and post assessment results shared the differences between how the participants perceived their intercultural orientation level and their actual level of intercultural competent. Both the emerging adults and the leadership team showed significant movement forward on the DMIS continuum. Differences in the pre and post assessment results reflects on the emerging adults’ response to the programs and intervention that the leadership team developed and executed with the intent of enhancing intercultural competence and the leadership team’s recognition of their roles as facilitators and the use of the diversity of thought and social demographics that influenced the collective work of the team. The espoused theory—refers to
the worldview and values that people believe guide their behaviors—and theory-in-use—refers to the worldview and values reflected in the behaviors that actually drive their actions (Savaya & Gardner, 2012). During the study’s short timeframe for developing intercultural competence the two constituent groups may not know of the impact of being exposed to the learning until years from now. The participants in the research project gained immediate knowledge through the introduction to cultural differences that promoted cultural awareness and the curiosity to learn more.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

This study produced some implications that can be considered in both the areas of theory and practice. For scholars, using theoretical intercultural models aligned with valid assessment instruments can offer great value when establishing baseline data. The IDI assessment tool was used only as a diagnostic tool that allowed the team to recognize the unique demographics of each team member and promoting an understanding of how these different social backgrounds as well as diversity of thought and perceptions enhanced the collective work of the group. Using the IDI instrument assisted the team to discover an appreciation of their individual diversity and how that created synergy among the team as well as used with the emerging adults to assist the leadership team in the design and execution of appropriate programs for their cultural awareness. This specific tool is used to measure the first five cultural stages in Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986). There are many cultural assessment tools available that are also aligned with theoretical models that will achieve the same purpose that the IDI contributed to this study. The appropriate diagnostic tool must be taken into consideration based on the study’s purpose, intended outcomes, and target audience.
Implications to the field can also inform faculty and instructors on theoretical collaborative approaches to team interactions when developing programs, using the action research methodology, and determining a framework for the analysis of group dynamics and team development. Use of Tuckman’s model of group dynamics indicated in this study that team dynamics and demographics impact the team’s developmental stages in ways that influence their interactions with each other and should be reviewed constantly when working collectively on the task at hand. In addition, this study indicated that Mezirow’s transformative learning theory can be assumed when appropriate interventions are in place to allow for conditions of changes in frame of references and behaviors to occur. However, challenges were presented in this study that prevented true transformative learning. The time frame for conducting the study and the developmental level of the students prevented true change to be measured and performed. Participants were at various stages of development and required specific interventions to promote intercultural orientation levels; and programs and interventions administered were deemed as an introductory form of exposing the participants to intercultural development. Continued studies focused on espoused actions when distinguishing perceived behavioral changes as opposed to actual behavioral actions are needed. Argyris and Schon (1974) shared two types of theory: espoused theory—the worldview and values that people believe guide their behaviors—and theory-in-use—the worldview and values reflected in the behaviors that actually drive their actions (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Knowledge of the team dynamics, the group’s intentionality towards their work, perceptions around leadership roles and positionality, and having a safe working environment emerged as key findings from the study. These characteristics can be considered when using best practices in the field. This study can be used not only in higher education, but in other industries...
when cultivating team interactions and learning. The information presented in this document will assist faculty, administrators, and instructors in the utilization of action research methods when developing not only academic programs, but other pertinent initiatives. This approach is particularly useful with regards to project management or strategic planning that look to employ a collaborative approach when working with diverse teams.

**Future Research**

Currently there are limited references that focus on teams’ social demographics and how these group dynamics influence the collective approach to utilizing the action research process. Therefore, there is a growing need to understand approaches used by teams that consist of various demographics when designing and implementing development programs in higher education. Action research is one methodology to consider when studying team dynamics and group development stages. This study also focused on team diversity and stages of development. Other areas of research would be to conduct comparison studies on various diverse groups and the use of other team theoretical frameworks, such as Barker’s theory of behavior settings, Hackman’s model of team autonomy, and Campbell’s theory of entitativity—the extent to which an assemblage of individuals is perceived to be a group rather than an aggregation of independent, unrelated individuals (Forsyth, 2010).

The emerging adult sample used in this study was primarily high achievers participating in a specific co-curricular leadership development program. This group of participants has only been exposed to the college experience for one year. Merriam (2004) questioned whether one requires having a certain level of maturity and needed cognitive skills to actually critically reflect and have insightful discourse that promotes transformative learning. Therefore, research is needed with a broader population to determine if these results around participants’ response to
specific programs/interventions that enhance intercultural competence can be generalized to other academic level populations or with non-traditional students.

There is also a need to study transformative learning through a longitudinal research approach in order to have sufficient time to fully assess the impact of the interventions. Although an assessment was conducted on current levels of cultural orientation, the project did not allow for using the IDI as a post assessment and analysis of cultural levels after the interventions were administered after a longer duration than after the first year of the program. In addition, longitudinal research comparing self-assessments, interviews or other evaluation methodologies of emerging adults developing cultural awareness with future performance or behavioral changes that can effectively measure transformative learning from undergraduate studies through completion of an under degree program are almost non-existent. As the emerging adults continue their participation in the unit’s leadership program and as they are exposed to more developmental opportunities to enhance intercultural competence, it would be significant to the field of study to review the long term impact of the interventions and to appropriately measure any movement from an ethnocentrism frame of reference to a more intercultural mindset.

In conclusion, an analysis of the data resulted in three distinct conclusions in the research project. These main conclusions are that the action research methodology is strengthened through the consideration of individual diversity and expertise that contributes to and supports the work of the collective group; introducing intercultural frameworks that offer developmentally focused programs and interventions garnered responses from participants to increase cultural awareness; and creating effective conditions for multicultural education does not in and of itself assure transformative learning. This study promoted gaining new knowledge through the use of
theoretical frameworks and best practices that will have implications to the field as well as created various concepts and ideas which can lead to other avenues of future research.
REFERENCES


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doi: 10.1177/102831


# APPENDIX A

## Action Research Project’s Processes and Timeline of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Timeline</strong></th>
<th><strong>Key Steps in Research</strong></th>
<th><strong>Outcomes</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>January 2012 – February 2012</strong></td>
<td>Facilitated a session on intercultural competence and DMIS/IDI for unit’s participants NOTE: Not officially AR client system Request collaborative partnership with stakeholders around AR project Meetings with senior leaders and other stakeholders to share AR project and request for institutional permission to conduct the study. Ongoing meetings with leadership team members to shared AR project, determined goals/purpose, collective roles; discuss potential development program and curriculum design; preliminary planning process.</td>
<td>-Introduction to the Client System - Initiated point of entry process -Gained stakeholder support -Team gained deeper perspective on purpose and goals -Adopted a collective approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating programs that focus on building intercultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 2012- July 2012</strong></td>
<td>First leadership team meeting: review applications; preparations for student orientation and summer activities, Leadership team establishes weekly meetings to discuss plans, evaluation process, and adjustments as deemed needed. Discussed appropriate activities for the cohort and specific assessment tools to establish baseline data Study Abroad Planning Session: determine itinerary for international trip to Brazil</td>
<td>-Enhance group dynamics and team interactions -Created summer activities and fall timeline of academic programs for emerging adults - gained full commitment from leadership team around team charge and meeting schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAGE 3: Action</td>
<td>April 2012 – May 2013</td>
<td>Implement activities and curriculum to emerging adults</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- Team building/ropes course</td>
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<td>- Strength finders</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Diversity Workshops</td>
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<td>- Global Village Project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Reflective Exercises &amp; Assignments</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Brazil Night (social activity)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Skype session with Brazilian facilitator/students</td>
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<td>- Undergraduate Research Project with local and international peers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-leadership team and cohort engagement and learning process</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-record observations of interactions and responses to interventions via field notes, recording device, journal entries</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-conduct online assessment and individual interviews to measure intercultural skill sets</td>
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<td>-administer self-reflection assignments/activities</td>
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<td>-discuss challenges and/or angst when developing intercultural competence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conduct intercultural development inventory (IDI) to establish baseline of level of intercultural competence (for students and leadership team)

Individual interviews with emerging adults to discuss IDI results and development plan.

International Experience – Salvador, Brazil Trip

Individual interviews with leadership team members to discuss IDI results and input on the collective work of the team

How do emerging adults learn in response to programs and interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE 4: Evaluation</th>
<th>April 2013 – July 2013</th>
<th>Leadership team meeting that focus only on the work of the team and meeting our goals.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-documented learning outcomes of emerging adults</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-documented and discussed learning outcomes of the process with the leadership team</td>
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<td>-met with senior decision makers as a follow up and debrief of the leadership team’s work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-review all data collected from assessment tools</td>
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<td>-administer IDI to leadership team with the intent of modeling the behaviors/learning for the cohort</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-discussing our own collaborative work and intercultural skill sets</td>
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<td>-outline decisions for enhancing the program based on findings from the study</td>
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<td>Debrief leadership team around data findings from IDI (pre), post self-assessment and reflections on study abroad trip.</td>
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<td>Leadership team establishes planning meeting in July 2013 to review outcomes with emerging adults, work of the leadership team, and revise approach and program for new cohort entering in the Fall of 2013. This will also include senior decision makers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>conduct online course evaluation with the emerging adults – review findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What learning takes place when a leadership team uses a collaborative approach to developing and executing programs that broaden cultural knowledge for emerging adults?
Institutional Consent
September 14, 2011

Dr. Robert Hill
University of Georgia
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration,
And Policy, Adult Education Program
850 College Station Road
Athens, Georgia 30602-4811

Subject: Permission for Action Research Project at [Redacted]

Dear Dr. Hill:

As you know, Ms. Linda Lyons, a doctoral student in your Adult Education Program, has been selected to conduct an action research study that will explore leadership development opportunities. This project will promote global engagement and diversity in higher education. Please accept this letter as confirmation that we understand that [Redacted] will serve as the institution where Ms. Lyons will conduct much of her research and that she will be working with [Redacted], Director of the [Redacted] as her institutional and primary project sponsor.

We and our colleagues at [Redacted] understand that this study will benefit the larger academic community. Linda’s research promises to add to our knowledge of how institutions of higher learning develop and advance intercultural and international competencies among students, our emerging leaders, as well as promote organizational learning and change.

We grant this permission with the understanding that the research will be guided by strict principles of confidentiality, e.g., no campus personnel or participants (or related identifiable data) will be placed on research documents or other published material. We understand that this research project and all attending issues of confidentiality, proper handling of data, proper publication criteria, etc., will be under your direct supervision.

We look forward to assisting Ms. Lyons in this study and facilitating her educational growth and development.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]  
Vice President for Student Success

[Redacted]  
Dean of [Redacted] and  
Associate Vice President for Advising,  
Retention and Graduation Initiatives
Team Consent Form

THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS WITH EMERGING ADULTS WHEN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As a member of a project team I, ________________________________, agree to participate in an action research study that will explore a leadership team’s effort in designing and executing intercultural programs with the intent to build intercultural competencies in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore the transformative effect of an action research approach to program planning used by a leadership team working to enhance intercultural competencies for emerging adults in higher education. This study is being conducted by Linda Lyons, a doctoral student in the University of Georgia’s Adult Education Program (lnmlyons@uga.edu 770-877-0215) with permission from the organization’s primary client, Dr. Robert Hill, Associate professor in the University of Georgia’s Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, Adult Education program (bobhill@uga.edu 706-542-4016) will serve as primary professor and will supervise/authorize all research procedures as it pertains to the criteria for this degree program.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

**Purpose of the Study:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of:

- identifying developmental opportunities to enhance emerging leaders’ intercultural competencies and cultural awareness
- the process of strategically identifying potential developmental interventions through collective work done by a core team, and
- how these identified interventions may facilitate intercultural and international awareness and learning.

**Procedures:** If I choose to participate, I will be asked to do the following things:

- participating in an online intercultural competency assessment that will give you direct insights on your current level of cultural experiences
- Participate in a one-on-one interview/feedback session with the doctoral student, Linda Lyons to obtain results of my online intercultural competency assessment and to answer questions to the best of my knowledge and ability and share my understanding and experiences around diversity and inclusion as a member of the leadership team charged with design and executing programs with the intent to enhance my intercultural competence. The interview sessions could be in-person, via phone, or video conferencing (Skype).
- Participate in a tape recorded interviews based on confidentiality outlined in this form.
- Allow researcher to observe my participation with the project team in formal and informal professional settings where knowledge sharing may occur. Such settings may include team meetings, academic meetings, class exchanges, lunch, or other settings deemed appropriate through data collected during interviews.
- Meet with the doctoral student, Linda Lyons individually if needed to answer questions to the best of my knowledge and ability about my understanding and experience of being a team member on the project. If determined necessary these interviews will take approximately 1-2 hours and will most likely be ongoing until the completion of the research (estimated five potential number of sessions and completion of research background done by fall 2012 or earlier). These sessions could be in-person, via phone, or video conferencing (Skype).
- Voluntarily provide documents for analysis that validate the knowledge sharing process.
- Participate in a tape recorded interviews based on confidentiality outlined in this form.
- Review a summary of my interviews to verify that the investigator understood my intended meaning.

**Duration:**
- Five to ten meetings developing potential training opportunities to enhance intercultural competencies with emerging adults and action steps for Project Team
- Length of time estimated: 1 – 2 hours
- Total duration: five to ten sessions

**Risks:** No risks are expected by a guarantee by the doctoral student of conducting research based on confidentiality and a safe interview environment.

**Benefits to me:** As a participant, I will benefit by gaining a better understanding of what I, and others, have experienced as we have shared knowledge to improve our practice around leadership, teamwork, and intercultural competencies. This could better help our core team to educate students and the campus community to understand these processes and better facilitate the knowledge sharing and learning opportunities that occur when students and constituents develop cultural awareness and these specific skill sets.

**Benefits to the larger community:** I understand this research will contribute to the understanding of how students as emerging leaders can build self-awareness and enhance their intercultural competence and cultural awareness along with identifying potential interventions that facilitate or impede the learning opportunities. By gaining a better understanding of intercultural competencies, the organization will be in the position to better prepare students as emerging leaders to effectively nurture and promote an institutional worldview on global engagement and diversity, thereby potentially enhancing their leadership skill sets once graduates of the institution as well as create internal change in its approach to intercultural programs and studies.

**Confidentiality:** I understand that participants’ names and the identifiable data will not be used on documents related to the research. Only the criteria for the selection of participants will be published and it will not be made clear who participated and who did not. Results from individual assessments and group profiles will be shared as aggregated data only with no specific identification of specific individuals and/or groups listed.

I agree for my interview(s) to be tape-recorded. Tapes will be transcribed by the researcher, and the tapes destroyed at the completion of the study. Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to the tapes.

A code number will identify each piece of data resulting from the interviews. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of the study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to me or other participants of this research study by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant or the organization.
No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

I understand that the researcher or her doctoral supervisor will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of the project (Linda Lyons, lnmlyons@uga.edu or llyons5@kennesaw.edu 770-877-0215) or Dr. Robert Hill, bobhill@uga.edu 706-542-4016).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

(Name of Participant) (Signature) (Date)

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________

(Name of Researcher) (Signature) (Date)

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, Graduate Studies Research Center; Telephone; email address.
Participants’ Consent Form

THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS WITH EMERGING ADULTS WHEN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I, ________________________________________, agree to participate in an action research study that will explore interventions that cultivates intercultural competencies for students in higher education. The goal of this study is to explore the transformative effect of an action research approach to program planning used by a leadership team working to enhance intercultural competencies for emerging adults in higher education. This study is being conducted by Linda Lyons, a doctoral student in the University of Georgia’s Adult Education Program (llyons@uga.edu | 404-219-7022) with permission from the organization’s primary client, Brian Wooten, Director, Center for Student Leadership. Dr. Robert Hill, Associate professor in the University of Georgia’s Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, Adult Education program (bobhill@uga.edu | 706-542-4016) will serve as primary professor and will supervise/authorize all research procedures as it pertains to the criteria for this degree program.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

Purpose of the Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of:

- developmental opportunities to enhance specific intercultural competencies and leadership skills and
- how these identified interventions may facilitate intercultural awareness and learning.

Procedures: If I choose to participate, I will be asked to do the following things:

- participating in an online intercultural competency assessment that will give you direct insights on your current level of cultural experiences
- Participate in a one-on-one interview/feedback session with the doctoral student, Linda Lyons to obtain results of my online intercultural competency assessment and to answer questions to the best of my knowledge and ability and share my understanding and experiences around diversity and inclusion as a student in higher education being exposed to programing with the intent to enhance my intercultural competence. The interview sessions could be in-person, via phone, or video conferencing (Skype).
- Participate in a tape recorded interviews based on confidentiality outlined in this form.
- Review a summary of my interviews to verify that the investigator understood my intended meaning.

Duration:

- Online assessment length time is estimated 30 to 40 minutes
- Individual interview and review of online survey results length time is estimated 1 hour
- Total interview/feedback duration: 1 Session
- Total length of research time commitment estimated: 2 hours
**Risks:** No risks are expected by a guarantee by the doctoral student of conducting research based on confidentiality and a safe interview environment.

**Benefits to me:** As a participant, I will benefit by gaining a better understanding of what I have experienced as I share my knowledge and experiences my around intercultural competencies and leadership.

**Benefits to the larger community:** This study will add to the growing knowledge based around developing intercultural competencies in higher education as well as the potential vehicle for enhancing the current available cultural awareness programs based on my insights and program experience.

**Confidentiality:** I understand that participants’ names and the identifiable data will not be used on documents related to the research. Only the criteria for the selection of participants will be published and it will not be made clear who participated and who did not. Results from individual assessments and group profiles will be shared as aggregated data only with no specific identification of specific individuals and/or groups listed.

I agree for my interview(s) to be tape-recorded. Tapes will be transcribed by the researcher, and the tapes destroyed at the completion of the study. Only the researcher and her doctoral supervisor will have access to the tapes.

A code number will identify each piece of data resulting from the interviews. Names or specific affiliations will not be included in any report or publication of the study findings. Quotes used in any report of the findings will not be attributed to me or other participants of this research study by name or in any other way that would lead to identification of the participant or the organization.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

I understand that the researcher or her doctoral supervisor will answer any further questions about this research, now or during the course of the project (________________________________ or __________________________________) or Dr. Robert Hill, ___________________________________.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

__________________________________________  ____________________________________________  _______________________
(Name of Participant)  (Signature)  (Date)

Telephone:__________________________  Email:________________________________

__________________________________________  ____________________________________________  _______________________
(Name of Researcher)  (Signature)  (Date)

Telephone:__________________________  Email:________________________________

*Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.*

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to the Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, Graduate Studies Research Center, ___________________________________________.
APPENDIX C

Interview Guides

Interview Questions for Team Members: “The purpose of this interview is to identify and explore key informal and incidental learning experiences regarding the collective work being done by the leadership team and the influence the action research process has on our efforts in designing and executing interventions/programs that enhance intercultural competencies with emerging adults in higher education.”

1. Tell us about the role that diversity and difference played in your background growing up (i.e. family traditions, neighborhood, friends, school, community groups, etc.)?

2. Is the development of intercultural competence in higher education meaningful to you? Why or why not? Please share an example of when it would be helpful?

3. Does developing these skills create any stress or anxiety for you? Why or why not? NOTE: if yes, please describe a situation in which you felt anxious or stressed.

4. How important is exposing students to intercultural skills in this leadership program? Why? Share examples of students using these skills?

5. What interventions that we provided you think had an impact in the learners developing intercultural competencies? Why?

6. What interventions that we provided you think had the most stress/anxiety in the participants developing intercultural competencies? Why?

7. What were the characteristics of the leadership team’s engagement/interactions with each other?

8. Can you share an example of any attributes that demonstrated the leadership team’s collaboration when developing programs for the students?

9. How did the team’s demographics (e.g. age, sex, race) influence the collaboration process?

10. Did any of the work of the collaboration process cause you any stress or anxiety?

11. What can we as the leadership team do differently to help our learners development intercultural competencies?
12. Do you have any additional comments on the leadership team’s work? on the action research process?

Follow up Interview Questions for Team Members (Conducted 2013): “The purpose of this interview is to circle back and discuss other observations and additional key learning experiences regarding the collective work that was done by the leadership team during the duration of this research project. It will also be important to note your insights on the influence the action research process has had on our efforts in designing and executing interventions/programs that enhance intercultural competencies with emerging adults in higher education.”

1. AR is a methodology that is based on team work and collaboration. It’s about promoting multiple forms of change:
   a. Change in practitioners’ practices,
   b. Change in their understandings of their practices and
   c. Change in the conditions in which they practice

   How has the team created change this year with our approach to the students’ development of cultural awareness?
   How have we, as a leadership team, transformed throughout this process?
   How have you, as a member and a vested stakeholder to the success of our students’ building intercultural competence transformed throughout this process?

2. AR framework used in this study is based on Coghlan and Brannick’s four stages:
   a. Constructing – exploration of context and purpose
   b. Planning Action – describing how to implement the action
   c. Taking Action – implementing plans and creating interventions
   d. Evaluating Action – examining the outcomes of the action

   Describe how you feel the leadership team as a collective whole used these stages
   Share how you think this may have created a change in the way a team approaches working with students’ development of cultural awareness?

3. Have you used in the past a collaborative approach with colleagues to develop and execute programs that broadened cultural knowledge for students?
   a. If yes, how was that experience compared with your experience with our leadership team?
   b. If no, share your experience with our team’s collaborative approach in developing and executing programs that broadened cultural knowledge for our students?

4. How has this collaborative experience with our team transform you?

5. How has this collaborative experience change your frame of reference when working with teams?

6. After their exposure to the programs that the leadership team created for the cohort this past year, can you share with me ways you feel that the students experienced some form of transformation from their response to these interventions aimed at developing intercultural competence?

7. How have we made changes in our process that will impact future cohorts going through the program?
8. Do you see the IDI being a useful tool in our process in developing these intercultural programs for the learner? Why?
9. How has the tool assisted the team’s collective work?
10. How would you describe characteristics of the leadership team’s engagement/interactions with each other?
11. How did the team’s demographics (e.g. age, sex, race) influence the collaboration process?
12. How, if any, did the team’s collaboration process cause you any stress or anxiety?
13. Describe any leadership team conflicts that you noticed?
   a. Do you think these perceived conflicts went unresolved in our process?
   b. If yes, do you think this may impact future team work with other cohorts?
   c. If yes, do you have any suggestions for how to address these conflicts?
14. Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions for the Study’s Participants: “The purpose of this interview is to have an open conversation on the program, share your IDI results and get your thoughts on cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

1. How do you like the leadership program so far? Share with me some examples of why you feel the way you do.
2. During the academic course, which interventions (e.g. general lectures, course assignment, group activities, service engagement projects, and/or field trips) had the most impact on your intercultural skill development? Why?
3. How does the work of the leadership team impact your development of cultural awareness? Please give me a few examples.
4. Is the development of intercultural competence in higher education meaningful to you? Why or why not? Please illustrate a few examples of when it would have been helpful.
5. Does developing these skills create any stress or anxiety for you? Why or why not?
   NOTE: if yes, please describe a situation in which you felt anxious or stressed.
6. Did being exposed to any of the interventions created any stress or anxiety for you? If yes, which interventions and why? If no, why?
7. Tell me about the role that diversity and difference played in your background growing up. (i.e. family traditions, neighborhood, friends, school, community groups, etc.)
8. Share with me some examples of any interactions you had with other cultural groups before college?
a. How did those interactions make you feel? Why do you think you experienced those feelings?

9. Provide a few examples of lessons you were taught about cultural differences and diversity before college?

10. After reviewing your IDI results, what opportunities do you think will help to further develop your intercultural skills? Why do you think these activities will help you in your development?

11. Any additional thoughts you would like to add?

12. Do you have any specific questions you would like to ask me about this session? This research?

Focus Group Session with Study’s Participants (Conduct 2013): “The purpose of this reflection exercise is share your thoughts on cultural awareness after being exposed this past year to programs and interventions that were put in place with the intention of building intercultural competence.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) in each of these skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To be persistent</th>
<th>To relate to people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To learn from interacting</td>
<td>To be able to communicate well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To respect the other cultures</td>
<td>To be non-judgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be aware of stereotypes</td>
<td>To practice empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be aware of one’s own limitations</td>
<td>To be flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be aware of one’s own culture</td>
<td>To listen and observe</td>
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<tr>
<td>To tolerate ambiguity</td>
<td>To adjust based on others’ reactions</td>
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</tbody>
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The above reflection exercise was taken from *The Diversity Training Activity Book* © AMACOM, a division of American Management Association.

This page reproduced from *50 Activities for Diversity Training* by Jonamay Lambert and Selma Myer

1. List the top 3 qualities you feel are most important in communicating across cultural lines and why did you choose them.

2. List the one that you feel is most difficult and why.

3. After being exposed to course work and the group activities intended to build intercultural competence, share ways that your attitude and behavior have changed towards culture difference?

4. What did you do outside of leadership program that contributed to this change?