

Developing Intercultural Competence:  
Professional Development for University Staff Members

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I design, implement and conduct a mixed methods action research project to develop intercultural competence in domestic university staff members. My research took place at my place of employment, a research one university in the American southwest. As the director of an international student service center, I had direct observations of the interactions between domestic staff members and our international students with lower English proficiency. With the observations came the realization that this communication could be both more effective and more efficient. To address this problem, I developed three workshops to provide participants with the skills to have more productive communication with their students. I used a mixed methods approach to investigate how this innovation influenced the three constructs associated with intercultural competence: cultural awareness, cultural empathy and language modification.

Quantitative data consisted of both pre- and post-intervention surveys. Results relating to all three constructs showed significant gain between the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. Analysis of the qualitative data engendered four assertions. 1. As staff members learned more about a student's culture, they become more cognizant of the communication strategies they used and become confident they could reduce conflict, ill-communication and miscommunication between students and staff member. 2. Staff members were not aware of the complexities of the English language. 3. Only after understanding the difficulties non-native English speakers face do the staff members truly understand the student experience and become willing to make sincere efforts to

communicate more effectively. 4. It is incumbent on the staff member to everything possible to facilitate a successful interaction with the student.

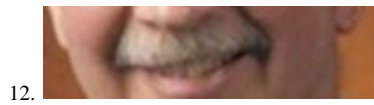
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rome wasn't built in a day, nor was it accomplished alone. This action research dissertation is the culmination of three years of pedagogical pursuance, none of which could have been done were I rolling solo. There are people to who I am indebted for their help with this endeavor, and for whom you can blame for any offense taken here within. I want to thank Dr. Ying-Chih Chen who put up with my flexible and cavalier approach to deadlines. I'd like to thank Dr. Ray Buss for putting up with my off-putting sense of humor. I'd also like to thank Dr. Dianna Lippincott in her continuous, patient, yet often futile, effort to get to stop typing *fuck* so much. Thank you all for your support and patience.

I'd also like to thank my wife, Laura, and my children, Jack and Alex, without whom this dissertation would have been done five years earlier. I love you all *mucho*.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the ‘staches that gave me the strength to not take myself too seriously and get this farkakteh thing done.



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1. Magnum, P. I. (Tom Selleck) 2. Charlie Chaplain 9. Shaft 10. Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman) 11. John Waters 12. Dr. Ray Buss  
7. Sam Elliot 8. Charlie Chaplain 9. Shaft 10. Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman) 11. John Waters 12. Dr. Ray Buss

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

#### *“The King’s English”*

*I take it you already know  
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?  
Others may stumble but not you  
On hiccough, thorough, slough and through.*

*Well done! And now you wish perhaps,  
To learn of less familiar traps?  
Beware of heard, a dreadful word  
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.  
And dead, it's said like bed, not bead-  
for goodness' sake don't call it 'deed'!*

*Watch out for meat and great and threat  
(they rhyme with suite and straight and debt).  
A moth is not a moth in mother,  
Nor both in bother, broth, or brother,  
And here is not a match for there,  
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,*

*And then there's doze and rose and lose-  
Just look them up- and goose and choose,  
And cork and work and card and ward  
And font and front and word and sword,*

*And do and go and thwart and cart-  
Come, I've hardly made a start!  
A dreadful language? Man alive!  
I'd learned to speak it when I was five!  
And yet to write it, the more I sigh,  
I'll not learn how 'til the day I die.*

*~ Anonymous*

#### **A Linguistic Context**

English sucks. Students know this. I would provide a citation, but like statements such as water boils at 100 degrees centigrade, the sky is blue, nature abhors a vacuum,

some statements stand on their own reputation. Native speakers of English have won the linguistic sweepstakes ... unless you're Dutch, in which case you probably speak English, German, Dutch, Esperanto, Klingon, have perfect pitch and a quadrennially good soccer team, and access to legalized marijuana and prostitution. There were many reasons why people considered English very difficult to learn. Pronunciation, grammar, cultural allusions, non-linear idioms and expressions, and a clear disregard for any predictable orthographic constraints – as seen in the epigraph above – can all lead to difficulties in acquiring and effectively using English.

One of the most commonly cited issues in language learning is vocabulary (Dollahite, 2011). English has more vocabulary than you can [shake a stick at](#) (and a grammar which insists, for reasons passing understanding, that the previous example actually be expressed “more vocabulary *at which you can shake a stick*”). English has more vocabulary than almost any other language in the world; the unfortunate result of the Battle of Hasting in 1066, when France conquered England and produced academic language for science, religion, government and other concepts (Durkin, 2011). When this happened, the native population kept their Germanic-based words for common everyday terms like *haus* (house), *wasser* (water), and *katz* (cat) while adopting the French words for higher function terms based in medicine, law, philosophy and others, which they did not already have, or concepts not widely used by the populace like *ambulance*, *philosophy*, and *critique* (Durkin, 2011).

Thus, it seemed that we have two words for almost everything, one from French and one from German. Native English speakers know *high* and *elevated*, *sad* and

*miserable, gleeful and elated*, not to mention the subtle nuances meanings of *exit, depart*, and *leave*, along with *take off* or *vamoose*. They also know intuitively when to use *bring* and *take, come* and *go*, and effortlessly use *a, the, and an* without error.

Further, the sheer volume of non-linear idioms and expressions could stop a team of oxen in its tracks, and our slang seemed intentionally designed to engender obfuscation – as seen in the opposite of meanings of the sentiments, “*That movie was shit*” and “*That movie was the shit*” – which conveyed two very different opinions regarding the quality of the film. This was not information most students got in their English language classes. However, for native English speakers, we were blessed to being born into a world where our native tongue was becoming the universal one.

Consider the following conversation between my friend, who is a die-hard New York Yankees fan, and me, who like all reasonable people have a visceral distaste for the ‘pinstripes.’ This is a real conversation.

*“Like, I’m sitting in the nosebleeds – best seats I can afford, you know – bottom of the 8th, Sox got runners at the corners. Friggin’ 217 hitter’s at the plate – don’t even remember his name, some late season call up – and they walk ‘em to get to Ellsbury and load the bases. Why? He’s battin’ 2 friggin’ 17. What are they scared of? Friggin’ manager should be shot. So Ellsbury line drives one off the big green monster n three runs score, and we’re down 5-3, don’t even bother bringin’ Rivera in at this point, know what I’m sayin’? Yanks need a set-up guy if they’re gonna make a run, you know?”*

Now, answer the following questions based on my friend’s diatribe:

1. What sport is being discussed?

2. What teams are playing?
3. In what city are the teams playing?
4. Where is my friend sitting?
5. Who wins the game?
6. What position does Rivera play?
7. How does the Yankee fan feel about the outcome of the game?
8. Do you, the reader, care?

With a plethora of standard vocabulary, constantly changing idioms, and field-specific jargon, is it any surprise that communication between domestic university staff members and non-native English-speaking students may be difficult? And, why does this matter? It matters because university faculty and staff members use both academic and non-academic vocabulary in their classrooms. International students may be prepared for the academic English, but the cultural idioms and expressions can cause problems.

### **Larger Context**

So, why does this matter? According to the Institute of International Education (2019), the rate of international student enrollment has increased in the US every year since 2004. In their annual publication, *Fast Fact*, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported 723,277 students in 2010-2011 academic year and just under 1,100,000 in 2018-2019. Of these students, 39.7% were studying STEM and 16.6% were a studying business. New York University has over 19,600 international students, and the University of Southern California enrolled more than 16,300 students from abroad. IIE reported 11 American universities with over 10,000 international students, and more than 20 universities serving over 7,000 students.

With this influx of culturally diverse students, it was important to note globalization and internationalization were not the same thing (Altbach & Knight, 2008). Globalization consisted of the economic and academic trends that were a reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, internationalization was the process of designing, implementing, and conducting policies and practices by institutions – including those in academia – to reconcile the reality of a global environment (Altbach & Knight, 2008). Therefore, although a school may not be able to control globalization, it can certainly control its own efforts to internationalize.

Tying this to my problem of practice, I observed the increased enrollment at universities to be a function of globalization. Yet, how universities dealt with this increased enrollment was a function of its internationalization. With increased enrollment came a host of challenges many domestic universities have not encountered previously. These challenges included academic issues, social isolation, and cultural adjustment. However, these were often seen by the university as globalization problems; i.e., problems encountered and solved by the student (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2014). Research conducted by Özturgut and Murphy (2009) reported international students often felt a disconnect between what was considered ‘best practices’ for integrating international students and what actually happened on college campuses.

One disconnection between best practices and realities was the fact that it was not mandatory “for people involved in communicating with international students in U.S. higher education institutions to engage in relationships to make their experiences culturally, socially or educationally worthwhile” (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009, p. 380). This was a weakness commonly found at higher education institutions, and an institution

that did not recognize its own weakness was bound to fail in the long run. This was exacerbated by the fact that the very people hired to engage with international students were not required to have intercultural competence. Moreover, advising and mid-level administrative positions require a bachelor's degree with two to three years of experience. Generally, these positions did not require international living experience, second language experience, or a demonstration of intercultural competence (Altbach, 1996; Tomich, McWhirter & Darcy, 2003; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009).

As expected, a major concern regarding international student success was language. After concluding a study of 689 international students in three universities in New York, Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) asserted students who demonstrated more proficient language skills were less likely to deem academic situations as stressful and believes they were better equipped to handle the stress they encounter. Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) explained that students themselves identified English, both formal and informal, as necessary for success. Further, a study conducted by Halic, Greenberg and Paulus (2009), indicated that although English proficiency was seen as a barrier, it was also seen as a 'channel of access' to other services provided by the university.

Moreover, cultural realities also faced international students and domestic faculty and staff members. There was a tendency for domestic faculty and staff members to see interactions through an ethnocentric lens; a default to viewing interactions through the perspective of their own culture. Thus, challenges and difficult situations were not addressed at the root cause, but rather at a superficial, ethnocentrically inaccurate level (Bunz, 1997). The competitive, individualistic, and assertive nature of American culture has also led to feelings of being overwhelmed (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992). Cultural

differences in academic expectations also led to issues. For example, it was common for African, Asian, and Middle Eastern students to have been trained to sit quietly in lecture-style classrooms and diligently take notes, which will be memorized in preparation for exams given perhaps once or twice a year (Thomas & Althen, 1989; Aubrey, 1991). Chinese students often arrived in the United States from schools where they were taught in a Confucian, teacher-centered approach. The Confucian tradition has emphasized the teacher-centeredness commonly associated with a classroom environment where students were not encouraged to engage, question, or contribute in the classroom (Yen, 1987). It was also interesting to note that the amount of stress incurred was in direct proportion to the physical distance between the host country and the culture of the international student (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980).

Finally, and most importantly, the responsibility with which the faculty and staff members take in addressing the concerns of international students has been lagging. Most faculty and staff members do not understand, nor take seriously, their role in the acculturation of international student enrolled in their institution (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009). However, numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits when faculty and staff members did, indeed, take an active role. Wan (2001) documented the benefits of building relationships and promoting friendships between international students and faculty members. Tseng and Newton (2002) asserted that personal satisfaction and pursuing a meaningful and academically successful life, facilitate by faculty and staff members, led to a greater degree of well-being reported by international students. Tomlich, McWhirter, and Darcy (2003) explained that international students reported a greater sense of efficacy and lower levels of stress with professors who had learned to



“communicate more effectively with their international students as the cultural similarity/distance is a powerful determinant in the adaptation and adjustment of international students” (p. 31).

There have also been issues on a university-wide scale. It was not unreasonable to assert that universities enrolling international students should have ensured that language and culture were not barriers to academic success. In a move that demonstrated a lack of understanding in their role of internationalization, universities may not have considered the responses by their international student body. Universities that did not sufficiently, even enthusiastically, address the needs of the students been subjected to student protests and public backlash, as Purdue University was in 2012. In 2012, Purdue University doubled their international student fees from \$1000 per year to \$2000 per year without increasing services to international students, and the international students protested (Hartman, 2012). Similar protests over increased costs occurred in 2016 at the University of Cincinnati, where university administrators implemented a \$150 per semester fees. Again, students complained about increase in fees without commensurate increase of services (Dreihaus, 2016). In the case of the University of Cincinnati, after conferencing with student leaders, the administration rescinded the fee for the spring 2017 semester. Arizona State University was committed to ensure that the international student community has access to resources that inform, educate and engage students. This access led to integration, and integration can lead to great academic, professional, and personal success.

## **The Local Context**

Arizona State University has also aggressively pursued international students. According to the Institute of International Education (2017), the international enrollment at Arizona State University has increased substantially since 2010, when they were ranked 20<sup>th</sup> with 4,483 international students. By 2016, Arizona State University was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, with 13,164 international students – 300% of the 2010 numbers. It was currently the public university with the most international students enrolled.

Over the past three years, according to the University Office of Institutional Analysis at ASU, the W. P. Carey School of Business alone has increased its international enrollment by 220% (ASU Fact Sheet, 2017). With numbers like these, it should not be surprising Arizona State University is endeavoring to provide academic resources to these students.

Although my research focused on the acquisition of intercultural competence to face the challenges of communication between international students and domestic faculty and staff members, it was also important to acknowledge that, when discussing international students and communication issues at ASU, we should not lump all international students into one linguistic category. Two of the top-10 exporters of students to the US are English-speaking countries – India (2) and Canada (5), with UK ranking 12<sup>th</sup> (ASU Fact Sheet, 2016). Yet, the W. P. Carey School of Business, whose students are those with whom I overwhelmingly have been engaged, had a student body comprised mostly of students from China, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Brazil – all non-native English-speaking countries, with a sizeable group of Indians, as well.

For the spring 2018 semester, the W. P. Carey School of Business had over 12,000 students (T. Desch, personal communication, September 24, 2018). Of these, 19.6% ( $n=2,348$ ) come from abroad with 1,849 undergraduate international students and 499 graduate students. As mentioned above, not all international students are non-native English speakers. This is true in the business school, as well, with just over 10% ( $n=251$ ) being from India, the United Kingdom, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. However, by far the largest group of international students come from China ( $n=1,581$ ), almost 65%. The next largest groups of students whose country of origin is not English-speaking come from Saudi Arabia ( $n=163$ ), Taiwan ( $n=77$ ), South Korea ( $n=38$ ), Kuwait ( $n=27$ ), and Vietnam ( $n=22$ ). It was also important to note that According to American Exam Services, an English test preparation company, reported that Arizona State University had the *lowest* English proficiency exam score requirements in the country ([americanexamservice.com](http://americanexamservice.com)). For example, the TOEFL exam – the most common English proficiency exam taken to enter American universities – has been scaled in four categories; reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The possible scores for each section range from 1-30 resulting in a maximum score of 120. ASU requires a 61 (out of a maximum score of 120) for admission.

International students have been entitled to all student-centered services available to domestic students. These services included those of an administrative, social, and academic nature. Administrative services traditionally included admissions, advising, and career services. Further, the W. P. Carey School of Business also emphasized importance of social community, as demonstrated by the services of the Office of Student Engagement and its numerous activities, events, and programs. And as expected, there

were a host of academic services provided to ensure students had the resources they needed to be academically successful. These services included tutoring centers, writing centers, supplemental instruction, online tutoring, math coaching programs, peer mentorship, and career services support.

In addition to these services, and due to the linguistic and cultural issues facing many non-native English-speaking students (NNEs), the W. P. Carey School of Business created the Global Education Center. The Global Education Center was unique in the world of higher business education. Many other business programs may have provided language or cultural support to their foreign students, but these services were offered through the university. The Global Education Center was a dedicated, international student resource center. In fact, the W. P. Carey School of Business was the only Top-25 business school with its own dedicated resource center for international students (S. Taylor, personal communication, April 12, 2017). Its mission was to provide linguistic, academic, social, and cultural support resources. The Global Education Center aligned its services and delivery to the needs of the international student community; nevertheless, the resources were also utilized by domestic students interested in interacting with the international student community.

The focus of the Global Education Center was to engage with students. To help them develop the skills – linguistic, academic, social, and cultural – to better integrate with their domestic classmates and interact with their domestic faculty member, it offered 20+ hours a week of student-centered services. These services included pronunciation classes, presentation skills, teamwork workshops, and grammar and proofreading services, as well as conversation clubs, social outings, and cultural events.

Since arriving at Arizona State University in 2011, I have listened to native-English speakers (NESs) trying to communicate with the international student population. I have witnessed the interactions. I have seen the disconnect. I have observed students stoically standing, not engaging, not asking questions, and feigning understanding. I have watched as faculty and staff members delivered their message without regard for their audience. As a result, I feel I understand why there have been communicative disconnect between staff members and students. The reasons were abundant. The domestic deliverers spoke fast. They used idioms and expressions. They used phrasal verbs in all their grammatically complex glory. They did not appropriately check for comprehension. They treated all students as linguistic equals with the same expectations and abilities. They did not grade their language – modify their delivery – to make their message more accessible to the listener. They did not consider the cultural implications at play in a communicative dynamic. Domestic faculty and staff members often have assumed a level of fluency not necessary possessed by students. They were not talking *with* students; they are talking *at* students. There did not seem to be intercultural competence to ensure that students were being supported as they should.

These missteps were likely not intentional nor indifferent. It was not necessarily a sign of apathy when speakers did not consider factors involved with effective and efficient communication. Goethe suggested that we should never take as malice that which might be indifference, ignorance, or incompetence. Advisors, admissions counselors, mentors, resident assistants, tutors, and professors were skilled professionals and were trained in their respective fields. It was not unreasonable when they assumed fluency that was not present. Therefore, it was important to provide professional

development to professional staff members to broaden their skillset and improve their performance when working with non-native English-speaking students. To do this, it was important to understand the current dynamic between these two entities. Intercultural competence – whose meaning will be unpacked, dissected, and discussed in Chapter 2 – was the first step to ensuring that international students are equal participants in communication (Zhu, 2011; Bennett 2001, 2016).

### **Previous Cycles of Research**

It is this concept – the possession of intercultural competence among domestic university and staff members – along with my observations which prompted my first cycle of research. I needed to ensure that the problem of practice I've observed was indeed a problem in need of a solution. It was the intent of these previous cycles to validate and justify my research interests.

In the Cycle 0 research, I found that my initial problem of practice – that is, the difficulties in communication between domestic staff members and international students – did indeed exist. Through survey and semi-structured interviews, academic advisors confirmed that language and culture impeded effective communication.

During my Cycle 1 research, I explored how domestic staff members felt about their ability to effectively communicate with their international students. Specifically, I inquired about how they felt in terms of being culturally, empathetically, and linguistically capable of engaging with their international students. I asked how they felt about the effect of these capabilities. Results from this cycle demonstrate that advising staff members further confirmed presence of the problem of practice and elaborated on their awareness – or lack thereof – of the influence of culture, empathy, and language on

effective communication. This cycle confirmed the viability of the professional development component I was considering.

In my Cycle 2 research, I sought to determine how academic advisors felt about their intercultural competence in terms of culture, empathy, and language. The results of this research led me to believe that advising staff members possessed inconsistent knowledge of intercultural competence, it’s criteria, use, or tangible benefits. This cycle has informed my intervention in that it supported the necessity of instructing staff members on the importance of intercultural competence.

I provide a more in-depth presentation of each cycle, including findings, explanations, influences, and conclusions, in subsequent chapters.

Table 1  
*Summary of Action Research Concurrent Mixed-Methods Design and Process*

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Purpose and research questions</b>	<b>Methodology and methods</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Actions for the next cycle</b>
<b>Cycle 0 Fall ‘17</b>	<p>Primary purpose/s:            Confirm presence of problem of practice.</p> <p>RQ1: What do faculty and staff members believe are the barriers to effective and efficient communication between domestic faculty and staff members and international students?</p>	<p><i>Mixed Methods</i>;            conducted semi-structured interviews of faculty and staff members and collected survey data to learn perceptions of their interactions with international students</p>	<p>Faculty and staff members confirmed presence of problem of practice. Language and culture do form a barrier to effective communication. Many advisors do not know how to effectively modify their communication to</p>	<p>Conduct further research to unpack current cycle results</p>

	RQ2: How, and to what extent, do domestic faculty and staff members currently modify their delivery when communicating with international students?		increase comprehension.	
<b>Cycle 1 Spring '18</b>	<p>Primary purpose/s: Focus scope of the study three specific barriers to intercultural communication: culture, empathy and language</p> <p>RQ1: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves <b>culturally</b> competent to effectively communicate with NNES?</p> <p>RQ2: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves <b>empathetically</b> competent to effectively communicate with NNESs?</p> <p>RQ3: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves <b>linguistically</b> competent to effectively communicate with NNESs?</p>	<i>Mixed-methods</i> ; piloted the intervention (a three-part professional development), followed by semi-structured interviews, collected pre- and post-survey data on the influence of the intervention.	Advising staff members further confirmed presence of the problem of practice and elaborated on their awareness – or lack thereof – of the impact of culture, empathy and language on effective communication. This cycle confirmed the viability of the professional development.	Modify existing workshops taking Cycle 1 results into consideration; unpack ‘empathy’, more linguistic strategies, include more cultural dimensions



<p><b>Cycle 2 Fall '18</b></p>	<p>Primary purpose/s: Determine how academic advisors feel about their intercultural competence in terms of culture, empathy and language</p> <p>RQ 1: To what extent do you feel <b>culturally competent</b> to ensure your NNES students optimize their advising sessions?</p> <p>RQ 2: How and to what extent do you employ your <b>intercultural competence</b> in your interaction with your NNES students?</p>	<p><i>Mixed-methods</i>; conducted semi-structured interviews of faculty and staff members and collected survey data to learn perceptions of the meaning and use of <b>intercultural competence</b>.</p>	<p>Advising staff members displayed inconsistent knowledge of intercultural competence, it's <b>criteria, employment or tangible benefits</b>.</p>	<p>Revise, implement and conduct intervention to <b>explain, demonstrate</b> and <b>espouse</b> the value of intercultural competence.</p>
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### **Purpose of Research and Research Questions**

In this study, I examined how culture, empathy, and language modification can inform to **intercultural competence** leading to effective and efficient communication between domestic faculty and staff members and non-native English-speaking students. Based on the information provided in Table 1, I used the following research questions to guide my endeavors for my final cycle of research.

1. How and to what extent did staff members consider themselves culturally competent to effectively communicate with NNES?
2. How and to what extent did staff members consider themselves empathetically competent to effectively communicate with NNES?
3. How and to what extent did staff members consider themselves linguistically competent to effectively communicate with NNES?

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

The subsequent chapters in this dissertation detail my efforts to justify my goals, validate my methods, and present the results of professional development intervention. In Chapter 2, I focused on the underlying theoretical frameworks and literature on which my endeavors were founded. It also describes in more detail the previous cycles of research informing the latest iteration of my intervention. In chapter 3, I explained the methodology for this research. It contains a description of the participants and settings, the intervention, the instruments and data sources, as well as, the data analysis employed.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES, AND TERMS GUIDING THE PROJECT

*America and England are two nations  
divided by a common language.  
~ George Bernard Shaw*

In chapter 1, I delved into the context for my study explaining that the substantial increase in international enrollment necessitated an increase in domestic staff members international competence. Through the information provided by the Institute of International Education, coupled with the ASU FactSheets, it was clear international students will continue to constitute a large portion of the ASU classroom environment. Further, between my local context and my previous cycles of research, the need for international competence will only increase. This is why it is my intent to provide an intervention to improve domestic staff members' international competence.

Yet, when embarking on a journey such as this, it is important to provide a framework which guides this research. First, to facilitate the content in Chapter 2, some supporting scholarship is identified which confirms issues arising from increased international student enrollment. This is followed by definitions of key terms. Following this, the two key theoretical frameworks used are described as guiding principles for the research. Specifically, the problem of intercultural competence is explained through Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1986) and Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986). After each framework and its significance is explained, several framework-supported studies were presented that informed the study.

## **The Need for Intercultural Competence**

Most international students reported some degree of culture shock after embarking on their studies in the United States (Furham, 1988; Olaniran, 1996, 1999; Selvadurai, 1992; Thomas & Althen, 1989; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). There were myriad manifestations of the stress caused by culture shock, including isolation, rejection, powerlessness, and anxiety (Olberg, 1960). These are typical experiences when first encountering culturally distinct attitudes, values, and behaviors; and although these may not have affected all international students, it is reported frequently enough to be considered an issue (Olberg, 1960; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). The deleterious effects of culture shock can be ameliorated by the acquisition of American friends (Bochner, McCleod, & Lin, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985), the creation of strong social networks (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988), or participation in American cultural activities, clubs, and events (Schram & Lauver, 1988). And although not necessarily reducing the effects of culture shock, some international students focused on academic achievement as a coping mechanism (Chu, Yeh, Klein, Alexander, & Miller, 1971; Dozier, 2001).

However, culture shock affects students, and the strategies above were primarily student-centered in nature. It has been widely reported that international students felt they were not culturally understood (Adelman, 1998; Hughes, 2004; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Further, it is also widely reported that students feel that they would be more successful if their culture were appreciated as a factor in their performance (Lee & Rice, 2007; Zhao, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). Lee & Rice (2007) emphasized not all issues faced by international students were simply matters

of adjustment, “but that some of the more serious challenges are due to inadequacies within the host society” (p. 381).

As expected, the increased enrollment of international students has been seen to have underlying economic motivations. As each student was generally a four-year, out-of-state tuition-paying student, many felt the movement to see the student body as ‘customers’ and ‘consumers’ (Habu, 2000; Levin, 2002; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004) often neglected the experience once the students were enrolled. Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas (2000) and Beoku-Betts (2004) reported a lack of empathy on the part of university faculty and staff members which contributed to an ambivalence about creating an intercultural competence. Other studies reported some universities may “purposefully or inadvertently marginalize international students” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 388).

Marginalization can be due to the perception of the language barriers – perceived or legitimate – that were as seen formidable barriers to success (Redden, 2014; Pappamihiel, 2003; XX, XX). Classrooms were often seen as petri dishes of cultural conundrums with faculty members often being unsure what happened, why, or what to do about it (Hsu & Huang, 2017; Dwyer, Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, & Fus, 2004). Increased concerns of the rates of violations of academic integrity were on the rise as less-academically-prepared students were being admitted (Click, 2014; Amsberry, 2009), and now anti-plagiarism detection is a billion-dollar business (McMurtrie, 2019). Even resources intended to be resources for and justify the admission of non-native English-speaking students, tended to be mismanaged, ill-conceived, and under-utilized by their target audience (Nowacki, 2012; Cross, Holten & Picciotto, 2015). Yet, Schram and Lauver (1988) explained host institutions often acknowledged these challenges as a set of

identifiable and fixable problems, whereas they should rather have begun considering their own important inadequacies as cause for these issues.

### **Benefits of Intercultural Competence**

There were many potential benefits to faculty or staff members who develop intercultural competence. According to Zhu (2011), intercultural competence was an essential component and assurance for effective cultural communication. Zhu provided the salient, accessible example of the Chinese person who felt a British person drove on the ‘wrong’ side of the road. However, as Zhu pointed out, it was not the ‘wrong’ side of the road; it was the ‘left’ side of the road. If the situation cannot be described objectively, the situation is not likely to be understood. This is the crux of competence, according to Zhu, seeing something not as wrong, but different.

Intercultural competence has also been shown to increase positive relationships through effective and efficient communication (Hofstede, 1986, 2001; Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997; Zhu 2011). Those with intercultural competence have the ability to apply their knowledge of culture as a concept, as well as their own personal culture, where they could empathize and see the perspective of the person with whom they were communicating. This higher level of empathy was associated with improved socio-emotional health, as well (Cassels, Chan, Chung & Birch, 2010). Also, intercultural competence increased the likelihood of one attempting to learn more about someone – seen as risk-taking – before rendering judgment about miscommunication or ill-communication (Zhu, 2011).

Thus, interculturally competent individuals are more likely to adapt their communication strategies based on the person sitting across from them (Bennett, 1986,

2011; Zhu 2011). They were less likely to try to improve communication by simply speaking slower or LOUDER. It didn't work (Zhao, 1997). Those exhibiting intercultural competence were more likely to be open, caring and possess the mutual respect necessary to willingly modify their communicative practices.

More than relationships and communication styles improved with intercultural competence. For example, Yershova, DeJaegher and Mestenhauser (2002) and Bennett and Salonen (2007) discussed the conundrum of culturally influenced cognition. Western-based methods of assessment differed from Eastern-based methods. Yershova et al. specifically called into question the acceptance of the universality of Western analytical constructs. They argued Western academic education cannot accurately assess critical thinking and comparative thinking processes formed in an Eastern-based education system. Bennett and Salonen (2007) built on this by arguing that "campuses have traditionally privileged certain styles for teaching and learning" and continued to add that "diversifying our cognitive styles, learning styles and communication styles has become an essential response to our diversified populations" (p. 5).

### **Definition of Terms**

Reasonable people can disagree on the meaning of various terms when used in a cross-disciplinary fashion. The purpose of providing these definitions was to provide the reader with a point of reference with respect to what the author was presenting. Therefore, in this section, I explained terms used within the context of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, itself, as well as cultural awareness, cultural empathy, linguistic modification, were described. The term Non-native English-Speaking students (NNESs) certainly requires some unpacking, as did fluency.

**Intercultural Competence.** Traced back to the 1960s, intercultural competence has been a topic of serious study since anthropologist Edward T. Hall published *Silent Language* in 1959. Generally, intercultural competence has referred to as an effective and appropriate communicative interaction between two people from distinct cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) asserted intercultural competence was “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between two people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 7). It was important to note that within various fields of study intercultural competence, intercultural effectiveness, and intercultural communication are used interchangeably (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Researchers also agreed the components of intercultural competence were cognitive (knowledge, awareness), affective (emotions) and behavioral (skills) (Baker, 2012; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Hall, 1976; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Incorporating these three components, for the purpose of my research, I defined intercultural competence as:

- The ability to consider and synthesize intercultural awareness, empathetic competence, and linguistic competence to effectively and efficiently facilitate communication between persons from different cultural backgrounds.

To fully realize the previous definitions, three more definitions were presented. For the purpose of my research, I chose the definition proposed by Will Baker (2012) that intercultural awareness:



“is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication” (p. 5).

Providing a universally accepted definition of empathy was difficult because there has been substantial debate, and less consensus, on the meaning of empathy (Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010). However, it generally was agreed that empathy has cognitive processes and emotional dimensions (Reynolds & Scott, 2000; Stein, 1989). Because of this, I have chosen to define empathy as Davis (1996), Goldman (1993), Strayer & Robert (2004) and Weisman (1996) have suggested – “a set of efforts and initiatives emphasizing or thinking ‘with’ the other, rather than feeling ‘for’ or thinking on behalf of that person” (Bozkurt & Ozden, 2010, p. 231).

To finally clarify my definition of intercultural competencies, I have explained linguistic modification. This term has become preferable to the previous nomenclature of linguistic simplification of late. In the past, opponents of linguistic simplification have likened this to lowering expectations; a method which seemed to indicate a dumbing down of the content.

Further, previous studies have demonstrated that even minor changes in the lexicon of content can raise student comprehension (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Abedi, Lord & Plummer, 1997). Therefore, I have chosen Abedi’s (2007) definition of linguistic modification as strategies taken “to reduce or eliminate unnecessary linguistic complexity that confounds the content of assessment” (p. 14).

**Non-Native English-Speaking Student.** This term deserved to be unpacked and explained. As mentioned in Chapter 1, almost 1.1 million international students were studying in the United States, representing 5.5% of the total student population (IIE FastFact, 2018). Not all of these students came from countries where English is not the primary language, and many of those who did speak English well.

It is important to understand that Non-native English-Speaking did **not** mean a lack of fluency. There were millions of non-native English speakers who, either through bilingualism or second language acquisition, would be considered ‘fluent.’ Hundreds of millions of Indians are bilingual, trilingual, quadrilingual, or ‘education-English’ speakers. However, for the purposes of this research, the NNEs of interest are those with lower English proficiency – those for whom lack of fluency was an impediment to academic success. After all, as mentioned in chapter 1, ASU has the lowest TOEFL entrance requirement in the country.

Another term that needed to be unpacked is fluency. The layperson has often bandied the term fluent around as a goal of language learning; however, asking what that meant was more problematic. Further, even among linguists there was little consensus about an expanded definition. That being said, fluency, defined in research on language learning has often been centered around accuracy and complexity (Ellis, 2005). Other factors included fluidity, which was natural, coherent and easy, as opposed to labored, halting and difficult production (Chambers, 1997).

The final distinction of relevance with respect to this problem of practice revolved around the definition of native speakers of English (NE) and non-native speakers of

English (NNE). For the research conducted and the intervention described herein I have provided Joseph Lee's (2007) six criteria for NEs as:

- The individual acquired the language in early childhood
- The individual has intuitive knowledge of the language
- The individual is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse
- The individual is competent in communication
- The individual identifies or is identified by a language community
- The individual has a dialect accent (including the official dialect)

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

To tackle a topic which included such robust themes as culture, empathy and language, it was important to create some guidelines, without which a fatal foray into the dark forest was inevitable. Therefore, I have chosen three theoretical frameworks to provide the guideposts. These frameworks were Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1986, 2001), Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986, 1993, 2013) and Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977, 1997). These theories provided a foundation through which faculty and staff members could develop cultural awareness, which facilitates empathy (Zhu, 2011). Empathy supported the adaptation of actions (Bennett, 1986). In this case, the adaptation of actions came in the form of communication modification to improve comprehension (Abedi & Sato, 2007). Finally, this process ended in a feeling of confidence and ability in one's own performance Bandura (2008).

*National culture cannot be changed,  
but you should understand and respect it.  
~ Geert Hofstede*

**Cultural Dimensions Theory.** As noted in Chapter 1, the Institute for International Education (2017) reported American universities were aggressively recruiting students from overseas. These students could be native English speakers or non-native English speakers, with the two largest groups of these being Indian and Chinese students, respectively (International Institute of Education, 2017). Nevertheless, these students had cultures distinct from the cultures they encountered in American universities. Because of this, the intended intervention needs to be grounded in a framework that analyzed and quantified cultural distinctions between students from various countries and the American staff members and faculty members who instructed them.

To do this, I have drawn upon Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1984, 2001) to explain the differences in experiences between non-native English-speaking students and the domestic faculty and staff members. A Dutch social psychologist and former IBM employee, Hofstede pioneered quantifiable cross-cultural analysis. After founding and managing the Personnel Research Department at IBM, Hofstede collected more than 100,000 questionnaires on personal culture. Using these as a basis, he formulated six different categories – or dimensions – that could quantifiably distinguish the cultural values of different countries (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). The dimensions, as unpacked by Hofstede (2011), were:

- **Power Distance Index (PDI).** The power distance index was defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power was distributed unequally” (p. 9). In this dimension, inequality and power is perceived from the followers, or the lower level. A higher degree on the Index pointed to a hierarchy is clearly established

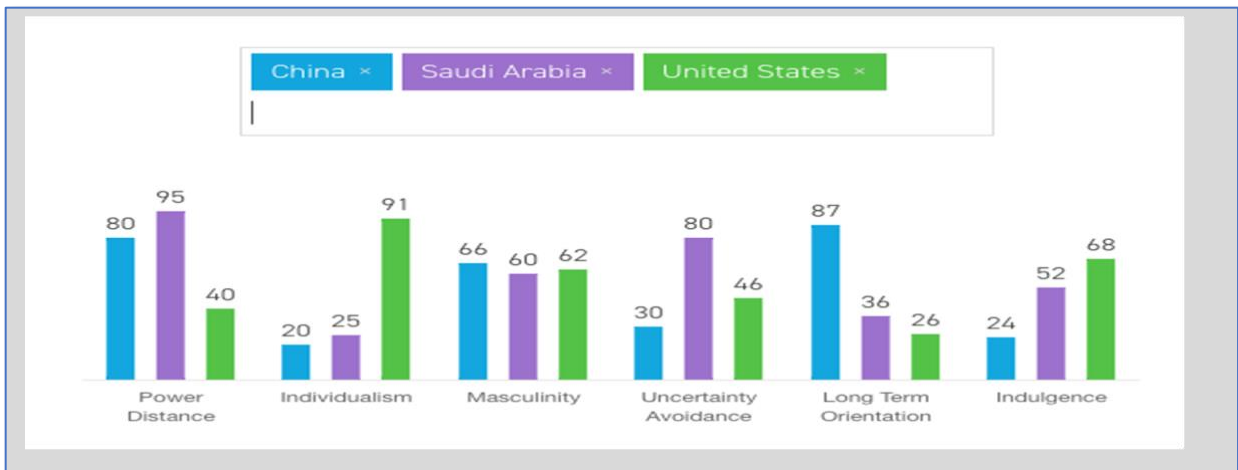
and executed in society, accepted by society without doubt or reason. A lower degree of the Index signified that people questioned authority and attempted to distribute power

- **Individualism vs. collectivism (IDV).** This index explores the “degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups” (p. 11). Individualistic societies have loose ties that often only related individuals to his/her immediate family. They emphasize the “I” versus the “we.” Its counterpart, collectivism, describes a society in which tightly integrated relationships tied extended families and others into in-groups. These in-groups were laced with undoubted loyalty and support from one another when conflict arose with another in-group.
- **Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI).** The uncertainty avoidance index was defined as “a society's tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 10), in which people embraced or averted an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. Societies that were ranked highly this index chose stiff codes of behavior, guidelines, laws, and generally relied on absolute truth. They also tended not to subscribe to the belief that a single, solitary truth dictated everything or that was knowable by society. A lower degree in this index shows more acceptance of differing thoughts/ideas. Society tended to impose fewer regulations, ambiguity was more accustomed to, and the environment was more free flowing
- **Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS).** Hofstede further explained (p. 12) that masculinity was defined as “a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success.” Its counterpart represents “a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life.” Women in the respective societies tended to display different values. In feminine societies, they shared modest and caring views equally with men. In more masculine societies, women were more emphatic and competitive, but men were noticeably more so. This means that a gap between male and female values was still recognized. This concept was frequently seen as taboo in highly masculine societies.

- **Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation (LTO).** This dimension associated the connection of the past with the current and future challenges and actions. A lower degree in this index (short-term) indicated that traditions were honored and held, and that steadfastness was a cultural value. Societies with a high degree in this index (long-term) viewed adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as necessities.
- **Indulgence vs. restraint (IND).** As a measure of happiness, this dimension described whether or not simple joys are fulfilled. Indulgence was defined as “a society that allowed relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun” (p. 15). Restraint was defined as “a society that controls gratification of needs and regulated it by means of strict social norms” (pg. 15). Indulgent individuals believed themselves to be in control of their own life and emotions; restrained individuals believed other factors dictated their life and emotions.

Visual representation of how different cultures scored on this instrument was provided in Figure 1. Created through Hofstede’s website, *Hofstede-Insights.com*, the graphic compared and contrasted three different countries – China, Saudi Arabia, and the United States – on the basis of the six dimensions described above. These similarities and difference were clearly depicted. It was easy to contrast the United States and China which related to Power Distance, or between China and both the United State and Saudi Arabia in terms of long-term orientation. When considering the various factors when interlocutors of different cultures engage, information like this can be very powerful.

Figure 1:  
*A Cultural Dimensions Comparison between Three Countries*



Indeed, Hofstede (2001, 2006) asserts that the recognition, instruction, and syntheses of these dimensions can reduce conflict, increase cooperation and facilitate communication. When examining the discourse between American university faculty and staff members with international NNEs, I look at these dimensions to see where the communication breaks down. It is the examination of these dimensions within interlocutor discourse that forms the basis of my intervention. For example, the disparity between the various scores of power distance was indicative of how likely a student was to disagree with a professor or staff member – the higher the score the less likely a student was to contradict someone in a higher position.

**Limitations of Cultural Dimensions.** It is important to note that whenever one speaks about culture, one must put it in a context. It is impossible to make a claim that, “In China, they ...” or, “In India, they ...”. With a population of 1.4 billion and 1.2 billion, respectively, there were surely exceptions to any such statement (US Fact Sheet, 2015). When talking about culture, we have spoken in generalizations, realizing that our

comments were starting points of our inquiries. There were exceptions to all cultural statements, and as such, people should be treated as individuals; if we did not accept this, we have moved from generalization into stereotypes. Hofstede's work (1986, 2001, 2011) has been criticized for lumping all members of a culture into monolithic groups without taking into consideration factors such as socio-economic status, minority/majority status, or gender. Another consideration was that significant amounts of his original research relied solely on IBM employees, certainly not an appropriate cross-section of society (Triandis, 1993). By clearly stating the demographics of the participants, the purpose of the research and its methodology, the researcher hoped to take this into consideration when designing and conducting the intervention described in Chapter 3.

**Relevant Studies Using Cultural Dimension Theory.** The continuing globalization of education has resulted in increased studies focusing on the benefits of cultural awareness in the classroom. These studies have focused on how participants in the educational dyad are influenced by their own culture. Researchers have used scores on the index to explain myriad social interactions between student and teacher. Prowse and Goddard (2010) used Power Index to explain communicative issues between Qatari students and Canadian professors. Their results indicated that power distance was the reason the Qatari students were reluctant disagree with their professors. Kemp (2013) examined the dimension of uncertainty avoidance to evaluate student performance in blended classrooms in the United Arab Emirates and found that the Emirati were not comfortable without specific directions for assignments. Lim (2009) studied student performance and anxiety as evaluated through the dimensional lens of



individualism/collectivism and found that in cultures with high scores of collectivism anxiety rose when students felt isolated.

In another such study, Cronje (2007) attempted to determine “the extent to which Hofstede’s static quantitative research could use as a basis for an essentially qualitative dynamic interpretation” (p. 597). To do this the researcher evaluated twelve graduate students from the Sudan University of Science and Technology and three faculty members from the University of South Africa. These two groups were appropriate because they exhibited extreme differences in many of Hofstede’s dimensions. The dynamics between the students and faculty were examined using various data sources such as research journals, student term papers, electronic artifacts, *PowerPoint* presentation, discussions, and emails. The duration of this study allowed the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data to overlap.

It is important to note that Cronje’s (2007) sample size was small,  $n = 9$ . He explained that his results could not be generalized. He also acknowledged he did not consider the language difference between the Arabic-speaking students and English-speaking faculty. However, his goal was to ‘give voice’ to Hofstede’s quantitative data. With this in mind, Cronje found that Hofstede’s PDI explained the students’ lack of self-confidence, as well as the fact that taking initiative was not something with which the students were comfortable. In addition, based on his qualitative research, Cronje argued the scores on the uncertainty avoidance dimension compounded the issues fostered in the Power Distance dimension.

Economides (2008) produced another study based on the cultural dimensions theoretical framework. In his research, Economides conducted a mixed-methods study

designed to determine the effectiveness of adapting the collaborative learning environment to a learner's cultural profile. This profile was based on culture specific cultural dimensions.

In that study, Economides found a learner may not belong exclusively to a cultural extreme of a dimension but has characteristics of a dimension along the continuum. In addition, the researcher offered the following conclusions.

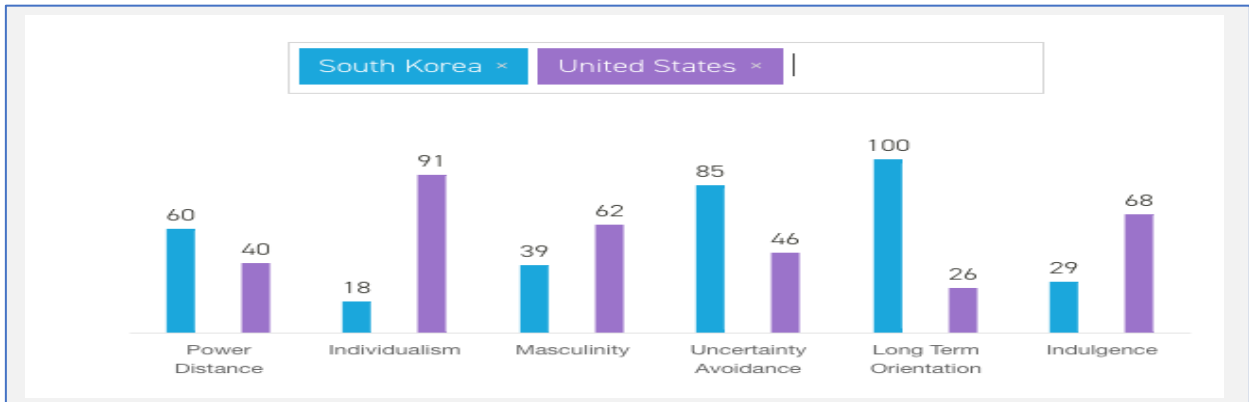
1. Cultural background may affect motivation
2. Cultural background may affect attitude toward learning and e-learning
3. Cultural background may affect learning styles
4. Cultural background may affect computer usage in education
5. Cultural background may affect learning behavior and strategies
6. Cultural background may affect academic achievement

Although these conclusions may have seemed obvious, it provided a solid foundation for research into my problem of practice, my Cycle 0 and Cycle 1 research, as well as my interventions. For those potential participants in my intervention that feel cultural consideration may be bit new-age or touchy-feely, these studies provided further evidence that culture needed to be considered in the educational dyad.

Although Economides used Hofstede's theories to create a learner's cultural profile, other research has focused on instructors and what they could do when armed with this information. Yoo's (2014) study focused on Korean students and American teachers. As my problem of practice was based on faculty/staff members and student dynamics, the results from this study were particularly relevant. Specifically, Hofstede's dimension of Power Distance Index (PDI) was discussed and is applicable due to the

nature of the high and low context cultures of the interlocutors in my problem of practice, as evidenced in Figure 2.

Figure 2  
*Cultural Dimensions of Yoo's (2014) Study of Korean Students and American Teachers*



This disparity, coupled with the even greater disparity in the individualism dimension, explained many of the issues American teachers experienced with their Korean students.

For example, in her work with Korean students, Yoo (2014) moved away from the traditional Grammar Translation method – in which there was no speaking or listening practiced – of L2 acquisition towards the more conventional communicative approach. However, because Korea has a very high PDI score, the communicative approach was often met with resistance because of its requirement of direct communication between the instructor (higher in status) and the student (lower in status). Further, honest communication – in the Western sense – entails disagreement, conflict, clarification, and disharmony (Baker, 2003) all of which are avoided in cultures with high PDI. Moreover, the communicative approach focused on the individual producing the desired language goals. It was difficult to hide among the group in the communicative

approach, and the significant disparity between individualism scores only amplified the issue.

Yoo (2014) concluded by indicating that even though Korean classes were large (30-45 students) with students of varying ability (beginner to advanced), awareness of cultural dimensions allowed her to create lessons and engage students more effectively. Awareness of the cultural dimensions – PDI in particular – allowed Yoo (2014) to consider students' needs, motivations and preferred instructor/student dynamic and adjust her teaching accordingly. Thus, it was the awareness of these cultural considerations that I intended to build into my intervention designed to provide faculty and staff members more effective skills when communicating with non-native English-speaking students.

Hofstede's framework provided me with a foundation to design a professional development workshop on cultural awareness. It was necessary to provide an accessible, meaningful depiction of culture. By explaining the different dimensions and providing examples of the differences, the participants could begin to see there are reasons that their students – as well as themselves – did what they did. If a student did not make eye contact, it may not have been rudeness. It may have been the student is from a culture ranked with a high degree of Power Distance. If a student was late for a meeting; it may not have been intentionally disrespectful to the advisor. Perhaps students came from a culture where the long-term orientation score indicated a more flexible view of deadlines and times. If participants in my intervention can understand that culture often explained perceived slights, then they could begin to develop cultural empathy (Zhu, 2011; Cassels, Chan, Chung, et al, 2010; Polat & Ogay Barka, 2014).

*The critical element in the expansion of intercultural learning is not the fullness with which one knows each culture, but degree to which the process of cross-cultural learning, communication, and human relations have been mastered.*  
~Hoopes (1981)

**Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity.** To make the language modification necessary to increase communication, Participants in this intervention – academic advisors with over 90 students each – must have wanted to adapt their communicative styles. They needed to want to know how to better communicate. They need to want to become interculturally competent. They needed empathy. According to Zhu (2011), intercultural empathy is essential component and ensures effective cultural communication. Zhu provided the salient, accessible example of the Chinese person who felt a British person drives on the ‘wrong’ side of the road. However, as Zhu pointed out, it was not the ‘wrong’ side of the road; it’s the ‘left’ side of the road. If the situation can’t be described objectively, the situation is not likely to be understood.

Cultural empathy has been dissected, unpacked, defined and redefined for decades. Cultural empathy, as defined by Ruben (1976), was “the capacity to clearly project an interest in others, as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete and accurate sense of another’s thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences” (p. 338). Polat & Ogay Barka (2014) suggested that cultural empathy was the ability to understand the emotional states of people in the target culture, and when doing so, decreasing the psychological barriers of that target culture. Others have expressed that cultural empathy was the ability to ‘read’ other cultures (van der Zee, Zaal, & Piekstra, 2003). It could

also be described as the “recognition of the behaviors, ideas, and emotions of individuals from different cultural histories” (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000; p. 25).

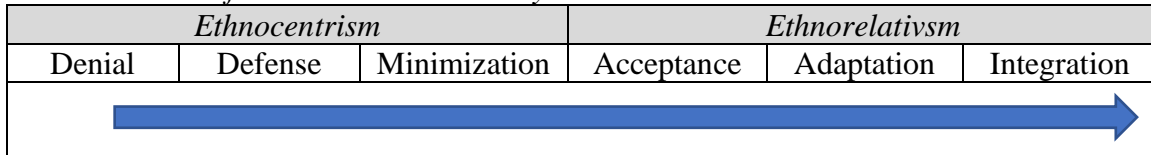
However, it was important to note that subscribing to someone else’s culture did not entail eschewing one’s own culture, as had been the common pushback in the development of cultural empathy in the past (Zhu, 2011). Nor did it mean the wholesale acceptance of another culture’s values, practices, traditions and beliefs (Bennett, 1986; Bennett, 1993; van der Zee, Zaal, & Piekstra, 2003; Zhu, 2011).

For the purpose of this endeavor, cultural empathy and its importance to intercultural competence was based on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennet, 1986, 1993, 2001; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003) and founded on the ability to avoid the evaluation of other cultures based on preconceptions emanating from the standards and customs of one’s own culture. This ability was not innate. This ability needed to be practiced, developed, and exercised. It was this ability – empathy – that the second workshop of my intervention sought to develop.

In his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), Bennett posited a six-stage continuum of sensitivity moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. According to Bennett, ethnocentrism occurred when people unconsciously experience their own culture as "central to reality". In this stage, cultural differences were seen as a threat – implicitly or explicitly – to the reality of their own cultural experience. Moving along the continuum, Bennett explains that people moved towards ethnorelativism, or the conscious realization a cultural context encoded all behaviors, including their own. The six stages along the continuum – which formed the basis of the empathy workshop of

the intervention were explained below (Bennett1986, 1993, 2001, 2016; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003) and depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3:  
*The Continuum of Intercultural Sensitivity*



***Denial.*** In the first stage of ethnocentrism, denial, people have not yet constructed the category of “cultural difference.” To them, the world was completely their current experience of it, and alternatives to that experience were literally unimaginable. People of other cultures, insofar as they were perceived at all, seemed less human, lacking the “real” feelings and thoughts of one’s own kind. Cultural strangers existed as simpler forms in the environment to be tolerated, exploited, or eliminated as necessary. This worldview state was the default condition of normal socialization. People could stay in denial their whole lives, as long as they did not have much contact with cultural difference.

***Defense.*** In the second stage of ethnocentrism, defense, people had become more adept at perceiving cultural difference. Exposure to media images of other cultures, or the kind of casual contact that occurs in corporate settings may have set the stage for this level of experience. Other people still seemed less real (i.e., less human) than one’s own kind, but they now existed in perception as stereotypes with whom they must deal. Because one’s own culture was still experienced as the only true reality, the existence of the other cultures was threatening to that reality. To counter the threat, the world was

organized into ‘us’ and ‘them’ associated with the denigration of ‘them’ and the superiority of ‘us.’

**Minimization.** In the third and final stage of ethnocentrism, minimization, the threat of Defense had been resolved by assuming a basic similarity among all human beings. Differences that had been threatening in defense were subsumed into already-existing, familiar categories. These categories were of two types: physical universalism, wherein, for instance, all human beings have the same needs; and transcendent universalism wherein, for instance, everyone was subject to the same spiritual principles, whether they knew it or not. Those experiencing minimization recognized cultural variation in institutions and customs (objective culture) and may have been quite interested in those kinds of differences. However, they held tightly to the idea that beneath these differences beats the heart of a person pretty much like them. Because they were still lacking cultural self-awareness, people holding to Minimization could not see that their characterizations of similarity were usually based on their own culture.

**Acceptance.** In the first stage of ethnorelativism, acceptance, people discovered their own cultural context, and therefore they could accept the existence of different cultural contexts. People at this stage could construct the culture-general frameworks that allowed them to generate a range of relevant cultural contrasts among many cultures. As a result, they were not necessarily experts in one or more specific cultures (although they might also be that); rather, they were adept at identifying how cultural differences in general operated in a wide range of human interactions. Acceptance did not mean agreement—some cultural difference may be judged negatively—but the judgment was not ethnocentric in the sense of denying the culture that made them who they were.



***Adaptation.*** In the second stage of ethnorelativism, adaptation, people were able to shift their cultural frames of reference; that is, they were able to look at the world “through different eyes” and intentionally change their behavior to communicate more effectively in another culture. This was a conscious act, necessitating an awareness of one’s own culture and a set of contrasts to the target culture. Shifting cultural frames of reference could be thought of as intercultural empathy, which involved temporarily setting aside one’s own worldview assumptions and intentionally taking on a specific, different set of beliefs.

***Integration.*** In the last stage of ethnorelativism, integration, people extended their ability to perceive events in cultural context to include their own definitions of identity. For these individuals, the process of shifting cultural perspective became a normal part of self, and so the concept of identity itself became a more fluid notion. Thus, one began to see one’s self as “moving around in cultures,” no longer completely at the center of any one or combination of cultures.

By providing a workshop based on DMIS, participants could be able to develop the empathy to become interculturally competent. An effective training session could potentially provide several benefits: culturally appropriate language skills, culturally appropriate behavior, and cultural self-awareness (Triandis, 1977; Gudykunst & Hammer; 1983; Bennett, 1986). These skills, coupled with the cultural awareness and language modification strategies from the other two workshops, could facilitate the development of intercultural competence.

*Ship in distress:  
Mayday! Mayday!  
We are sinking! We are sinking!*

*German Coast Guard:  
Vell, vaht ahh you sinking about?*

**Linguistic Modification Approach.** Once participants have learned enough about culture, they develop empathy for their students. At this point they are more likely to effect changes to increase comprehensibility (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). However, they need to know what changes to make and how to make them in increase comprehensibility. As mentioned before, it is not simply a case of speaking slower or louder. In fact, whether someone speaks fast is hard for the listener to objectively determine. Laver (1995) wrote that, “The analysis of phenomena such as rate is dangerously open to subjective bias. Listeners’ judgements rapidly begin to lose objectivity when the utterance concerned comes either from an unfamiliar accent or (even worse) from an unfamiliar language” (p. 542). Whether we feel we speak fast or not is irrelevant because the determination is made by the listener. Therefore, deliberate, effective modifications need to be made to ensure the listener feels the language is accessible.

Linguistic modification approach (LMA) has been a popular topic in education since the 1990s when California high school mathematics scores were determined to be decidedly lower for ESL students with the same mathematical ability as native English-speakers (Abedi, 2004; Abedi & Sato, 2006). The disparity in these scores are the result of, according to LMA, the inaccessibility of the content used as the medium of assessment. LMA is a theory-based approach to negotiating language barriers between speakers of disparate language proficiency. Linguistic modification entails the altering

the content being delivered to make it more accessible to the listener while keeping the salient content intact (Abedi 2004; Abedi & Sato, 2006; Sato, Rabinowitz, Gallagher & Huang, 2010). In essence, it does not dumb down the content; it simply makes it more likely for the listener to understand.

There are several linguistic features that contribute to the inaccessibility of intended content. These features may slow down a reader, lead to miscommunication or misinterpretation, or cause a listener to miss key components of oral communication. They add to the cognitive load of the student and make it more difficult to deal with concurrent tasks. According to Abedi, Lord & Plummer (1997), common features contributing to inaccessibility include unfamiliar vocabulary, unnecessarily complex grammatical structures, superfluous discourse markers, passive voice, and abstractions.

The application of linguistic modification has been shown to increase comprehensibility by the student (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Abedi, Lord, and Plummer, 1997). The act of rewording of targeted discourse information can increase semantic relations without affecting the content being assessed, as can reducing rare complex grammatical structures like the past perfect tense or non-agentive passive voice constructions.

In 2003, Abedi, Courtney, and Leon examined the results of almost 1,600 eight-grade student National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In this study English Language Learners were given either a bilingual dictionary or a linguistically modified version of the test. The purpose of this study was to determine a more effective way of making the content accessible. The result of this study was that a linguistically modified exam proved

more effective at accessiblizing the content than a dictionary. These results are consistent with other studies by Maihoff (2002), Kiplinger, Haug, and Abedi (2000) and Rivera and Stansfield (2001). Each of these studies determined that linguistically modifying content increased listener comprehension of English Language Learners without negatively affecting native English-speakers.

**Limitations of linguistic modification approach.** Although the use of linguistic modification approach has shown promising results in increasing accessibility, there are some potential limitations in its application. NNESs have a unique set of characteristics that need to be acknowledged and accommodated. First, it is difficult to determine when interacting with an NNES what lexical proficiency he or she may possess (Abedi & Sato, 2006; Sato, et al. 2010). Vocabulary is often acquired in a non-systematic and haphazard manner, so what one NNES may know another from the same cultural background may not.

Another concern with LMA is that it is most often applied without follow-up. When applied in teacher/student dynamic the results of LMA are only seen through the lens of the content delivered. When pressed for comprehension many students reflexively reply in the affirmative that they understand even if they don't (Liu, Anderson, Swierzbis & Thurlow, 1999; Cummins, 2005).

Finally, the reality of communication is that not every idea, concept or thought has a readily accessible synonym. Not every grammatical construction can be reduced. At some point, a listener may not have the base proficiency to genuinely engage in the conversation (Abedi & Sato, 2006). All of these situations are considered limitations to the linguistic modification approach.

*Implications of theoretical constructs on the intervention design.* Based on my previous experiences as a classroom teacher and an administrator, as well as my experiences witnessing faculty/staff members and NNE interactions, these cultural, empathetic, and self-efficacy frameworks were incredibly relevant to my problem of practice. Communication between domestic faculty and staff members and the non-native English-speaking student population could be ineffective, inefficient, or even incoherent. Thus, application of strategies to support development of intercultural competence was warranted.

Intercultural competencies consisted of knowledge, emotions, and skills. The intervention being designed to address this problem of practice incorporates three main constructs: culture (knowledge), empathy (emotions) and language (skills). These are the three pillars on which more effective intercultural competence could be built. The foundational guidance for culture was provided by Hofstede (1985, 2001, 2011), who found six cultural dimensions accounted for the cultural differences between two groups. The foundational guidance for empathy came from Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986, 1993, 2001). The language strategies needed to demonstrate intercultural competence come from Abedi & Sato (2007).

In terms of Hofstede's (1984, 2001) cultural dimensions, the manner in which he deconstructed culture into six accessible categories provided for developing an intervention consistent with dimensions based on the culture of those in the educational alliance. Therefore, if the dyad was composed of American and Chinese, the intervention can focus on Power Distance, Individual/Collective, and Long/Short-Term Orientation. On the other hand, if the dyad was between a Brazilian student and their American

instructor, then Uncertainty Avoidance and Individual/Collective dynamics could be considered. This allowed for individualized, tailored professional development workshops. It also indicated to the participants that sensitivity culture included eschewing a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all endeavor.

The literature on the classroom application of cultural dimensions theory provided specific factors to consider when attempting intercultural discourse, and, as such, had implication for the intervention. Prowse and Goddard (2010), Economides (2008), Cronjé (2011), Kemp (2013), Lim (2009) and Yoo (2014) all examined the effects of Hofstede's dimensions on the educational alliance between interlocutors of different cultures. Within the educational alliance, Cronjé and Yoo demonstrated the effects of Power Distance, whereas Kemp focused on Uncertainty Avoidance, and Lim observed the effects of Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation on classroom anxiety. Further, Economides emphasized that the indices, by definition, were on a continuum and that people from these cultures should be treated individually. The results of these studies all suggest awareness of cultural differences and modifying educational approaches based on these differences were an effective strategy to improve the classroom experience of international students.

The second construct needed for intercultural competence discussed was empathy. The framework for the empathy construct came from relational-cultural theory, an approach aligned with the multicultural and feminism movements in psychology. By focusing on the components of growth-fostering relationships, namely mutual empathy and connection, the therapeutic alliance between patient and counselor becomes stronger and more efficacious (Miller, 2008; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, I& Surrey, 1991;

Miller & Stiver, 1997; Jordan & Hartling, 1999). This approach to growth-fostering relationships framed the workshop on empathy.

Expanding on this in the intervention for the problem of practice, the empathy of the therapeutic alliance was instilled in the academic educational alliance. Sasser (2014) demonstrated that when provided instruction on growth-fostering relationships, individuals could recognize, learned, and used empathy. In addition, Cannon et al (2012) explained that the skills acquired in a 6-week intervention were enough to identify non-mutual relationships and take steps to mutualize them. This was important because results from the Cycle 0 and Cycle 1 research indicated that the faculty and staff members saw interactions with students as non-mutual. They identified these interactions as uni-directional: deliverer of information and recipient of that information. This research in empathy provided the evidence that the proposed intervention can instill mutual empathy in the participants.

The final construct used in the intervention to reduce anxiety and uncertainty was language. Linguistic modification theory focuses on the intention to reduce impeding complexity by deliberately choosing lexicon, grammar, and discourse that make the message easier to understand (Sato, 2007). Lexical selection has proven to be important in increasing listener comprehension (Riley, Green, & Heller, 1983). Studies on modification of input conducted by Abedi, Courtney, and Leon (2003) indicated discourse and grammar also had significant effects on student comprehension. Therefore, language modification theory served as the foundation for the linguistics component of the intervention.

**Intercultural Competencies Workshop Implementation.** The purpose of my intervention is to provide a professional development opportunity for faculty and staff members to develop the three components of intercultural competence – cognitive (knowledge, awareness), affective (emotions) and behavioral (skills), as I have synthesized them – and determine whether the self-same faculty and staff members express an increase in this competence. These components informed the learning outcomes of the three workshops of my intervention.

### *Cognitive/Cultural*

The cognitive aspect which was the foundation of knowledge and awareness (Hall, 1976; Baker, 2012) allowed for creation of a cultural awareness curriculum. Hall stated that ignoring, denying, or neglecting someone’s culture is deleterious and “can be as destructive and potentially dangerous as denying evil” (p. 7).

### *Affective/Empathetic*

Further, the need for the affective component to be addressed manifested itself in the creation of the empathy workshop. Empathy was “essential for healthy relationships” (Cassels, Chan, Chung & Birch, 2010, p. 309) and as such form an important part of my intervention. Affective empathy was how individuals responded to others’ situations and emotions (Feshbach, 1975; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987).

### *Behavioral/Linguistic*

Finally, the Baker (2012), Ruben & Kealey (1979), Hall (1976) and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) claim the behavioral component was skill based. That is, it is the ability to modify actions to increase effective interactions between people from different cultures. Thus, participants in the current situation would realize the importance of lexical



selection, grammatical choice, and discourse have in communication and alter their styles accordingly. All of these linguistic features have been identified as increasing listener comprehension (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Abedi, Lord, & Plummer, 1997).

## CHAPTER 3:

### METHOD

*Research is an organized method for keeping  
you reasonably dissatisfied with what you have.*  
- Charles F. Kettering

In chapter 1, I provided the impetus for my research and in Chapter 2 offered supporting scholarship and theoretical frameworks. Now, in Chapter 3, I explained how this research was conducted. In this chapter, I presented the research design, the methods of data collection and analysis. Also, in this chapter I included the settings, the participants, the role of the researcher, and issues related to reliability and trustworthiness.

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study is to examine how the Higher InterCulture Competence Undertaking Program (HICCUP) can lead to a greater sense of intercultural competence in the workplace. As university faculty and staff members work with greater numbers of international students, the importance of the intercultural competence (ICC) also increases. This study is designed to record how staff members perceived their effectiveness when with international students and whether the intervention increased this feeling of effectiveness.

This action research study was designed to address the following research questions:

- 1) How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves culturally competent to effectively communicate with NNES?

- 2) How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally empathetically and competent to effectively communicate with NNES?
- 3) How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally linguistically competent to effectively communicate with NNES?

### **Research Design**

To adequately answer these questions, the HICCUP program is being conducted using appropriate action research. Noting that action research is cyclical, involving a process of reconnaissance, action, analysis, and reflection (Mertler, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015), this research is an extension of three previous cycles of research. The previous cycles of research are explained in Chapter 1. As an example of action research, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2015), this study recognizes the involvement of practitioners is a necessity and that the end result should further the practitioner's professional development. Further, action research should involve a local setting and a real, tangible problem. The problem being investigated needs to be resolved because it is, in real time, affecting the practitioner's life and occupation. Finally, the action research here focuses on a small-scale research project, elucidating a specific issue in a practice-based setting.

As an action researcher, I am engaging a mixed methods approach, allowing for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. A mixed methods approach was selected because of the recognition of its ability to address the research problem more comprehensively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori,

2009). Sometimes neither a quantitative approach nor a qualitative approach is sufficient to provide the depth of understanding of the results that is desired.

An example of this arose in the Cycle 1 research, which preceded this current endeavor. In an attempt to determine the effectiveness of an intervention, I collected pre- and post-intervention survey data. The data from my pre- and post-intervention survey indicated no significant change in the participants' sense of self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the post-intervention interviews indicated participants believed the intervention was very beneficial and reported higher sense of self-efficacy. Why was there a discrepancy between the survey results and the interviews? The participants filled out the surveys, as one interviewee noted, "not knowing what they didn't know" and indicated a greater sense of efficacy than they actually had at the beginning. As a result, after the intervention, the participants had no room on the scale to move to higher scores to indicate improvement.

According to Ivankova (2015), mixed methods is an important tool to strengthen the relationship between the two approaches, qualitative and quantitative. As a result, the mixed methods approach provided a more robust understanding of the dynamic I had been witnessing. With this in mind, I utilized a convergent parallel, mixed methods design to determine the effectiveness of HICCUP. Sometimes referred to as *triangulation*, *concurrent* or *simultaneous*, according to Creswell & Clark (2015), a convergent parallel design is useful because all forms of data have strengths and weaknesses, which can be compensated for by using another method if a result can be corroborated with both qualitative and quantitative information, more valid results can be established (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015).

## **Setting**

The setting for this study was Arizona State University, specifically, the W. P. Carey School of Business. As discussed in Chapter 1, Arizona State University welcomed over 13,400 international students in the 2017-18 academic year (IIE, 2019), and the business school alone had almost 1,900 international students (Stuempfle, personal communication, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019). The impetus for such a substantial number of international students is ASU's global strategy and its stated mission that it is "a comprehensive public research university, measured not by who it excludes, but rather by whom it includes and how they succeed." Along with this stated goal is an obligation that everyone admitted has the opportunity to succeed. Faculty and staff members are central to affording that opportunity.

Focusing on the business college, there are 11 different academic departments with faculty members that educate international students. There are five staff-centered, service departments that support international students. Two departments – recruiting and admissions – have little contact with students once they are admitted. Three departments continue to have substantial, face-to-face access to international students: academic advising, career services, and student engagement. Two of these departments, academic advising and career services, are responsible for delivering crucial information to students allowing them to graduate and prepare for securing employment after graduation.

The offices of academic advising and career services are the targets of this intervention. As the enrollment, both international and domestic, has increased so has the number of staff members employed to serve the students. Academic advising has increased from 17 advisors in 2015 to 31 advisors in 2018. The career services

department has doubled to 24 coaches and counselors since 2015. The mean experience in years per position is 4.1 years in advising and 2.5 years in career services (Amy Ahlstromer, personal communication, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

### **Participants**

The focus of this research is on academic advisors and career counselors, two groups of staff members charged with delivering content-rich messages in a short period of time. Most sessions between students and members from these departments are 30 minutes or less. With such little time to convey important information, there is no time for intercultural disconnects to get in the way.

Choosing a sample of individuals to participate in one's intervention is important because sample can produce data about the population at the center of the problem of practice (Babbie, 2005; Ivankova, 2015). Participants from for this study were provided, not selected, by the directors of the Department of Academic Advising and Department of Career Services. This allowed the sampling to be purposive. Therefore, participants were identified and included based on their affiliation with these student service departments.

Further, the selection process is purposive. Specifically, the process is an example of homogenous case sampling, in that all of the individuals selected share "defining characteristics" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 185). The population participating included academic advisors ( $n=21$ ) and career coaches ( $n=4$ ) for a total population of 25. Because this is a convergent parallel mixed methods project, the same participants provided the information for both qualitative and quantitative assessments. This is also suggested by Ivankova (2015) as an efficient and effective method in its proximity to participants.

Finally, whether 25 is considered a large or small sample can be debated. The reality is that with a sample ( $n = 25$ ) this size, mixed methods design outweighs the small sample size. This is because the triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources actually converts the weakness of a small sample into a strength within the design resulting in a more robust, more articulated assessment of the data (Richardson & Reid, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015; Ivankova, 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My position is Executive Liaison for International Student Services and one of my responsibilities is serving as Director of the Global Education Center. In this position I have unique insight to my problem of practice, access to stakeholders, and opportunities to effect change. I take each of these affordances seriously. I am practitioner, observer, implementer, and analyst.

Throughout this endeavor, I am both the investigator and the one who implements the intervention. I will be actively involved at the research site, observing and participating. It is my responsibility to select the participants, in conjunction with the directors of the two departments involved. I also design and conduct the survey data to determine the participants' perceptions of intercultural competence. I also collect and analyze the data, as well as consider the implications of the results. Therefore, my role as researcher will be one of participant observer (Creswell, 2005; Mertler, 2011). Based on earlier results, I designed the intervention to provide academic advisors and career coaches with the strategies to more effectively communicate with international students.

## Intervention

My intention is to provide workshops to improve the intercultural competence (ICC) of the staff members in the departments of academic advising and career services. Higher InterCultural Competence Undertaking Program (HICCUP) is a three-workshop professional development. Each workshop lasts 60 minutes and consists of one component of ICC – the cognitive, affective, and behavioral – as indicated by Arasaratnam-Smith (2017), Baker (2012), Ruben and Kealey (1979) and Hall (1976). Table 2 below depicts the sequence of workshops, the components and their focus, as well as the activities used to improve competence.

Table 2. *Overview of Higher InterCultural Competence Undertaking Program*

<b>Session</b>	<b>Component</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Workshop 60 Minutes	Cognitive	Cultural Awareness	Geert Hofstede's <i>Cultural Dimensions</i>	Cultural Awareness Inventory; Cultural Norms Comparison
Workshop 60 Minutes	Affective	Empathy	Milton Bennett's <i>Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity</i>	Cultural Empathy Continuum
Workshop 60 Minutes	Behavioral	Linguistic Modification	Abedi & Sato's <i>Language Simplification Inventory</i>	Idioms & Expressions Awareness; Grammatical Reduction Activity; Lexical Choice Activity

**Education or training.** Providing a professional development opportunity, an oft-overlooked motivation is whether the session is 'education' or 'training.' According



to scholarship, including Harrison and Hopkins (1967), Nadler (1970), Breslin and Pedersen (1976), Miller (1979) and Gudykunst and Hammer (1983), the distinction between education and training lies in its use. Education is “designed to improve overall competence of the employee in a specified direction and beyond the job now held” (Nadler, 1970, p. 60).

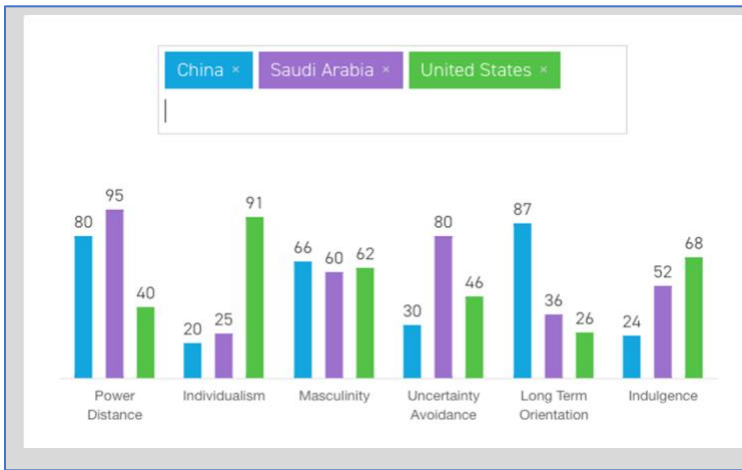
However, being practitioner-researcher engaged in action research, I make my professional development more readily tangible to the problem of practice at hand. Therefore, I have decided to provide professional development training. Training, on the other hand, according to Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) is implemented to increase on the job performance in the position the individual already occupies. It is intended to help the individual in their current endeavor. Thus, the intervention is training.

**Workshop 1.** The first workshop, designed to expose the cognitive aspect of intercultural competence, is based on Geert Hofstede’s *cultural dimensions* theory (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). The sequence of workshops – culture, empathy and modification – is justified by the idea that before someone can develop empathy for someone from a distinct cultural background, that culture must be understood. Ignorance – the unawareness of culture or people from that culture – is a barrier to empathy (Ibrahim, 1991; Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, 1997; Zhu, 2011). Therefore, before I attempt to develop the empathetic awareness necessary for ICC, I unpack cultural awareness.

The dimensions, taken directly from Hofstede (2011), are Power Distance Index, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Masculinity vs. Femininity Index, Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation and Indulgence vs. Restraint.

These dimensions, the comparison between countries of which, and practical examples are provided to the participants to discuss, unpack and transfer, and synthesize. Led by the researcher, participants will engage with a series of perspectives along a continuum. Participants identify with the perspectives on one end and discuss how communication can be impeded with someone on the other end of the continuum. A visual representation of cultural values depicted above helps the participants understand how significant cultural differences can be seen below in Figure 4.

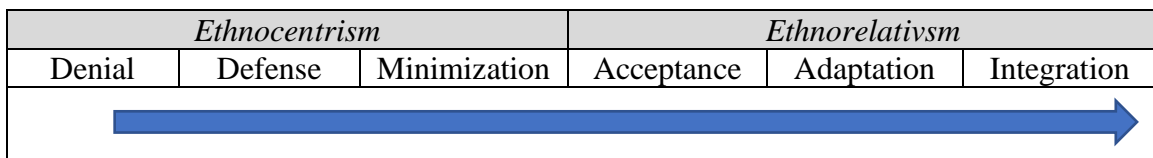
Figure 4. *A Comparison of Cultural Dimensions.*



**Workshop 2.** For the purpose of this endeavor, cultural empathy and its importance to intercultural competence is based on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennet, 1986, 1993, 2001; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003) and founded on the ability to avoid the evaluation of other cultures based on preconceptions emanating from the standards and customs of one's own culture. This ability is not innate. It needs to be practiced, developed and honed. It is this ability – empathy – that the second workshop of my intervention seeks to develop.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) posits a six-stage continuum of sensitivity moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. According to Bennett, ethnocentrism is when people unconsciously experience their own culture as "central to reality." In this stage, cultural differences are seen as a threat – implicitly or explicitly – to the reality of their own cultural experience. Moving along the continuum, Bennett explains that people move towards ethnorelativism, or the conscious realization a cultural context encodes all behaviors, including their own. The six stages along the continuum – which form the bases of the empathy workshop of my intervention are explained below (Bennett1986, 1993, 2001, 2016; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003) and depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5:  
*The Continuum of Intercultural Sensitivity*



During the workshop, participants learn the steps in the continuum. Each step has a descriptor. Each descriptor has two accompanying sentiments. Over the course of the workshops, the participants learn where they themselves fall on this continuum. By identifying their own empathetic value of culture, they become more attuned to the culture of others (Bennett1986, 1993, 2001, 2016; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; van der Zee, Zaal, & Piekstra, 2003; Zhu, 2011).

By providing a workshop based on DMIS, it was anticipated participants would develop the empathy to become interculturally competent. An effective training session

can potentially provide several benefits: culturally appropriate language skills, culturally appropriate behavior and cultural self-awareness (Triandis, 1977; Gudykunst & Hammer; 1983; Bennett, 1986). These skills, coupled with the cultural awareness and language modification strategies from the other two workshops, can facilitate intercultural competence.

**Workshop 3.** Once cultural awareness has been developed and empathy has been acquired, the motivation to actually modify one’s behavior for the benefit of another manifests itself (Abedi, Lord & Hofstetter, 2000; Abedi, 2007; Sato, 2007; Zhu, 2011). Therefore, the third workshop focuses on the Abedi & Sato’s language modification inventory (2007). These workshops focus on producing the content in a manner designed to improve comprehension on the part of the international student audience.

To do this, I designed this workshop to address vocabulary, grammar, and semantics/discourse. Activities raising awareness of and providing strategies for the lexical realities of English are provided. The awareness and modification of complex grammatical structures is unpacked. Common English idioms pulled from 100-level and 200-level textbooks are provided and dissected for meaning. Phrasal verbs and their non-linear meanings and, seemingly asyntactic manifestation is described. An example of the issues of phrasal verb based on the verb *turn* can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Phrasal Verbs and their Definitions*

<b>Phrasal Verb</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Phrasal Verb</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Turn Off	<i>Extinguish; Repel</i>	Turn Back	<i>Reverse</i>
Turn On	<i>Run; Arouse</i>	Turn Into	<i>Become; Transform</i>
Turn In	<i>Go to sleep; Give</i>	Turn Down	<i>Decrease; Deny</i>
Turn Out	<i>Remove</i>	Turn Up	<i>Increase</i>

An example of the semantic issues at hand can be seen in Table 4, where the location of the adverb *only* can have major or minor effects on the meaning of the sentence.

Table 4. *Semantic Differences of ‘Only’*

<i>Target Sentence</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i><b>Only</b> she told him she loved him.</i>	No one else said they loved him but her.
<i>She <b>only</b> told him she loved him.</i>	She said nothing other than that she loved him.
<i>She told <b>only</b> him she loved him.</i>	She loves no one else other than him.
<i>She told him <b>only</b> she loved him.</i>	She made a point to emphasize to him that she was the only one to love him.
<i>She told him she <b>only</b> loved him.</i>	She dismissed the significance of her love for him.
<i>She told him she loved <b>only</b> him.</i>	She loves him and only him.
<i>She told him she loved him <b>only</b>.</i>	She loves him and only him. (considered more formal)

### **Data Collection/Instrument**

To obtain a more robust, in-depth analysis of my problem of practice, the data collection tools for HICCUP include both qualitative and quantitative measures. My concurrent research design allows for both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected at the same time. It is important to note that ‘concurrent’ – or as described it above, convergent parallel – doesn’t mean the information is being collected on the same day, at the same time, in the same moment; this would not be feasible. However, the definition of ‘concurrent’ allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to be completed before the analysis of the other is complete. One type of data not informing the collection of the other (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2015; Ivankova, 2015). The table below is modified from a version presented by Mills (2014, p. 109).

Table 5. *Research Questions and Data Collection Instruments*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Collection Instrument</b>	<b>Data Analysis Tool</b>
RQ 1: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves <b>culturally</b> competent to effectively communicate with NNES?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-Intervention Survey</li> <li>2. Post-Intervention Survey</li> <li>3. Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Interviews</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Measures</li> <li>• Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test</li> <li>• Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>
RQ 2: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally <b>empathetically</b> and competent to effectively communicate with NNES?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-Intervention Survey</li> <li>2. Post-Intervention Survey</li> <li>3. Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Interviews</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Measures</li> <li>• Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test</li> <li>• Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>
RQ 3: How and to what extent do faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally <b>linguistically</b> competent to effectively communicate with NNES?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-Intervention Survey</li> <li>2. Post-Intervention Survey</li> <li>3. Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Interviews</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Measures</li> <li>• Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test</li> <li>• Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>
RQ 4: To what extent does the intervention affect the participants' feelings of self-efficacy as it relates to their intercultural competence?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-Intervention Survey</li> <li>2. Post-Intervention Survey</li> <li>3. Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Interviews</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Measures</li> <li>• Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test</li> <li>• Thematic Analysis</li> </ul>

**Surveys.** The quantitative data comes in the form of survey data gather at pre- and post-intervention times. I have called upon the work of Albert Bandura's efficacy scales (Bandura, 1997, 2006). His guide for constructing scales indicate important guideposts. As a result, I ensured that my items reflect the constructs of culture, empathy, language, and efficacy. Bandura emphasizes the distinction between *can* and a measure of ability and *will* as a measure of intention; I have considered this in the wording of my instrument.

In his guidelines for scale construction, Bandura also extols the importance of domain functioning. This means that behavior is more efficiently indicated by "people's beliefs in their capabilities to do whatever is needed to succeed than by their beliefs in only one aspect of self-efficacy relevant to the domain" (Bandura, 2006, p. 310). As a result, if the scales I construct are not targeted to the actual factors that affect the functioning domain of intercultural competence, then I should not be surprised if no predictive relation is identified. I have heeded this advice in my survey design.

**Interviews.** As mentioned previously, the purpose of a mixed methods study is to provide greater depth in the description of the problem at hand. Therefore, in addition to the quantitative surveys designed to measure the participants' perceptions about their intercultural competence, I will conduct interviews. These interviews are semi-structured, allowing for greater opportunity to uncover relevant, yet initially obscured, information. The interviews allow the participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The questions are open-ended allowing the interviewee to choose how he or she chooses to respond, which reduces the chances of the interviewer closing off avenues of information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015).

To analyze the qualitative data, I have chosen the Thematic Analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this process, the data is reviewed many times before generating initial codes. After establishing initial code, themes are considered, consolidated, reviewed, reconsolidation and defined. Only at this point are assertions supported by the data proposed.

### **Threats to Reliability and Validity**

When endeavoring to conduct research that engenders an outcome, it is not sufficient to just attain results. The result you attain must be achieved through sound practices. Therefore, the quality of the instruments used to measure that from which one draws conclusions, makes inferences and move forward are important. Intentional consideration of one's instruments can help ensure reliability and validity (Brualdi, 1999; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005; Smith & Glass, 2014).

**Validity.** Validity indicates the “appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the inferences a researcher makes” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005, p. 152). Validity allows one to draw accurate conclusions. The stronger the degree of validity, the stronger the inferences one draws based on the information. This work, being an example practitioner-led action research, there is potential threats validity – both internal and external. One consideration to my internal validity is the threat of history. Smith and Glass (2014) ask researchers to be aware of the threat of history.

A threat of history occurs when an event takes place concurrently with and independently of the timeline of one's intervention. My intervention takes place over the course of a semester, but I cannot control what events my participants attend over the



course of my intervention. They may attend another professional development, watch a movie, have an interaction with a student which affects their perception of intercultural competence. This could affect their performance on my measurement. However, the existence of a possible threat does not diminish the possibility that the research hypothesis is sound (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005; Smith & Glass, 2014). That being said, I take steps to account for this in the discussion of my results.

Another threat to consider is the external threat of novelty. This occurs when a new program is initiated and received with excitement and optimism from the participants. Smith and Glass (2014) define the threat of the Novelty Effect as “unlikely to replicate if the study were repeated in the second year of the program, after the novelty wears off” (p.148). This is a consideration for my problem of practice since the participants are voluntary and have opted to participate because they feel this professional development can help them. There is no such guarantee were I to run this program with another cohort.

Another external threat to is the experimenter effect. The experimenter effect occurs when the enthusiasm, magnetism of the presenter leads the participants to perform, learn, contribute atypically well (Smith & Glass, 2014). As a teacher, it is hard for me to not encourage, not prompt, not facilitate, or in other ways attempt to improve the performance of my students. I do my best during this professional development to not be overly charming.

**Reliability.** Validity isn't the only concern. Reliability indicates consistency (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005; Smith & Glass, 2014;). The higher the reliability, the more likely that scores will be similar from one administration of the

instrument to the next. That being said, scores achieved on an instrument may prove themselves reliable, but that does not ensure validity (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005; Smith & Glass, 2014;). They are both important but mutually exclusive and be considered individually.

**Reliability of the three constructs.** Results are meaningless unless it can be proven that the instrument does, indeed, consistently measures what it intends to measure. These surveys were composed of three constructs: (a) cultural awareness, (b) empathy awareness and (c) linguistic awareness. In order to determine reliability of each construct, I used SPSS to determine Cronbach'  $\alpha$ . The post-intervention results rendered a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .94 for the cultural construct, .74 for the empathy construct and an .82 for the linguistic construct. According to Frankel and Wallen (2005), .70 is an appropriate level of reliability. Therefore, the results confirm that the items for the constructs are, indeed, consistent.

**Credibility.** Credibility asks the researcher to connect his or her findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of his or her findings (Plano Clark & Cresswell, 2010; Ivankova 2015). Clarke and Braun (2013) assert that credibility is demonstrated when the findings reflect the authentic meaning of the research participants. Establishing credibility in this mixed methods action research endeavor is particularly important due to my low sample size (n=25). Credibility becomes more important with a small sample size because of its dependence on robustness of data (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

I employ two tools used to establish the credibility of my findings. First, I use triangulation of methods by employing multiple sources of data. Participants provide both quantitative survey information as well as qualitative semi-structured interview

information. This double-dipping into the experiences of my participants is necessary to ensure the consistency of findings. Another bulwark against inconsistency is member-checking. Member-checking uses those individuals most closely situated to the problem of practice are the ones validating my interpretation of the data (Ivankova, 2015). I provide codes and theme-components to as many participants as possible to receive feedback as to whether or not what I am asserting reflects their truth.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

*Facts and figures are like cow pastures – You need to squint  
to see how full of bullshit they really are.  
- Bergstrom & West*

Results from the study are presented in the following two sections. The first section of this chapter includes results obtained from the quantitative data. In the second section, results obtained from the qualitative data are presented. For the qualitative data, assertions are presented and subsequently reinforced with themes, theme-related components, and quotes from participants. In addition to the results, data collection processes and analyses procedures are provided.

In this chapter, quantitative data included a set of pre-intervention and post-intervention scores for 25 staff members students who completed all three workshops of the Higher Intercultural Competence Undertaking Program (HICCUP). The surveys measured teacher perceptions of three constructs related to the intervention – cultural awareness, cultural empathy and linguistic awareness. Several methods were employed to analyze the results. To determine whether the intervention consistently measured its intended function, reliability of the constructs was examined. Following this analysis, Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test on the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys was conducted to analyze changes in the mean scores.

I also include in this section the qualitative results of post-intervention interviews of the 25 participating staff members. This data was input into HyperRESEARCH (HyperResearch 4.5.0, 2019). The data were then analyzed using the Thematic Analysis

approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). This is method, rather than a methodology, which allow more flexibility as it is not tied to a particular methodology. In this process, the data were reviewed many times before generating initial codes. After establishing initial code, themes were considered, consolidated, reviewed, reconsolidation and defined. At this point assertions supported by the data was provided.

## **Results**

### **Results for Quantitative Data**

Results from the quantitative is presented through an analysis of the Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test for each construct on the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey. Wilcoxon was used because of the ordinal nature of the Likert Scale survey necessitates a non-parametric test. The means and standard deviations for the pre-intervention and post-intervention are then presented.

**Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test scores.** To determine whether there were differences in the results when comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey and reject the null hypothesis, a Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test was employed. The scores that were observed measures the constructs of cultural awareness, empathetic awareness, and linguistic awareness. With a confidence value of .05 established to determine the null hypothesis, the following table presents the results of the Wilcoxon Paired Difference Test.

In Table 6 below, descriptive statistics comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey results are presented. As can be seen, differences between these survey scores indicate substantial changes in personal attitudes about the constructs, to

wit, an increase of 0.60 in the cultural construct, 0.77 in the empathy construct, and 0.68 in the language construct.

Table 6.  
*Culture, Empathy and Language Construct Mean and Standard Deviation*

Construct	Pre-Intervention Survey		Post-Intervention Survey	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Culture	4.64	1.33	5.24	.697
Empathy	3.92	.98	4.69	1.08
Language	4.12	1.19	4.8	.96

### Results for Qualitative Data

As this is a mixed methods action research endeavor, qualitative data were collected in the hope of providing a more robust description of the effects of the intervention. Results for the qualitative data are presented in three sections. Initially, a description of the data sources is provided. After this, the themes, theme-related components and assertions culled from the qualitative data are presented. The final section provides participant quotes from the data to illustrate the themes and provide a foundation for the assertions.

**Description of the data sources.** To learn more about the personal beliefs, attitudes and perspectives of the participants, qualitative data were collected. The data were collected through a series of interviews conducted with each of the twenty-five participants individually. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for greater access to the participants by allowing them to elaborate on content they felt was relevant to the questions. The questions were focused on the constructs of culture, empathy and

language. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, resulting in 6 hours and 1 minute of audio files and over 48,000 words. The collected qualitative is illustrated in Table 7 below.

Table 7.

*Description of Qualitative Data Sources*

Data Source	Word Count	Minutes
Participant 1 Interview	1779	14:14
Participant 2 Interview	2101	15:21
Participant 3 Interview	1790	15:55
Participant 4 Interview	2245	19:11
Participant 5 Interview	3233	19:45
Participant 6 Interview	1343	13:05
Participant 7 Interview	2067	17:01
Participant 8 Interview	1643	15:10
Participant 9 Interview	1343	14:50
Participant 10 Interview	1989	17:21
Participant 11 Interview	2012	18:34
Participant 12 Interview	2910	21:12
Participant 13 Interview	3200	22:45
Participant 14 Interview	1515	16:32
Participant 15 Interview	1741	12:11
Participant 16 Interview	1871	13:55
Participant 17 Interview	2211	16:45
Participant 18 Interview	1414	15:54
Participant 19 Interview	1650	15:29
Participant 20 Interview	1501	10:12
Participant 21 Interview	1898	14:26
Participant 22 Interview	1754	18:01
Participant 23 Interview	1463	15:43
Participant 24 Interview	1780	15:50
Participant 25 Interview	1993	17:00
Totals	48446	360:01

**Themes, theme-related components, and assertions.** Over six hours of interviews were recorded after the completion of the three workshops. Using the Thematic Analysis approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013), I analyzed

the quantitative data produced from the semi-structured interviews. Using open-coding – no pre-set codes were used –this analysis produced 66 unique codes. I compared these initial codes with each other. After rereading and reanalyzing the codes, I modified, removed and merged codes as necessary and formed categories. For example, I took such sentiments as ‘English slang is more common than I realized’ and “American TV must be incredibly difficult to understand ... I mean, there is so much cursing on TV” into a theme-component of ‘prevalence of slang’. I merged ‘I can’t believe how much non-academic English I use at work’ and “I speak completely different with my domestic friends” into a theme-component ‘self-awareness’. I then merged ‘self-awareness’ and ‘prevalence of slang’ into a larger theme: Language-Use Self-Awareness theme.

I was able to create themes of content-aligned perspectives. Four over-arching themes emerged from the data: increased cultural awareness, language-use self-awareness, empathy → motivation, and cognizant professional obligation. Table 7 below expands on the themes, components and the assertions generated.



Table 8 .  
*Themes, Theme-Related Components, and Assertions Based on Qualitative Data*

Theme-Related Components	Themes	Assertions
<p>1. Staff members believed they knew more about the culture of their students than they did.</p> <p>2. Staff members underestimated culture as an explanation of student behavior.</p> <p>3. Staff members were unaware of the different dynamics that make up culture, including power distance, time orientation and uncertainty avoidance.</p> <p>4. Staff members assumed a level of cultural awareness their students may not possess based on their admission to a US university.</p>	<p>Increased Cultural Awareness</p>	<p>As staff members learned more about a student’s culture, they become more cognizant of the communication strategies they used and become confident they could reduce conflict, ill-communication and miscommunication between students and staff member.</p>
<p>1. Staff members recognized the amount of slang and idioms they use in average conversation.</p> <p>2. Staff members appreciated the difficulties of phrasal verbs like <i>take off</i> and <i>turn in</i>.</p>	<p>Language Usage Self-Awareness</p>	<p>Staff members were not aware of the complexities of the English language.</p>

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3. Staff members developed an awareness of the various meanings of silence in a conversation.

<p>1. Staff members expressed admiration for students studying in a foreign language.</p>	<p>Empathy→Motivation</p>	<p>Only after understanding the difficulties non-native English speakers face do the staff members truly understand the student experience and become willing to make sincere efforts to communicate more effectively.</p>
<p>2. Staff members admitted an assumption of English proficiency not necessarily present in the student with whom they work.</p>		
<p>3. Staff member recognized their own potentially unreal expectations when working with their students, sometimes well-meaningly.</p>		

<p>1. Staff members recognized they have power to improve communication with international students.</p>	<p>Cognizant Professional Obligation</p>	<p>It is incumbent on the staff member to do everything possible to facilitate a successful interaction with the student.</p>
<p>2. Staff members recognized a hierarchical dynamic, with themselves in the roll of authority figure.</p>		

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**Supporting quotes from the data sources.** The following section provides quotes from participants to support and further strengthen the four assertions. The first two assertions assert inner-directed observation. That is, the participants became aware of forces at play they were oblivious to previously. The last two assertions indicate the participants are ready to modify their behavior to facilitate effective and efficient communication with their students. The quotes of the participants helped to illustrate both these internal and external effects.

**Increased Cultural Awareness.** Assertion 1 – *As staff members learned more about a student’s culture, they become more cognizant of the communication strategies they used and become confident they could reduce conflict, ill-communication and miscommunication between students and staff member.* The cultural awareness workshop contained specific content and activities to help participants learn more about cultural differences and how they manifest in communicative dynamic. Through the workshop, participants learned that cultural difference in respect to hierarchy and power distance, uncertainty avoidance and time-orientation can have palpable effects on communication.

Some initial codes resulting in this assertion were simply chunks of meaning related to culture. Codes like ‘honesty’, ‘punctuality’, ‘deadlines’, ‘respect’, ‘silence’ and ‘eye-contact’ were lumped in the theme-component ‘Staff members underestimated culture as an explanation of student behavior.’ After all of the codes merged into the theme-components, I was able to assert that *As staff members learned more about a student’s culture, they become more cognizant of the communication strategies they used*

*and become confident they could reduce conflict, ill-communication and miscommunication between students and staff member.*

Several staff members expounded on their experiences and these quotes lead to the first theme-component: Staff members believed they knew more about the culture of their student than they did. One academic advisor said, “I always thought I knew a lot about culture.” (Academic advisor interview, October 2). The same advisor went to explain,

I studied in Mexico and Spain; I thought I knew what it's like for my students from Mexico to study in the US. I'm Mexican American; I speak Spanish ... but I grew up in Texas. I didn't go to Mexico a lot. Maybe I just know a lot of Mexican American culture ...

One interviewee (Academic advisor interview, September 12) said, “I never thought about that” nine times in one 90-minute workshop. Another academic advisor said (Academic advisor interview, October 2),

I'm in higher ed. I had lots of cultural training, but it was very theoretical ... it was also ... almost ... superficial, I guess. It was kinda obligatory ...

Demonstrating the second theme-component – the under-emphasized role of culture in communication – one academic advisor (Academic advisor interview, September 27) exclaimed disappointedly, “I always thought I knew a lot about culture” (Academic advisor interview, October 2). The same advisor went on to explain,

I did a semester abroad in China when I was in undergrad [12 years ago] ... I learned a lot about China ... or I thought I learned a lot ... I don't know ... I guess I figured I could work through the cultural

differences. I didn't know ... but I guess my experience is completely different from Chinese students who come here.

Another interviewee stated that “I knew that they didn’t like eye-contact, but I didn’t know why”. (Academic advisor interview, October 7). She went on to explain that,

I didn't know it was respect ... I didn’t know it stemmed from the collectivist nature of China. I’d never heard ‘the nail that sticks out gets hammered down’ ... I always heard ‘the squeaky wheel gets the grease’.

Throughout the workshop on culture, participants demonstrated a certain awe that culture can be used to explain the behavior of their students. It can explain why students behave the way they do, think the way they think, and have the values they have. “The idea that harmony is more important than honesty in some cultures explains SO much now!” (Academic advisor interview, October 14).

Sentiments supporting the third theme-component – Staff members were unaware of the different dynamics that made up culture, including power distance, time orientation and uncertainty avoidance – included statements like “They’re always late” (Academic advisor interview, October 13), “just tell me if you don’t understand” (Academic advisor interview, October 4), “I don't know why they just sit there silently ... staring at me” (Academic advisor interview, September 25), and “It’s like they just tell me what I want to hear” (Academic advisor interview, October 1). During the interviews many comments were made referencing Hofstede’s culture dynamic scores. The visual representation in graph form of high scores in Power Distance for Chinese and low scores for Americans

was appreciated by all the participants. By asking participants to describe situations between them and their students where this dynamic could be the cause of consternation benefitted everyone. One participant commented,

It was the silence that bothered me. I took it as meekness ... or lack of confidence. And, while I still think it might be meekness in some situations, I realize now that it could be deference ... deference to me because I'm higher hierarchically (Academic advisor interview, October 2).

Another participant (Academic advisor interview, September 30) lamented,

Jesus, I feel bad. I know that my Chinese students come from a different culture and I tried to make them feel better by treating them fairly. I wanted them to know that in America we're equals ... I didn't think that they may not like that ... that that might make them uncomfortable.

The last theme-component – Staff members assumed a level of cultural awareness their students may not possess based on their admission to a US university resulted from several codes. These codes contained chunks of meaning including 'American classroom', 'academic expectations', 'academic preparation', 'study skills', 'soft skills', 'working with staff/faculty', 'getting help' and 'asking questions.'

Participants often expressed surprise at the lack of preparation or awareness about what to expect on the American campus. They also explained that the resources available to university students, services commonly availed to by domestic students, are not being utilized by the international students to the same degree. One interviewee commented, frustratingly, "don't they know I'm here to help them. It's my job," (Academic advisor

interview, August 28). Another interviewee echoed this sentiment by asking “why do they ask their friends instead of me?” (Academic advisor interview, October 2).

Many participants in the workshops compared their experiences with American students and their experiences with international, mostly Chinese, students. Most of the participants explained that American students show up, ask the questions they need to ask, get the information they need and leave. However, many of the international students show up, sit silently, wait for the staff member to speak, listen to information, nod their head in the affirmative when questioned and leave. One participant reported (Academic advisor interview, October 7) that her sessions with Chinese students take half the time of those with her American students,

My sessions are so short with them and I never feel like I did a good job helping them. I can count on them to ask one question, maybe, listen to what I say, say ‘yes’ when I ask if they understand and leave. It takes half the time ...

These comments, taken from semi-structured interviews, demonstrate how the participants benefitted from the workshop on culture. The activities and content allowed for the participants to realize they may not know as much about culture as they really did, and also acknowledged the value of cultural awareness in explaining student behavior. They also learned about the importance of power-distance, uncertainty avoidance and time orientation in discourse, and they began to realize that not all international students were equally prepared to study in the United States.

**Language Usage Self-Awareness.** Assertion 2 – *Staff members are not aware of the complexities of the English language.* The intercultural competence workshops

contained specific content and activities to help participants learn more about language use and the complexities of the English language. Through the workshop, participants were exposed to common English idiosyncrasies that domestic speakers take for granted yet cause real issues of non-native English speakers. As one participant ironically commented, “I was watching *House of Cards* last night, and how the frig are these students supposed to understand that shit?” (*Academic advisor interview, September 17*). This rhetorical statement is an excellent manifestation of the theme-component: Staff members recognized the amount of slang and idioms they use in average conversation.

I actually told a student to ‘hang on a moment’, and he hung his coat on the hook behind the door. I think he heard the word ‘hang’ and guessed the rest. I never considered that ‘hang on’ just means ‘wait’, right? I’m sure he would have understood ‘wait a moment’, but ‘hang on’ is one of the idioms I use all the time without thinking about it. Right. I’ve been thinking about what else I say without considering whether it's normal or not ... I just take it for granted they understand. I once told a student who knocked on the door when I was with another student to keep his pants on. Seriously. (*Academic advisor interview, September 25*).

The workshop delineated the sheer volume of military and sports idioms and expressions taken from 100-200 level business textbooks published between 2004 and 2016 and used at Arizona State Univeristy. These are considered common and not vulgar but often prove to be difficult for our non-native English-speaking student. Considering that idioms and expressions are one of the last things English learners incorporate into



their lexicon (Chambers, 1997; Ellis, 2005), it isn't surprising that these terms cause issues in comprehension.

Table 9

*Idioms pulled from 100-200 level business textbooks*

Military Idioms		Sports Idioms	
Awol	Rally the Troops	Touch Base	Threw Me a Curve
Take No Prisoners	Close Ranks	There's No 'I' in Team	Ballpark it for Me
Ride Shotgun	Full-Speed Ahead	Game Plan	Blindside
Snafu	Bite the Bullet	Call the Shots	Suckerpunch
Dodge A Bullet	86	Skating in Thin Ice	Strike Out
Pyrric Victory	Pull the Trigger	At Any Stage in the Game	Homestretch
Meet One's Waterloo	Pull Rank	Give a Run for One's Money	Out of Left Field

One staff member reported that while she may not use all of the terms in Table 9 above, she used most of them and knew the meaning of all of them. She wouldn't consider it at all unusual to hear these, or use these herself, in conversation (Academic advisor interview, October 1).

Another theme-component – Staff members appreciated the difficulties of phrasal verbs like *take off* and *turn in* – manifested itself through many interviews. This theme-component was generated out of codes build around chunks of information like 'phrasal verbs', 'meaning of *take*', 'meaning of *turn*', 'turn in/submit', 'take off/remove', 'turn up/increase' and 'synonym activity'. The phrasal verb synonym activity really resonated with the participants and they self-reported increased meta-awareness when using phrasal verbs with their students. One participant recalled,

After the workshop on phrasal verbs ... I remember sitting in my office and ... like, I was shocked at how many phrasal verbs I was using; and I never knew what phrasal verbs were, but I was using them all the time. Like, I totally get why a foreign student would get confused ... it's like you hear 'turn' but when you hear the whole thing ... turn in, turn on, turn off, turn down ... it's like they all have different meanings and none of them have to do with turn! (Academic advisor interview, September 12).

This sentiment was echoed by another participant (Academic advisor interview, October 1) who admitted to telling a student to 'set the forms you got from SSV yesterday after our last meeting down' and flustered when he realized the amount of information between *set* and *down*.

The final theme-component producing this assertion focused on the role of silence in conversations. In the workshops, the concept and function of communicative silence was presented. A significant cultural difference in communication involves silence. Americans fear it. Students from Asia and the sub-continent embrace it. On average, Americans will wait no longer than three seconds before filling in the silence with more information, whereas Chinese speakers are comfortable waiting five seconds and the Japanese eight seconds (Takaya, 2011; Hua, 2013). As one of my participants exclaimed in the workshop, "Whoa, this gives new meaning to the term *I spoke too soon!*". (Intervention workshop 2, August 3).

This difference in comfortable silence was referred to repeatedly in the interviews. The role of silence in communication was seen from the American view of

meekness. Several participants commented on the difficulty of silence. Many interviewees spoke about ‘breaking the silence’.

I had no idea. I just thought they were bored ... or they didn’t understand me ... or didn’t care about what I was saying. I got really angry ... or, you know ... just really frustrated that they weren’t talking. They weren’t answering any questions. Maybe I didn’t wait long enough. You know ... the other day I was in a session with a student and I tried to sit in silence while waiting for my [Chinese] student to speak ... it was so hard. (Academic advisor interview, September 25).

This sentiment is a physical manifestation of the American cultural stance towards silence. Whereas in many Asian cultures silence is respectful, deferential and polite, Americans expect an oral response within four seconds. This is the amount of time the average American believes that the silence disrupts the flow of an interaction (Koudenburg, Postmes & Gordijn, 2010). This staff member explains the frustration at having the conversation ‘derailed’ and the feeling that the student wasn’t pulling his weight.

Another participant echoed this sentiment.

I just feel obligated to say something if they don’t respond. I’m not sure I really assigned any reason for the silence ... perhaps I did. I just felt awkward ... well, I say ‘awkward’ now ... at the time it was just ... ‘well, someone should say something’ and I’d keep talking. I don’t know if ever gave them a chance to talk. (Academic advisor interview, October 5).

The role of silence in intercultural communication was well received by the participants. It was acknowledged as one of the more difficult aspects. This is because as one participant (Academic advisor interview, September 25) put it, “how do you learn how to communicate when you don’t know how to communicate.”

**Empathy→Motivation.** Assertion 3 – *Only after understanding the difficulties non-native English speakers face do the staff members truly understand the student experience and become willing to make sincere efforts to communicate more effectively.* Participants commented extensively on the difficulties that international students, particularly those with lower English proficiency, encounter while studying in the United States. Codes emerged when chunks of meaning including ‘proficiency’, ‘fluency’, ‘English test’, ‘TOEFL’, ‘IELTS’, ‘preparation’, ‘academics’, as well as ‘impressive’, ‘amazing’, ‘isolation’, ‘I couldn’t do that’, ‘but I thought ...’, ‘I expected ...’, ‘homesick’ and ‘English skills.’ The codes led to theme-components indicating that the new empathy they felt towards their students could motivate them to try and communicate more effectively.

The first theme-component created from these codes explained that staff members expressed admiration for students studying in a foreign language. Participant comments about the difficulties working with students with language and cultural differences was coupled with praise for the courage it takes to study in a country in which you don’t speak the language. One participant (Academic advisor interview, September 12) said, “when I studied in Mexico, almost everyone I met could speak at least some English ... and many could speak a lot. I never felt isolated.” Another participant remarked that she has travelled all over the world and that she,

... never felt isolated or alone because everywhere I went there was someone who could speak English ... or there were English materials I could read ... or there were Americans, or Canadians or Australians. Even the Germans I met spoke English. I never felt that separated from everyone ... and that's another thing ... I always felt people wanted me there. I don't know if my students here feel that way.

Still another participant (Academic advisor interview, September 12) said "Man, I knew they may've felt alone, but ... I didn't *know* how they felt alone. It's like maybe they have 'imposter syndrome' or something." Another staff member recalled an international vacation where the hotel staff went 'above and beyond' trying to communicate in English.

I remember in Vietnam when the staff was so helpful – and no one spoke English really – but they tried ... they knew I was a little lost and confused ... they used paper dictionaries and drew maps and pictures to help me understand. I think a lot of others would have given up on me ... but now ... I'm wondering if I'm giving up on my students when it gets too hard ... was I expecting too much? (Academic advisor interview, October 2)

The empathy expressed by the staff member was a desired outcome of the intervention. The staff member realized how hard it must be for her student, and the staff member is wondering if she is doing enough for the student. The moment of realization is a common theme amongst the participants.

The second theme-component for this assertion indicated staff members admitted an assumption of English proficiency not necessarily present in the student with whom

they worked. Throughout the workshops and throughout the interviews, participants expressed their views on the English proficiency of their students. Most believed that their admission into an American University indicated a certain level of English. Many took for granted that they would be able to communicate with their international students with same facility as with their domestic students.

Many admitted that they knew there would be some language issue, but they were surprised at the lack of proficiency of many of their students. In the first few minutes of the one of the workshops, an exasperated staff member blurted out, “I mean, how the hell did he fill out his application? I mean, he just sits there. I don’t think he understands anything I say” (intervention workshop 3, August 5). I heard one participant whisper to another, “I just assumed ... was I wrong to assume?” (Intervention workshop 3, August 5).

The final theme-component in the third assertion was that, as a result of this workshops, staff members recognize their own potentially unrealistic expectations when working with their students, sometimes well-meaningly. This was another challenge the participating staff members acknowledged. Some staff members expressed a desire to treat all students the same. “Well, I’m very intentional about treating everyone the same. I don’t want to assume anything about a student because she’s Indian or Saudi or Chinese” (Academic advisor interview, October 5). This sentiment was echoed by another participant (Academic advisor interview, October 5) who said, “... but it’s not right to treat them differently just because they’re Chinese. They’re here now and they need to be treated like our domestic students.”

Other participants had unreal expectations, not out of an intentional desire to treat everyone equally, but because of an assumption of what a college student should be able to do. One participant explained her view like this,

If they're sitting in my office, I'd assumed they're prepared. I assumed if they're in my office they're a college student. I'd treat them like a college student. If they didn't talk or respond or ask question, so be it. I have 20 other students to advise. I know that sounds harsh, but ... yeah, that's harsh, but it's still frustrating.

**Cognizant Professional Obligation.** Assertion 4 – *It is incumbent on the staff member to do everything possible to facilitate a successful interaction with the student.* Several participants commented on their role in the staff member-student dynamic. Many discussed a revision in the way they characterized that dynamic and the power that they wielded. For example, during one of the workshops (Intervention workshop 3, August 5), one participant said, “I didn't realize how much I could affect whether they understood me or not.” During the same workshop, another participant said, “I never really considered it my responsibility to see if they understand. If they don't, they'd ask, right?” Codes including ‘obligation,’ ‘responsibility,’ ‘professional,’ ‘job,’ and ‘duty’ help create this assertion.

One realization of these workshops focused on the realization that they now knew how to modify their language to make themselves more understandable. This foundation of the first theme-component: staff members recognized they have power to improve communication with international students. The intervention focused on lexical selection, silence, and grammatical reduction, and these strategies empowered staff members to

intentionally and deliberately communicate more effectively. By becoming aware of the idioms and expressions used on daily basis, participants could more deliberately check for comprehension. As one participant (Academic advisor interview, October 1) explained it,

There was this one session, I realized I had used ... something like six idioms when speaking with this Chinese student ... didn't even realize it at the time ... maybe she understood them all ... maybe not ... but I was sure to ask her if she understood ... now every time I use an idiom ... even at home with my husband and daughter I notice it.

Another participant echoed the sentiment, albeit a little more poetically, "I'm so pissed at you, Bob. Every time say a phrasal verb with a kid, I think of you and I think, should I use a different word?" (Academic advisor interview, September 25).

The second theme-related component of this assertion is: staff members recognized a hierarchical dynamic, with themselves in the roll of authority figure. Throughout the workshops, Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions were presented and discuss at length. One of the dimensions, power distance, played an important role in intercultural communication. Power distance was the level of acceptance of an innate hierarchy. Some cultures were more accepting of a hierarchical structure than others. In chapter 2, I demonstrated this visually: Chinese people accept, and expect, hierarchical roles (Hofstede, 1984, 2001, 2011). As a result, even though American work culture is ostensibly egalitarian, international students from Asia saw staff members as authority figures, with all the deference that entailed.



After the workshops and the next few sessions I had with international students ... it felt like they were waiting for me to *tell* them, *command* them ... what to do. I'd never do that with an American student ... with them, it's like a collaboration ... a partnership. But I had a Chinese girl in my office, and I just got the feeling that she wanted me to ... just tell her what to do. It felt weird, though. (Academic advisor interview, September 12).

Another participant elaborated, "I feel like an American student would get pissed if I was all, like, do this, do that, so I was always respectful ... or at least what I thought of as respectful" (Academic advisor interview, September 25). One staff member summed it up quite elegantly, "well, I don't need to be the boss, but if that's what they need ... I can lean on them" (Academic advisor interview, October 5).

### **Summary of Results**

The mean scores of the 25 pre-intervention surveys and post-intervention surveys showed a .6 increase in the culture scores; a .77 increase in the empathy score; and a .68 increase in the language score.

An analysis of the qualitative data produced four assertions. These assertions were generated after coding into theme-related components and theme-related components into themes. These assertions promote the ideas that as a result of these workshops, staff members (a) increased their cultural awareness, (b) became aware of the language they used with students and the comprehension issues they could cause, (c) realized that by understanding the difficulties faced by

their students, they were more likely to put forth effort to help, and (d) acknowledged their role to be responsible for successful communication.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

*Reasoning draws a conclusion,  
but does not make the conclusion certain,  
unless the mind discovers it by the path of experience.  
~ Roger Bacon*

The design and implementation of these workshops was framed by the distinction between training and education. Education is seen as the attempt to improve one's skills to move beyond one's current environment. Training, in contrast, is the attempt learn skills that improves one's ability to succeed in their current job (Nadler, 1970; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983). Therefore, since my participants were interested in becoming more effective and efficient in their current positions, I consider this intervention to be a training.

In this chapter I present the complementarity of the quantitative and qualitative data, and then I demonstrate how this data can be integrated to provide a more robust answer to my research questions. Then I explain how these results relate to previous research and theoretical frameworks. Following that, I present some practical lessons I learned throughout this adventure. Finally, I present limitations, future research avenues, and some personal closing thoughts.

My problem of practice focused on the interactions between domestic university staff members and non-native English-speaking students. The sheer degree of subtleties inherent in these interactions make it difficult to truly explain through one source of data.

Action research, with its multiple sources of data, allows the nitty-gritty of the results to be both nittier, and, indeed, grittier.

It was my intention to demonstrate the value of my three constructs – culture, empathy, and language – to my participants. To do this, I designed, implemented, and conducted three distinct workshops. Each workshop was participant-centered in that everyone contributed, participated, asked questions and described experiences.

Participants learned about the significance of the three constructs, examples of the three constructs in authentic settings and synthesized them through their own experiences.

After this, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to find answers to the three research questions:

- How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves culturally competent to effectively communicate with NNES?
- How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally empathetically and competent to effectively communicate with NNES?
- How and to what extent did faculty/staff members consider themselves interculturally linguistically and competent to effectively communicate with NNES?

### **Complementarity and Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results**

In attempting to determine the effects of culture, empathy, and language workshops on university staff members, I used a mixed methods approach. This was a deliberate choice because it provides a more robust description due the

potential complementarity of both the qualitative and quantitative data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, 2015).

RQ 1 address the role of cultural awareness in effective and efficient communication between staff members and NNEs. For this construct, five items on the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys were presented to the participants. Results showed an increase between the pre- and post-intervention surveys, with a mean increase from 4.64 to 5.24. However, when the qualitative data was analyzed, a clearer, more informative picture formed and supported that quantitative outcomes.

During the semi-structured interview stage of the action research project, one of the most consistently emoted comments is the self-admitted over-estimation of their own cultural awareness. Qualitative results indicate that participants did not know as much as they thought about the role of culture in the staff member/NNES dynamic. Many of these comments center around a superficial awareness of culture, as well as the lack of application of cultural awareness to NNEs interactions. In fact, one participant exemplifies this when he said, “I mean, I know, that some cultures are polychronic or monochronic .... but I never thought about it when a student came late to a meeting” (Academic advisor interview, October 1). Other common sentiments supported the notion that participants need to use this knowledge to fulfill their obligations to the students. When taken together, both qualitative and quantitative results, a complementarity that supports assertions 1 and 4 emerges.

RQ2 addressed the role of empathy in effective and efficient communication between staff members and NNEs. For this construct, five items were created to determine the participants perspectives towards the role of empathy. The results from the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys show an increase in the mean scores, from 3.92 to 4.69. This is the most substantial increase of the three workshops.

Results from the semi-structured interviews corroborate this increase. One consistent thread throughout the interviews was the realization that participants did not really know how their students felt; they only believed they did. One participant summed up this common sentiment by explaining:

Well, I guess it's not exactly the same as my study abroad in Mexico ... this seems much more ... high stakes. They can tell us about culture and how its important, but it didn't really make me feel it for my students (Academic advisor interview, September 25).

Another common thread was the realization that with this new awareness is a more intentional willingness to modify the way they interact with their students. As one participant put it, "I can't not hear every idiom I use now" (Academic advisor interview, October 1). These results from both the quantitative and qualitative instruments for research question 2 support assertion 3.

RQ3 addressed the role of language – and its modification – in effective and efficient communication between staff members and NNEs. For this construct, five items were created to determine the participants perspectives towards the role of

language. The results from the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys provide an increase in the mean scores, from 4.12 to 4.80. Although this increase was more than the increase of the culture scores, it was not as high as the empathy increase.

Results from the semi-structured interviews clarify this increase. One consistent theme derived from these interviews was the unawareness of the sheer quantity of non-linear idioms used in any one conversation. An example of this is when participants learned that one analysis of 200,000 words analyzed during political debate, psychotherapy sessions, and compositions indicated that idioms are used 4.8 times a minute (Howard R. Pollio, 1997). Another example is when they learned that American sitcoms used idioms on average three times per minute and that 73% of them are deemed crucial for understanding the plot (Cooper, 1998). Upon hearing this, one participant uttered, “Cheese n rice” (Intervention workshop 3), while another participant muttered, “What the frick” (Intervention workshop 3). Silence was also a common thread through the interviews. Not one of the twenty-five participants understood the role of silence in communication. Although this seemed the most difficult to acculturate to, it also seemed the most accessible or practicable. Assertion 2 declares that the staff members were unaware of the complexities of the English language, and the results from the qualitative and quantitative instruments support that assertion.

This mixed methods action research provides the opportunity for the complementarity of the qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate a robust and detailed answer to the three research questions. The results portray the participants as increasing their awareness of the cultural realities of intercultural communication and how empathy is an important component to effective and efficient communication.

These results also portray participants as previously unaware of the complexities of English, but willing to try to modify the way they speak to NNEs.

### **Alignment to Theoretical Perspectives**

In this section, I connect my results with the theoretical frameworks used to guide my research. The first theoretical framework I presented was Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. As mentioned in chapter 2, Hofstede (1986, 2001) formulated six different categories that could quantifiably distinguish the cultural values of different countries: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, indulgence vs. restraint. Hofstede suggests that a contemplation of these differences can improve intercultural competence. My workshops endeavored to demonstrate how these dimensions can affect the effectiveness and efficiency of communication between non-native English-Speaking students (NNEs) and domestic staff members.

Using these concepts, the workshops was designed to explain, demonstrate and reconcile the relevant dimensions as demonstrated in the staff member/NNEs dynamic. Participants recognized their own dimensions, for example, in terms of equality in interaction (power index), students answering 'yes' to any question (uncertainty avoidance) or being late (long-term vs. short-term orientation). Discussions about challenges participants had are couched, discussed and reconciled through the cultural dimension. Understanding and empathy begin to emerge through the application of this framework to their personal experiences.

The second framework presented in chapter 2 is the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) proposed by Milton J. Bennett (1986, 2004). Bennett's



framework posited a six-stage continuum of cultural sensitivity. These six stages – denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integrations – range from ethnocentric to ethnorelative feelings. The distinction between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism is important because it distinguishes the evaluation of behavior and values through the standards, expectations, and preconceptions of one's own, the former, and the evaluation of behavior and values through a culture rather than universal lens, the latter.

The outcome of the intercultural workshops is closely related to DMIS. In this endeavor, participants evaluate their own views of culture and how they value the myriad expressions of culture. Participants reported how reflection of their own views allow them to identify themselves on the continuum. Some recognize their attempt to treat all students the same, regardless of ability, is an example of the minimization stage. This stage is situated on the ethnocentric side of the continuum and not the goal. They also reported that the acceptance stage, although moving in the right direction, is not the end of the journey. They recognized that, even though they assumed international students would be very culturally accepting, many of their students are not on the ethnorelative side of the continuum. Recognizing that students may not be ethnorelative, they would need to take the lead and use DMIS to facilitate successful interactions, as seen in assertion 4.

The third framework presented in chapter 2 was linguistic modification approach (LMA). Proponents of LMA assert there are tangible changes one can make to the content to make it more accessible without losing any salient components of the content. By being aware of, and modifying when necessary, the complex linguistic features like unfamiliar vocabulary, unnecessarily complex grammatical structures, superfluous

discourse markers, passive voice and abstractions, accessibility is increased. My workshops were designed, implemented and conducted to expose the participants to these linguistic features.

During the workshops and interviews, participants report on their realizations of the complexities of English and how making small changes could increase accessibility. Some recognize the sheer volume of idioms and expressions they used, whereas others acknowledged using grammatical structures without considering their complexity. One of the more common sentiments expressed was the acknowledgement of the potential obscuring nature of phrasal verbs; participants express their intention to, if not change, be aware of their usage of phrasal verbs.

Theoretical frameworks provide guidance for a researcher. Results need to be examined in their light. When examined in their totality, the results of my research are consistent with established theories on intercultural competence, cultural empathy, and language modification.

### **Lessons Learned**

I began this program because I witnessed ineffective and inefficient communication between domestic staff members and international students. Having taught international students for over 20 years, I believed I could help staff members better serve the international student community. I believed my experience could benefit others, but all of my skills and strategies were anecdotal and personally experiential. I wanted to demonstrate, quantifiably and qualitatively, that these skills and strategies worked. Through this program, I learned valuable lessons. Some of these lessons are about the research I conducted, and other lessons are about who I studied.

**Conducting research.** Prior to entering this program three years ago, I had never heard about problems of practice, action research, mixed method approaches, or the importance of theoretical framework. The entire idea of conducting meaningful and beneficial research was beyond me, and to be honest, it stayed beyond me the first few semesters. However, the faculty talked about problems of practice. They gave me the vocabulary to articulate what I had been thinking but unable to convey. By learning about problems of practice, I was able to isolate a tangible problem I could target and attempt to make a substantive contribution. My problem of practice is the interaction between domestic university staff members and those international students with limited English proficiency.

I also learned about action research. Action research was imminently accessible to me. It resonated. Find a problem. Examine it. Attempt a solution. Reflect. Wash. Rinse. Repeat. There is something very gratifying and motivating in being empowered to attempt to solve a problem that affects you and your environment. Action research empowers those who may not believe they have power to be an instrument of change.

When learning about action research, I also learned about the mixed method approach. In the language of the hoi polloi, action research refers to method of systematic integration of multiple sources of information (Butin, 2001). However, to me, mixed methods is a medium for robustness. I like this term, robustness. The idea that a clearer more substantive picture can be drawn by using, not just the quantitative approach I expected to employ when I began the program, a personal qualitative approach resonated in me. Quantitative results may only tell part of the story. As an educator, the answers are in the person, not on the paper. A mixed method approach allowed me to poke and prod,

nibble and nudge to find more information; information that may not come to like solely by analyzing a Likert Scale.

However, as empowered as I felt, and as anxious as I was to run down that pedagogical pathway, I needed a guidepost. I needed to know which way to run, how far I could stray from my path. I did not know it at the time, but I needed theoretical frameworks. I needed help making sense of my problem of practice, without which I could not make predictions. And if I was going to design instruments to measure the effectiveness of an intervention, then I was going to need help guiding those designs. Hofstede, Bennett and Abedi provided me with the traffic cones keeping me heading in the right direction. They have provided me with justification for my decisions. This is why theoretical frameworks are important.

**Domestic staff members.** However, not all lessons learned were about my ability to design, implement and conduct research. I also learned a lot about my problem of practice, specifically the domestic staff members who interact with students with less proficiency in English. After completing the qualitative and quantitative analysis, I realized several things about my participants.

First, they genuinely want to help their students. The academic advisors take time out of their busy schedule to learn from me. They realize that their interactions with international students will only increase. They acknowledge they may not have all the skills they need to be effective in their job, so they accept professional development.

Second, most of the staff members overestimate their intercultural competence. They believe they are culturally aware, and some were to a degree, but many of them come to realize their knowledge was superficial. They see their international experience

to be of the same importance as their students. It more often than not is not. There are many truly ‘aha’ moments when the participants understand the difference in experience between themselves and their students.

However, I think the most important lesson learned is that none of the participants had any true understanding of just how difficult English is. It was both fun and disheartening to see their faces when they realize just how kerfuffled English can be. They consider slang to be profanity, which they avoid as a matter of course. Yet, they have no idea how much non-profane slang they use every day. During the interviews, participants disclose just how many idioms or expressions they use in a simple 20-minute session with an international student; it is satisfying to see their realization. They explain how hard it is to allow three seconds of silence to elapse when speaking with a student. In short, I learned just how much they take for granted when speaking with their students.

Finally, I learned I can modify the common maxim, ‘think globally, act locally.’ I believe even though this issue is global, I can affect it locally. Therefore, I now ascribe to a new maxim, think globally, influence locally.

### **Limitations**

As enthusiastic as I am with this research project, it is not without its limitations. As an action research project, we are told that these results are most likely not generalizable outside our problem of practice. That being said, it is still important to recognize limitations. These limitations include threats to validity, as described through the history effect, novelty effect, and the experimenter effect. Another limitation concerns the sampling of participants who contributed the data.

**History effect.** A threat of history occurs when an event takes place concurrently with and independently of the timeline of one's intervention. My intervention took place over the course of a semester, but I could not control what interactions or events my participants experience between the time they took the pre-intervention survey until the post-intervention survey. They could attend professional development, see a movie, or have an interaction with a student or co-worker that affected them. This could affect their performance on my measurement. All of this is not say that the results aren't sound, but it does need to be acknowledged (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2005; Smith & Glass, 2014).

**Experimenter effect.** I have been teaching for 20 years. I have presented at local, national and international conferences. I know how to entertain an audience and keep them engaged. It is possible that this leads participants to perform, learn, contribute atypically well (Smith & Glass, 2014). I knew all of the participants when they signed up to participate. I see them outside of the intervention and engage with them socially. Because this is my problem of practice, and 'it takes a village' as it were, I feel it necessary to be as engaging with my participants as possible.

**Novelty effect.** It is possible that his opportunity of professional development is initially received with excitement and optimism from the participants. As mentioned before, Smith and Glass (2014) explain the threat of the novelty effect unlikely to be repeated if attempted a second time. This is a consideration for my problem of practice because the participants are volunteers who choose to participate because they feel this professional development could help them. There is no such guarantee were I to run this program with another cohort. This leads me to the next limitation.

**Sampling.** Another limitation is the fact that all the participants volunteered to participate. They are like-minded in that they want to learn strategies to help their international students. They are inclined to be more receptive to the ideas and strategies proposed in the intervention. However, there are many staff members who do not feel the need to treat non-native English-speaking students differently. Many staff members do not feel these students deserve ‘special treatment’ or feel they should not be attending an American university if they do not grok the lingo. Should these staff members be forced to participate in my intervention? It is possible the content may not be received as enthusiastically as it was by those who volunteered for this past cycle of research.

### **Future Research**

In this action research study, I explored intercultural competence and how it can be increased through a professional development intervention. However, even though I have satisfactorily concluded my efforts, there is more worth pursuing. This includes a) working with staff members who hold different views about our international student population, b) follow up after a longer duration to determine whether strategies are being employed, and c) whether effects could be similar for another facilitator.

As mentioned in the limitations section, the only participants were those who volunteered, i.e., those who are already interculturally inclined. Participants wanted to learn skills and strategies for engaging more effectively and efficiently with their students. They listened openly, were receptive to ideas they had not considered and genuinely searched for ways to help their students. There are other staff members on this campus who do not share such concern. Some staff members believe all students should be treated equally regardless of skill set. If a student chooses not to attain a level of

English necessary to be academically successful, so be it. I would like to see another iteration of this intervention where a director requires all participants, empathetic and apathetic alike, to participate in a professional development. Will this intervention achieve similar results in the unwilling?

A second area of continued research addresses the long-term benefits of the intervention. The current iteration of this study was conducted over 5 months. The time between intervention and post-intervention and survey was never more than six weeks. During that immediate time, participants extolled the virtues of the intervention. However, there was no long term follow up. After an appropriate interval, a third data collection should be conducted to determine whether the skills and strategies are still used or still beneficial. This could demonstrate greater value of the intervention.

Finally, I believe the experimenter effect is a real concern. This problem of practice is in my bailiwick. I see its effects all around me. I don't believe I am the only one who sees this or wants to ameliorate it; I just happen to be the person currently working on it. Right or wrong, I am demonstrably passionate about this topic. I have been told I have infectious enthusiasm and that I am a skilled presenter. I believe the content of the intervention is effective enough to stand on its own merits; however, I believe another presenter should conduct the workshop to determine whether its positive effects still hold when presented by someone else.

### **Final Thought**

This endeavor is a mixed methods action research project. This endeavor is an experience, and, as Bacon suggests above, only in experience does conclusion approach certainty. Waxing rhapsodic about a problem won't eliminate the problem. Something



needs to be done. Sometimes one must cry havoc. The purpose of this research project was to examine the effects of intercultural competence on the ability of staff members to engage their non-native English-speaking students (NNESs) more effectively.

Regardless of the results, the experience of this endeavor has served me well. And, because I identify as a teacher – it is who I am and what I do –I can only hope that it will serve our international students, as well, by reducing language and culture as barriers to academic success.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE SURVEY



Pre-Intervention Survey

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-Intervention Survey: For each of the questions below, circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement, where: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I possess the necessary cultural awareness to communicate effectively.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I have the skills to ensure my students learn what they need from me.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I understand the difficulties of the non-native English-speaking students I work with.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I have the abilities to employ cultural awareness to increase my students' understanding.	6	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking differently allows me to communicate more effectively.	6	5	4	3	2	1
Non-native English-speaking students have a more difficulty time understanding English than native English-speaking students.	6	5	4	3	2	1
It is not my responsibility to ensure that non-native English-speaking students understand what I am saying.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I can use my cultural competencies to perform	6	5	4	3	2	1

my duties to my expectations.						
I communicate with student differently based upon where they are from or their English ability.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I don't think there are differences between the experiences of students with a degree of proficiency in English and those with low proficiency.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I can effectively modify my speech to increase listener comprehension.	6	5	4	3	2	1
To better communicate with my students, I use an understanding of the differences between our respective cultures	6	5	4	3	2	1
I have the abilities to change the way I talk to make myself better understood.	6	5	4	3	2	1
My knowledge of different cultures is an asset in my position.	6	5	4	3	2	1
I appreciate how challenging it can be for international students to communicate with me at times.	6	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX B  
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE SEMI-STRUCTURED  
INTEVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you think are some challenging aspects of studying at Arizona State for our NNESs?
2. How often do you think about how you communicate orally with non-native English speakers (NNESs)?
3. What are some challenges for you in fulfilling your job responsibilities with your students?
4. In your dialogues with NNESs, who is responsible for making sure communication is understood?
5. What barriers do you think NNESs may have to effective comprehension?
6. What effect do you think the following have on NNESs content comprehension?
  - a. Phrasal Verbs
  - b. Idioms & Expressions
  - c. Speed of Speech
  - d. Pacing & Pausing
  - e. Comprehension Checks
  - f. Cultural Differences between you and your students
7. What modifications to your own speech, if any, do you make in order to make yourself better understood?
8. How often do you feel a NNES left the appointment having fully understood what you said and any assigned tasks?

APPENDIX C  
CULTURE WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

What do you see – cultural metaphor




Activity 2  
Cultural Awareness – Self-Perceptions

**Time is Money.  
It is limited.  
We should not waste it.**

**Time is Life.  
It is abundant.  
We should enjoy it.**

**Time is Money.  
It is limited.  
We should not waste it.**

**Time is Life.  
It is abundant.  
We should enjoy it.**




**People should “*tell it like it is*” even if it hurts.**

**Maintaining harmony is important even if it means not telling the complete truth.**

**People should tell it like it is even if it hurts.**

**Maintaining harmony is important even if it means not telling the complete truth.**




**I prefer to work independently and be recognized individually.**

**I prefer to work as part of a group and think it’s better when individuals are not singled out.**

**I prefer to work independently and be recognized individually.**

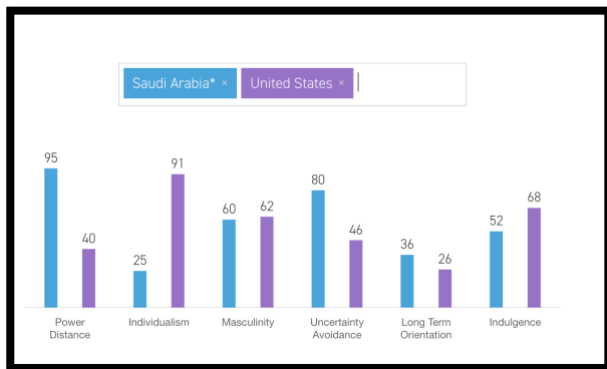
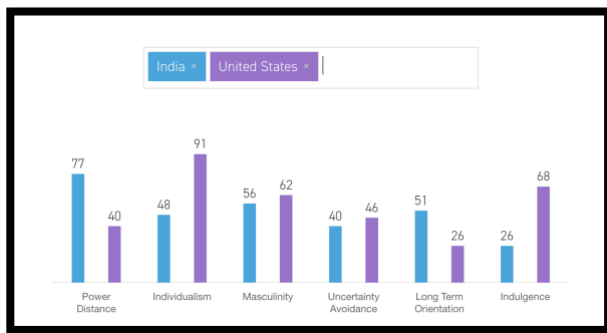
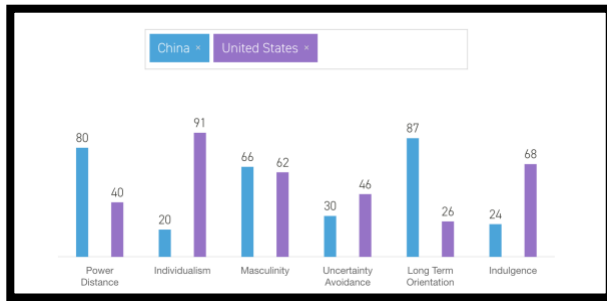
**I prefer to work as part of a group and think it’s better when individuals are not singled out.**



## Activity 2

### Cultural Comparison – Hofstede’s 6-D Cultural Model

Use the models below to think about cultural differences that arose through the disparate scores in the relevant dimensions.





APPENDIX D  
EMPATHY WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

## Activity 1

### T-Activity

Please discuss the following topic with your partner.

Topic: Have a conversation about what you ate for breakfast this morning and for dinner last night.

#### Goal:

- Explain what you had during these two meals
- Learn what your partner(s) ate for these two meals

#### Limitation:

- You may not use any words that contain the letter 'T'
  - You may not tell your partner what your limitation is
- 

Please discuss the following topic with your partner.

Topic: Have a conversation about what you ate for breakfast this morning and for dinner last night.

#### Goal:

- Explain what you had during these two meals
- Learn what your partner(s) ate during these two meals

#### Limitation:

- You may not make eye contact for more than one second at a time with your partner(s).
- Do not make ANY eye contact when they are speaking to you.
- You may not tell your partner what your limitation is

## Activity 2 Intercultural Continuum

Ethnocentric			Ethnorelative		

**Place the six categories in order from the *most* ethnocentric to the *most* ethnorelative.**

Integration

Minimization

Adaptation

Denial

Defense

Acceptance

**Match the Description with the Step on the Continuum**

I accept but may not agree with other cultures. Generally, I am curious and respectful.	I "see" the world through different eyes and make intentional changes in my own behavior and values.	"We" are superior and "they" are inferior. One feels threatened and is highly critical. What is strange may be labeled as stupid.	My cultural experience is the only one that is real and valid. There is little to no thought of "other."	I easily move in and out of different cultural worldviews.	Other cultures are trivialized or romanticized. One tends to deny differences (e.g., "color blind") and only seek similarities.
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**Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity** (Bennett, 1986)

Ethnocentric			Ethnorelative		
Denial	Defense	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
My cultural experience is the only one that is real and valid. There is little to no thought of "other."	"We" are superior and "they" are inferior. One feels threatened and is highly critical. What is strange may be labeled as stupid.	Other cultures are trivialized or romanticized. One tends to deny differences (e.g., "color blind") and only seek similarities.	I accept but may not agree with other cultures. Generally, I am curious and respectful.	I "see" the world through different eyes and make intentional changes in my own behavior and values.	I easily move in and out of different cultural worldviews.

(Strauss, 2001)

Denial Defense Minimization Acceptance Adaptation Integration

"Where can I learn about Venusian culture so I can be more effective in my residence hall?"

"As long as they speak English there will be no problem"

"I interact with my male and female colleagues differently to account for the differences in the way respect is communicated."

"Their food is terrible. Food from my country is so much better."

"If people are really honest with themselves, they'd see that some values are universal."

"Whatever the situation I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view."

"I don't understand why it takes them so long to greet each other. It seems like an inefficient use of time, but I know it's an important part of their culture, so I'm going to ask my neighbor about this the next time I see her."

"They were born here so they should know how to do it the American Way."

"I don't see any difference; race, gender, or culture. Just people."

"Our education system works really well for us, others should just learn to do it our way."

"I feel most comfortable when I'm bridging the differences between the cultures I know."

"I have to make a conscious effort to keep my legs uncrossed in order to fit in with the local culture in Egypt, where it is rude for someone to cross their legs when sitting."

Denial Defense Minimization Acceptance Adaptation Integration

"Where can I learn about Chinese culture so I can be more effective in my residence hall?" Acceptance

"As long as they speak English there will be no problem" Denial

"I interact with my male and female colleagues differently to account for the differences in the way respect is communicated." Adaptation

"Their food is terrible. Food from my country is so much better." Defense

"If people are really honest with themselves, they'd see that some values are universal." Minimization

"Whatever the situation I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view." Integration

"I don't understand why it takes them so long to greet each other. It seems like an inefficient use of time, but I know it's an important part of their culture, so I'm going to ask my neighbor about this the next time I see her." Acceptance

"They were born here so they should know how to do it the American Way." Denial

"I don't see any difference; race, gender, or culture. Just people." Minimization

"Our education system works really well for us, others should just learn to do it our way." Defense

"I feel most comfortable when I'm bridging the differences between the cultures I know." Integration

"I have to make a conscious effort to keep my legs uncrossed in order to fit in with the local culture in Egypt, where it is rude for someone to cross their legs when sitting." Adaptation

"The key to getting along in any culture is to just be yourself—authentic and honest!"

"With my experience, I can be successful in any culture without any special effort – I never experience culture shock."

"My homestay family and I have had very different life experiences, and we're learning from each other."

"These people don't value life the way we do."

"To solve this dispute, I'm going to have to change my approach."

"While the context may be different, the basic need to communicate remains the same around the world."

"I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people."

"The more I understand this culture, the better I get at the language."

"While sometimes I feel marginal in groups, I am able to move in and out of them with relative ease."

"I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures."

"Sometimes it's confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values."

"All big cities are the same—lots of buildings, too many cars, McDonalds."

"The key to getting along in any culture is to just be yourself—authentic and honest!" *Minimization*

"With my experience, I can be successful in any culture without any special effort – I never experience culture shock." *Denial*

"My homestay family and I have had very different life experiences, and we're learning from each other." *Acceptance*

"These people don't value life the way we do." *Defense*

"To solve this dispute, I'm going to have to change my approach." *Adaptation*

"While the context may be different, the basic need to communicate remains the same around the world." *Minimization*

"I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people." *Defense*

"The more I understand this culture, the better I get at the language." *Adaptation*

"While sometimes I feel marginal in groups, I am able to move in and out of them with relative ease." *Integration*

"I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures." *Integration*

"Sometimes it's confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values." *Acceptance*

"All big cities are the same—lots of buildings, too many cars, McDonalds." *Denial*

### Where are we on this continuum?

Ethnocentric			Ethnorelative		
Denial	Defense	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
My cultural experience is the only one that is real and valid. There is little to no thought of "other."	"We" are superior and "they" are inferior. One feels threatened and is highly critical. What is strange may be labeled as stupid.	Other cultures are trivialized or romanticized. One tends to deny differences (e.g., "color blind") and only seek similarities.	I accept but may not agree with other cultures. Generally, I am curious and respectful.	I "see" the world through different eyes and make intentional changes in my own behavior and values.	I easily move in and out of different cultural worldviews.
(Strauss, 2001)					

APPENDIX E  
LANGUAGE MODIFICATION WORKSHOP

Activity 1  
Phrasal Verbs

Write a definition for each of the phrasal verbs below. Many of these have more than one meaning, so right as many definitions you can think of. Then write a mono-verb alternative – your definition and alternative may be the same word.

Lexeme - Turn	Definition	Mono-Verb Alternative
Turn in	Submit	Submit
Turn on		
Turn off		
Turn out		
Turn back		
Turn over		
Turn into		
Turn down		
Turn up		

Activity 2

Think of as many phrasal verbs as you can for 'look'. Then write a synonym or definition and, if possible, a mono-verb alternative.

Lexeme - Look	Synonym Definition	Mono-Verb Alternative
Look into	investigate	investigate

### Activity 3

Look at the following idioms and try to explain them as if to a non-native English speaker.

**AWOL**  
Take no prisoners

**Rally the troops**

Close ranks

Ride shotgun

Full-speed ahead

Bite the bullet

**SNAFU**

**Military Idioms**

Dodge a bullet

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Section 8

Pyrrhic Victory

Pull the trigger

Pull rank

Meet one's Waterloo

About face

Touch base

**Threw me a curve ball**

There's no 'I' in team

ballpark

homerun

Game plan

Blindside

Neck and neck

Call the shots

**Sports Idioms**

suckerpunch

Skating on thin ice

Strike out

At any stage in the game

homestretch

Give a run for one's money

Out in left field



APPENDIX E  
IRB EXEMPTION



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Michelle Jordan  
Division of Teacher Preparation - Tempe  
480/965-9663  
Michelle.E.Jordan@asu.edu

Dear Michelle Jordan:  
On 9/28/2017 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Investigating Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Best Practices for Delivering Content to Non-Native-English Speaking Students
Investigator:	Michelle Jordan
IRB ID:	STUDY00006957
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Robert Schoenfeld, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li><li>• Robert Schoenfeld, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• Robert Schoenfeld, Category: Consent Form;</li></ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 9/28/2017.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Robert Schoenfeld  
Robert Schoenfeld