

Research Article

Transformative Learning and the Development of Young Peoples' Intercultural Competencies

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Abstract

We evaluated the effects of transformative learning and intercultural shared experiences with Russian university students. Specifically, we studied their perspectives and attitudes toward others (those with different ethnic backgrounds, world views, and attitudes) for an intervention group of 47 students and a comparison group of 51 students. Methods: Ten intercultural seminars were conducted over six years in this mixed methods study; participation in the seminars was the independent variable. The same pre-/post- self-assessment questionnaire was analyzed to measure perceptions of the students participating and not participating. Students in the comparison groups received neither instruction, intervention, nor interaction. Test scores were the dependent variable. Qualitative data were collected as ethnographic action data for the emergence of themes, patterns, and corroboration. Findings: The seminars resulted in statistically significant differences in perceptions of others among and between intervention and comparison groups. Intervention group members showed measurable growth of intercultural competencies and positive perceptions of others as indicated by quantitative data, discussions, and interviews. Qualitative data provided explanation and elaborative meaning for the quantitative data. Conclusions: This study supports the hypothesis that student informants participating in transformative learning and language and culture seminars experience increases in their development of intercultural competencies. Qualitative and quantitative data support the proposed theory. *True education, whatever that may be, will have the greatest tendency to civilize and humanize people in their relations to one another. Plato*

Keywords

Intercultural Competencies, Transformative Learning, Others, Mixed Methods, Intervention Group, Comparison Group

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of This Study

The growth of multiculturalism, global interdependence, and massive migrations and movement of refugees necessitates a greater awareness of, and dependence on, intercultural com-

petencies, transformative learning, and related communication skills. The ability to competently understand and appreciate cultural diversity within and across international borders powerfully impacts one's ability to successfully navigate within global economic and geopolitical landscapes [1]. Well over a million students from the USA participate in some form

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of international study program, and most other countries have similar programs [2]. It appears that intercultural sharing programs are influential in helping young people develop the cognitive, affective, and behavioral skill sets to act effectively and appropriately in a broad scope of cultural contexts [3].

Approaches to intercultural and multicultural education appear to vary widely throughout the international community. International sources were consulted, and original research was conducted in Finland and Russia. The literature indicates that increasing opportunities for intercultural interactions and acquiring tools for cultural proficiency have some correlation to transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies. These are manifest in interpersonal, community, national, and international efforts to transform internal frames of reference and affect external behaviors to promote understanding [8]. Cultural proficiency may be described as a mindset and worldview influencing the way an individual or an organization makes assumptions for the effective description, response, and plans to deal with issues that arise in diverse environments [14]. It is suggested that for some people, focused efforts may lead to a paradigm shift, transformations in thinking and from looking at cultural differences as a problem to a culturally proficient view of learning effective interaction with other cultures as a solution.

Learning about other cultures is fundamental in the development of cultural proficiency: competencies and transformations in positive attitudes toward others (those of different ethnic groups and backgrounds). Culture is a foundational focus of this study and of the educational process, life experiences, and bridge-building between and among peoples. Culture is considered a defining construct that shapes behaviors, values, and institutions and has recognizable attributes as expressed in the arts, literature, organizations, and other reflections of belief systems and behaviors [2]. This includes broadening and deepening one's thinking and transforming to a less exclusive and more open-minded, reflective, and critical thinker who analyzes his or her own worldview, assumptions, and expectations. Within societies today, the presence, identification, and stereotyping of intercultural differences increase entitlement, divisiveness, tension, and conflict presenting a challenge to educators, students, policymakers, government agencies, and the general public in all walks of life.

This study describes the relationships between participation in transformative learning and intercultural competency building language and cultural sharing programs and students' perceptions of and attitudes toward others. The study also evaluates the role of a mixed methods study to provide insights from qualitative and quantitative research to complement and support the overall findings. Two research questions (RQs) were addressed. RQ1 investigated evidence of transformative learning and the growth of intercultural competencies for students participating in intercultural language and culture workshops and seminars. RQ2 addressed qualitative and quantitative data mutually supporting the overall findings.

When referring to ideas, thoughts, and intellectual traditions one mainly considers theories [10]. The proposed theory here is that transformative learning experiences for the corresponding pedagogies and setting, result in positive development of intercultural competencies for the student informant group involved in this study. Thus for each individual it seems:

"One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time." *André Gide*

Transformative learning is a process of discovery through which a person changes or adapts their thinking, frames of reference, mindset, mind habits, meaning-making perspectives, and aspects of their worldview; *allegorically, finding new lands*. The focus is centered on the accessibility and quality of education to achieve the goals of the learners' development [16].

Transformation and change are natural to life. Educators, in particular, have been advised that an overall aim in teaching and learning is to help students become changemakers [16]. The intended impact of transformative learning and intercultural experiences is seeking a more harmonious and equitable world through positive change. However, until the last decade or so, related phenomena were somewhat under-examined. The increase in attention has been positive. Thus, education should seek to provide students with the tools, competencies, and skills to lead productive and fulfilling lives and develop programs and schools to become advocates of equity and social justice [12].

This happens when we enable young people to be directly involved in their development and growth [16]. The experiences are holistic and comprehensive and do raise one's level of positive stress which helps to initiate and inspire positive change [9]. This includes: 1) Intentionally and purposefully developing relationships with others, 2) Visiting culturally different places either at home or abroad, 3) Reflecting on one's own cultural awareness and place in the world. These experiences provide opportunities for actively practicing and developing intercultural awareness, skills, and competencies [9]. For the purpose of this study, others are defined as members of any group different from one's own in terms of social, cultural, or ethnic identity; typically indicated by ethnic background, creed, color, or self-identification. This research considered epistemological, theoretical, and philosophical frameworks. The prevailing worldview involved gaining knowledge of the relationship between the researcher's hypothesis about transformative learning and intercultural competencies, and the practical approach to addressing the research questions. Perceived and/or real cultural differences and resultant perceptions, or attitudes, are potentially sensitive issues. The degree of intercultural competence improves with increasing awareness and levels of intercultural sensitivity [11]. In order to address, assess, and discuss these phenomena more concretely, two different categories were identified, each consistent with the research theme: one's own

ethnic group, and the other. These categories are part of an ongoing societal public debate and are often referenced in popular form in the media and through disciplined inquiry on this topic. The main focus centers on increased knowledge and awareness of the impact of transformative learning and intercultural experiences and the possible influence on perspectives of young people that enhances the likelihood of meaningful discussions and dialog about intercultural issues.

Societies in general have in great part been shaped by globalization over the past several decades. However, the impact this will have on our world is yet to be seen. Clearly, there is an increasing interconnectedness of issues involving climate change, war and conflict, gender and social inequality, poverty, unemployment, and forced migration. For many countries and societies, these have all become consequential. In the movement of people traveling as refugees, migrants, or travelers, they carry their cultures, religions, heritage, world views, and languages along with them.

For the reader's benefit, please note that the terms informants, intervention group, participants, students, and student informants are sometimes used interchangeably depending on the intention of a particular statement or situation. Key terms are intercultural competencies, transformative learning, others, mixed methods, intervention group, comparison group. Funding was private with no financial interests involved from any third parties.

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects

Subjects consisted of students from Shuya Pedagogical University, Ivanovo Region, Russia in the classes of 2014–2020 who participated in language and culture seminars and a class cohort that did not participate and served as a comparison group. University faculty and records supported demographic similarity for both groups. The seminars were each 2 to 4.5 days in duration over a period of 8 years and provided 8 to 16 hours of lessons, guided activities, workshops, exploratory learning, and formal and informal interaction for intervention group students. The goal of the seminars is to provide transformative learning experiences, opportunities for the development of intercultural competencies, and improved language skills as the role of meaningful communication is necessary. Cultural immersion is an important component for the teachers and intensive cultural exchange for the students as the faculty typically meets the student participants on their home turf.

Students participating were convenience samples. The sample of 98 university informants including freshmen through fifth-year seniors and were involved in the study as informants by virtue of their enrollment in the university. The informants were placed in two groups: the intervention group was comprised of students in the linguistics department, and the comparison or control group informants were students

from other departments. Because of convenience sample populations, there were not true experimental and control groups, but rather informant and comparison groups.

Specific diversity of informants was approximately 90% ethnic Russian, 9% from several former Soviet states, 1% African or Asian. Participation was voluntary. No participants chose to avoid or drop out of the program.

2.2. Mixed Methods Research

This study combined qualitative and quantitative research techniques to address the overarching research question: how and in what ways do transformative learning experiences influence intercultural competencies as indicated from the results of this mixed methods study? Combining the methods, approaches, concepts, and language of both research paradigms into a single study was intended to provide superior results [4]. The study targeted the impact of the participation of Russian university informants, ages 18–23 years, in language and cultural sharing seminars and their perceptions of others. The seminar teaching teams provided a variety of lessons, classes, workshops, discussions, and a myriad of interactions through extracurricular activities with the intervention group designed to provide intercultural experiences. The teachers themselves were components of the cultural experience. The comparison group received no intervention and was not in contact with the seminar team teachers, except for chance encounters if they happened to pass in the hallways or cafeteria. They did not participate in any intercultural activities. Figure 1 illustrates the mixed methods research design.

This mixed methods study was structured to underpin the research questions and the purpose of the study. The significance of the study has been reflected in the description of the mixed methods design and how the research questions are aligned with this type of design. The research questions helped determine the methodology and select research strategies with data that resulted in determining the ultimate wording and description of the research questions during the study or ex post facto. Philosophically, choosing a mixed methods research strategy pragmatically favors flexibility.

This research followed a methodology primarily dependent on worldview, philosophical underpinnings, and basic assumptions. Thus, influenced by a western point of view and these factors influenced the scope of the study. Worldview was considered as a set of beliefs, assumptions, and values. Worldview and assumptions contribute to the decision of a mixed methods research plan [7]. Prior to designing and conducting a mixed methods study, there are three suggested and basic criteria: 1) determining the preferred worldview to use with mixed methods research; 2) engage different worldviews and ably respect each; 3) worldviews and the kind of mixed methods design form a philosophical and close relationship. The research conformed to the basic standards of a natural scientific model of both positivism and empiricism

and therefore provided supportive data with an objective and external reality as the view of social reality [6].

It is essential to consideration whether or not the research question justifies and favors mixed methods research. Thus, the Creswell and Plano Clark [7] hierarchy of levels in developing a research study took on special significance for this research. Level one, as may be expected, considers worldview, beliefs, and epistemology. The second level views a theory relative to the research; in the case of this research, education, and social sciences. The method designed here involved using one set of combined data to support the other in evaluating the overall findings as the mixed methods plan and research design shown below in Figure 1. This is in conjunction with an

overarching research question addressing: how and in what ways do transformative learning experiences influence intercultural competencies? In a learning environment with structured and purposeful interactions and active participation with others, can our thinking and perception of others change, especially in positive ways?

Members of the research team gained entry and access as individuals and seminar team members at a personal and also at an educational institution level. Such research projects are of a sensitive nature and require careful, ethical, and purposeful planning. The research plan, timeline, and design are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

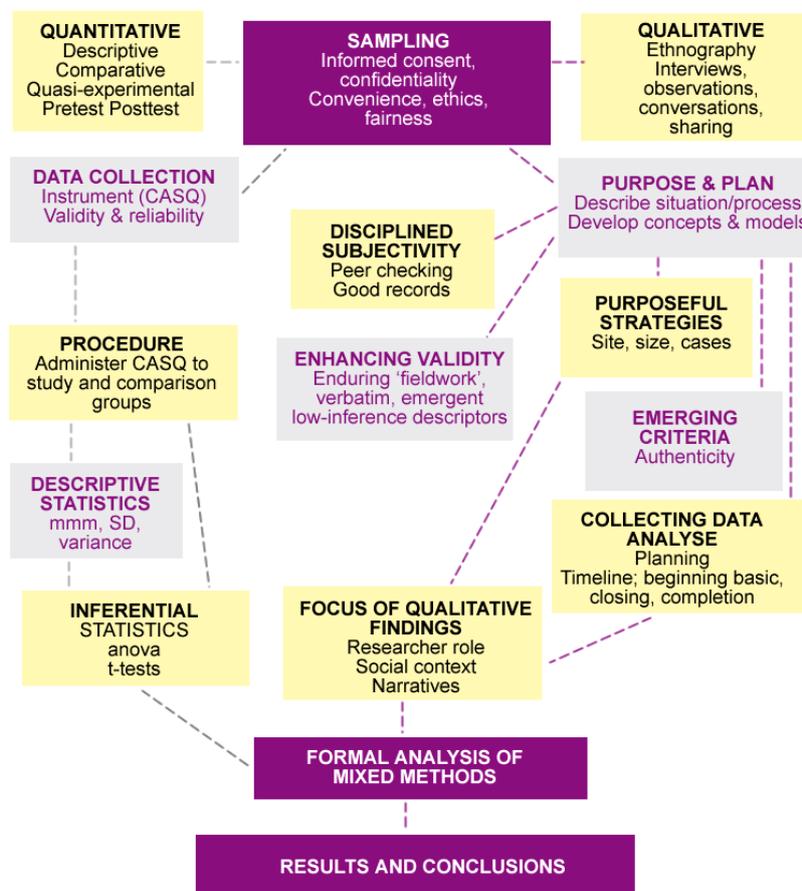


Figure 1. Mixed Methods Research Design [19].

Table 1. Research Plan and Timeline.

STEP 1	PLANNING	Identify site
APRIL 2014		Identify participants
	DATA COLLECTION	Target sample: size and suitability
		Strategy for purposeful sampling
		Secure institutional permissions and approvals
		Determine potential data collection issues: ethics, logistics, personal
STEP 2		Recruit informants

APRIL 2014		Identify data sources Determine types of data to be collected Determine questions Record data
PHASE 1 APRIL 2015	INTERVIEWS: INDIVIDUAL, PAIRS, TRIADS WRITTEN RESPONSES FREE WRITE PROMPTS OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS OBSERVATIONS PROCEED AS INDICATED	Protocols Interviews & Observations Identify Recording Methods Written, Oral, Photo, Video Who, What, When, Where?
PHASE 2 BASIC DATA COLLECTION APRIL 2015 & 2016	LENGTH OF DATA COLLECTION PERIOD CONTINUE QUESTIONS	CASQ Pre-test Formal and Informal
DECEMBER 2016 MARCH 2017 MAY 2017	CONVERSATIONS: DISCUSSIONS: IN-CLASS AND OUT-OF-CLASS	CASQ Post-test Unstructured Conversations
MAY 2018	LARGE AND SMALL GROUP IN- TERACTIONS	Determine emergent Nature of Data
OCTOBER 2018 DECEMBER 2019	STUDENT-INITIATED ACTIVITIES	Written and Oral Interviews
CONCLUDING PHASE	FINAL DATA COLLECTION	CASQ Retention Tet
INTERVENTION GROUP	OBSERVATIONS	Overt Covert
STEP 3 FEBRUARY – MAY 2020	ON-GOING EVALUATIVE ANALY- SIS and DATA ‘SNOOPING’	Evaluative programs, strategies, tools
STEP 4 TENTATIVE DATA INTERPRETATIONS MARCH 2020, MAY 2020	INITIAL DATA ANALYSIS	SPSS for Quantitative Ethnographic Reports
STEP 5 FORMAL ANALYSIS MAY 2020 -JANUARY 2021	DIAGRAMS, FIGURES, TABLES, MODEL:	Writing For Final Draft

The qualitative component of this study included scripted interview questions, Socratic seminars, open-ended verbal and written questions, free-write student statements, impromptu conversations, expressions, opinions, observations, informal free-time activities, and anonymous student evaluations. Qualitative research methods were intended to support the quantitative findings and vice-versa. The delivery of the

academic and culturally related content and activities purposefully and deliberately were integrated on a day-by-day basis and were intended to be as close as possible across all classes by each of the participating seminar teachers.

The quantitative part of the study compared the scores of informants from both groups on a pretest and posttest of the Cultural Assessment Survey Questionnaire (CASQ), a quan-

titative measurement instrument focused on the concepts in Table 2. The self-assessment instrument was developed by the authors and based on a similar instrument designed by Godkin and Sauvageau [10]. The CASQ included four domains (Table 2.) related to the students' perceptions and attitudes toward others. The domains and specific items were based on peer input, existing literature, and trial testing at a series of 12 international language and culture camps in Karjaa, Finland. For example, it has been reported that shared experiences with others helps students develop intercultural competencies and interest in other cultures [7]. As a result, selection of items for the CASQ corresponded to four domains related to intercultural competence: (a) cultural competence, (b) community concepts of culture, (c) humanistic values and self-actualization, (d) interest in learning about other culture and interacting positively with people from other cultures.

Although the instrument was not exhaustibly validated, it

was confirmed as valid by expert peer analysis defined a priori [8]. Test-retest analysis for the CASQ summative values with the intervention group from April 2016 to May 2017 yielded a correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) of 0.952 and from March to May 2017, $r = 0.988$. These values indicated confidence in the CASQ's accuracy over time and setting in measuring what it was intended to measure.

Pre- and post-administration of the questionnaire asked students to score themselves for eight questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) relative to their attitudes toward others. An additional seven questions asked them to score themselves on a 4-point Likert scale relating to their familiarity with others (1 = not at all, 4 = very familiar). The sums of all scores for each question and each group were averaged. Those totals were used in data analysis for descriptive and inferential statistics. The CASQ was available in English and Russian.

Table 2. Domains and Items Related to CASQ Responses and Student Attitudes.

1. Cultural competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have difficulty being understanding of people whose ethnicity or race is different from mine. • How well are you able to describe the social needs of people of at least one of the populations of color in your country? (Exclude your own group if you are ethnically diverse.) • How well do you know what languages are used by the populations in your country? • How well can you include culturally important information in your attitudes about people from other countries? • How well do you know the main religious beliefs and practices of at least one of the major populations of color in your country? (Exclude your own group if you are ethnically diverse.) • Bilingual (two languages) education programs, which use the common language as well as pupils' native language to teach daily coursework, should be offered in public schools.
2. Community concepts of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people move to the new country, they should learn enough of the common language to manage daily business on their own. • People who enter my country illegally should not be offered health care. • Creating government policies to help correct unequal treatment among racial groups is no longer necessary.
3. Humanistic values and self-actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People from different cultural or ethnic groups, or people from different countries, living legally in your country, should all be eligible for the same social benefits and be treated equally like anyone else. • How aware are you of the problems faced by people of color in finding jobs and getting social services (healthcare, etc.) in your country? (Exclude your own group if you are ethnically diverse.) • I tend to feel uncomfortable with people whose cultural backgrounds differ from my own.
4. Interest in learning about other cultures and interacting positively with people from other cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy interacting with people from other countries and cultures. • How well do you feel you understand an acquaintance's cultural background and culturally specific beliefs and behaviours? (Exclude your own group if you are ethnically diverse.)

Note. Numbers 1–8: Likert scale. 1–5. 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. Numbers 9–14: Likert scale. 1–4. 1 = not at all, 4 = very familiar

As the study proceeded, the importance of qualitative data increased. Limitations including internal and external validity, reliability of the CASQ, and other extraneous factors outside

the scope of the researcher's control were considered. For successful qualitative research, the goal is to follow a good plan with valid questions and consistent results from efficient

data collection and a strategic process for the events and personnel involved in the study (Table 3). Objectivity is important with the informants' responses and scores understood by the researcher while maintaining awareness of potential interpretive bias. Subjective objectivity is used in the analysis phase of a mixed methods study.

Standard conditions should be maintained for all related procedures with consistent instructions for the same questions and observations. During this inquiry, verbal questions were connected with verbal responses that were manually recorded

verbatim. For some questions, written responses were required, and the informants' replies were maintained and reported verbatim. To facilitate standardization and consistency, mutually agreeable times were scheduled for the components of the qualitative studies (interviews, discussions, conversations, formal and informal activities, and observations). The mixed methods design was constructed and reconstructed during the early stages of the study when it became apparent that qualitative research would play a much more significant role than initially envisioned.

Table 3. Qualitative Data Records by Event and Personnel: 2015–2019.

Seminars	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Totals
No. of seminars	1	2	3	2	2	10
No. of faculty	3	4	1	4	1	13
Lg. group meetings	7	7	10	6	7	37
Sm. group meetings	21	19	42	48	20	140
Informant led activities	2	3	5	4	5	19
Formal & informal talks	36	80	16	96	18	246
Informal outings	4	5	4	10	5	28
Open-ended writings	99	184	139	157	124	703
Open-ended interviews	21	26	15	37	42	141

3. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for quantitative results and analyzed by conducting repeated measures of analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-tests for within- and between-group comparisons on scores of pretests and posttest means to determine any statistically significant differences for this parametric data. The independent variable (IV) was the participation of the intervention group members in the language and culture seminars. The dependent variable (DV) was scored on the CASQ posttest. A

subjective analysis of the empirical results of the main effect on the DV was the collection of qualitative data as part of this mixed methods study. Changes in pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using SPSS for both intervention and comparison groups at the beginning and conclusion of the study (Tables 4 and 5). The results in Tables 4 and 5 thus represent the DV, changes in attitudes or perspectives as indicated by the CASQ scores. The result of the ANOVA was statistically significant. The F value of 8.796 predicts the DV for the intervention. A P value of < .05 was used to determine statistical significance, thus the level of confidence is 95%.

Table 4. Intervention and Comparison Groups Pretest Scores.

Intervention	Mean	SD	N
Informant group	44.49	4.943	47
Comparison group	43.63	4.821	51
Combined mean and Difference	44.04 and 0.86	4.873	98

Table 5. Informant and Comparison Groups Posttest Scores (DV).

Intervention	Mean	SD	N
Informant group	51.45	4.154	47
Comparison group	43.27	4.968	51
Combined mean and Difference	47.19 and 8.18	6.144	98

Table 6. Pretest and Posttest Mean t-test Scores: Intervention and Comparison Groups.

Group	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	t-statistic	p value
Intervention	44.49	51.45	8.484	<.05
Comparison	43.63	43.27	0.892	<.05

A developmental identification and integration process was devised for the overall analysis of the qualitative data according to the intervention as the IV. This was consistent with the overarching concept of intercultural competencies and included perceptions, attitudes (difficult to measure but viewed here as a probabilistic), and transformations in thinking. Student statement factors and individual data pieces were collected and segregated for each theme (Figure 2). As an example, the actual and complete data for the theme Learning through interaction (Table 7), was derived for

goodness of fit by type, context, and content. Formatting or coding the data to facilitate analysis utilized an intuitive, intellectual discriminant analysis supported by peer and expert review. All statement factors were grouped and coded in the same way for each theme. The sets of data for each theme were analyzed within the framework of the intercultural factors and integrated by evaluation of all data pieces. The themes were considered sub-dependent variables and predictor variables for correlating data to the corresponding theme using subjective objectivity.

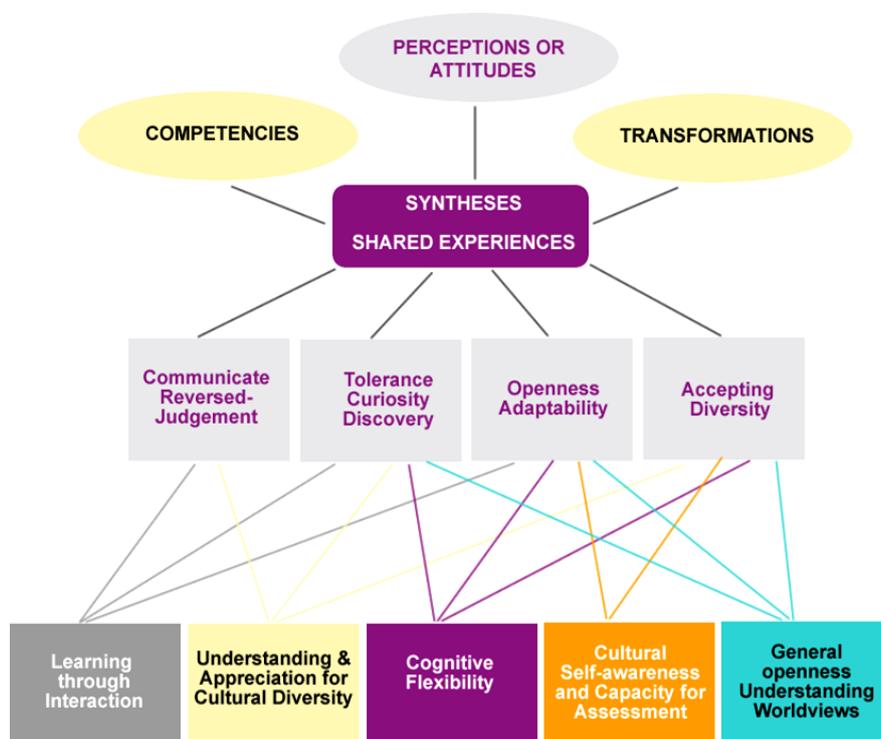


Figure 2. The Development Process for Intercultural Competencies, Perceptions or Attitudes, and Transformations with Intercultural Thematic Factors [19].

Standard conditions were maintained for the administration of questions and observations. Verbal questions correlated with oral responses and were recorded verbatim. Written questions required written responses. Informants' replies were also reported verbatim. To facilitate standardization and consistency, conveniently agreeable times were scheduled for the qualitative studies; this included interviews, discussions, conversations, formal and informal activities, writing, and observations. Diverse and varied activities supported the authenticity of informants' responses, characteristics, experiences, and opinions. These aspects of the study fit within a prescribed yet flexible time frame, the actual physical locations, and the topics. The authors recorded observations and ethnographic narratives. Tables 7 - 11 show the compilation of qualitative data reported by theme.

In handling the data four steps emerged as a logical progression for this process: 1) Analysis of the sets of interview questions with congruent thematic data tables from subject responses. 2) Classifying free-form voluntary subject statements with researcher observations and narratives. 3) Developing the thematic categories that emerged from qualitative data. 4) Designing the conceptual developmental process as patterns and relationships based on the themes became apparent.

Informant statements are included within each thematic expos é. Statements are recorded in as close to original form as was practical and some grammatical anomalies reflect the originality of the informant. Specific seminar related themes

were an integral part of the seminar content with the objective of providing the opportunity for the informants to consider topics from different viewpoints, to look at some topics or themes for the first time, and to practice metacognition. Many of their thoughts and ideas were both impressive, insightful, interesting, and appeared indicative of their evolving cultural perspectives.

In the sections that follow, the informants' comments and the ethnographic narratives describe their experiences of participating in the language and culture seminars. Each table is aligned with a specific emergent theme. The contextual, conceptual, pragmatic, and philosophical underpinnings of the ethnographic approach in this study were to examine the impacts and effects of overall participation in the seminars and the shared experiences of the informants and our faculty team. This is seen in their impressions of the seminars and the influences and impact of transformative learning experiences, the apparent development of intercultural competencies and resultant perspectives of others. Presented in the context of the seminars, the informant sentiments are essential for the reader to conceptualize and understand the purpose, significance, and findings of this study. It is also important to understand the operationalization of the content and context of the seminars; looking at what, why, and how of the intervention or IV to see the complementarity of the quantitative and qualitative components of this mixed methods study and for examining future research or practices. This section includes data extracts from students and author comments.

Table 7. Learning Through Interaction.

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
1. Enjoyed songs and music	47	29
2. Songs and music drew us together	46	23
3. Songs and music were great and helpful	44	33
4. Appreciate the positive atmosphere	44	14
5. Comfort level felt good	44	29
6. Teachers so positive	44	24
7. Like the way the instruction is given	43	28
8. Songs and music lifted my spirits	38	25
9. Enjoyed the group work	39	25
10. The seminars helped getting to know others	31	15
11. Develops relationships and trust	28	14
12. Creates friendships	28	13
13. Made new friends	28	20

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
14. It was good to have opportunities to share	28	19
15. Pressure & stress is high, seminars help cope	20	11
16. This was an emotional experience	20	10
17. Good to see kindness & openness, it spreads	9	7
18. The sessions improved my mood	8	22
19. It was great to visit friends	3	16
20. Time to relax, be myself	3	3
21. This was amazing breath of fresh air	3	3
22. The change of pace helped me gain energy	3	1

Within the somewhat flexible parameters of this theme Learning Through Interaction, our conversations, individually or in small groups, focused on real- life issues to which we could all relate and openly discuss together. The topics or subjects for our discussions could be described as basic in the sense that they were foundational to genuine life experiences and within the realm of concepts common to human nature. Simultaneously, the concepts were deeper and profound in that they uncovered insights and understanding of important elements of character and life within the range of human experiences shared by many. The results related to this theme indicate that active, mutual participation and interaction with others, in other words, doing things together, was an important factor and indicator of the transformative learning process.

The informant responses in Table 7 and data extracts reflect this phenomenon. The responses related to this theme, in one way or another, indicated that interacting with others was an educational experience that promoted transformative thinking and learning through the vehicle of interaction and sharing of ideas, opinions, perspectives, and joining together in mutual activities. Ethnographic narratives describe potential correlations, connections, or consistencies between informant responses and this theme.

3.1. Data Extracts

“The themes of our conversations were rather simple and true to life, that we can say something about it. They were simple but at the same time very profound. They show such important things as Trust, Believe, Love, Respect. They teach us how to be open, how to survive, how to support. And also, how to avoid wars and save peace in our world.” Student’s written feedback, 2017

This data extract showcases how culture indicates the way we are with each other. For example, responses like positive

atmosphere, comfort level felt good, songs and music lifted my spirits, creates relationships, made new friends, and good to see kindness - it spreads, indicate the positive behavioral and attitudinal interactions experienced by the informants.

“What do you think about the opportunities to share thoughts and opinions? Ok, um, when we communicate and when we do something together, um, it helps us to understand that there is no difference in us, that all people are the same and the only important thing is how you, um, is how you try to interact with the other person.” Student Interview, Shuya, 2018

The way we interact with others encompasses our attitude and behaviors and also how we relate to one another. This theme relates to the atmosphere and environment that promoted openness, listening, and willingness to share. The additional data extracts below substantiate the impact of Learning Through Interaction as influential in transformational thinking, developing intercultural competencies, and enjoying learning together. This student came up and stayed with me as we walked from the campus to the Teza river, about a 30-minute walk. It was a nice May evening and she, as well as the 12 to 15 other students, along with 3 staff members enjoyed this informal outing. We refer to it as walk and talk, which is exactly what we did. She asked why we came to her university. I told her I was very interested in spending time within another culture, and I had already visited Shuya at an earlier seminar. She expressed joyous amazement that we Americans and Finns would come to their small university out in the provincial area. She smiled a lot, and we had a nice conversation. She had a huge smile when I told her that kids like her were the reason, we do what we do, working and interacting with young people. Observation, Shuya, 2018

The degree of gratitude was quite apparent, actually throughout the analysis of all the themes. The affirmation was clear on the impact of doing things together; positive feelings were established and interest in cultural sharing. Just watch-

ing their happy faces and noticing that most of them were walking and talking with other students they had not known well or simply had never met was important and interesting to observe, as well as uplifting. Doing even simple things together definitely has its place in learning through interaction. The focus of this statement is on time together with interaction. Playing games refers to time together but more than that, doing things together; this is consistent with the importance of shared experiences and having some fun while learning. A clear and almost palpable component of the overall interaction; teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-teacher, was the overarching concept of trust. Trust is built and our seminar teaching team provided learning activities that intentionally introduced and helped the development of mutual trust. At times, students asked if we could close the door so that they could share something in complete privacy and confidence.

Sharing provided the opportunity to hear others and reflect on different thoughts, ideas, ways of thinking, and observations. These may lead to transformations in ideas and thoughts, as well as greater impacts such as one's worldview. Having the opportunities and interest in looking through other lenses to see the other is part of the experience in developing intercultural competencies, as both qualitative and quantitative findings confirmed. Within the seminar environment, a microculture developed an atmosphere like a song everyone knew and seemed almost palpable to staff and students alike. Ethnographic data supported this microculture.

Music was a significant part of our seminar and camp intra-microculture. Overall, there was recognition by many informants of the role of music, and in general, the warm atmosphere it helped create and sustain throughout the seminars. Some supporting verbatim statements are as follows: "Friendly and comforting climate," "Your openness and kindness. The atmosphere was so warm and friendly, you guys made us feel like home," and "I liked the songs most of all. It makes a very friendly, warm atmosphere, it unites people like one big family." "Most of us rarely talk to each other on daily basis, but here I felt like we all are a big family, the members of which can support, comfort, help, and share your feelings when you need it, anytime. Moreover, it was fun." "Songs, they create a friendly atmosphere," and "I like the seminar, it was full of emotions, songs, to my mind it helps people to work together, and it also concentrates the attention," and "and, of course, songs! They were amazing. It is very good way to learn English."

The role of songs and music is included with this theme. In the process of this qualitative analysis, there was an intentionality to discover what members of the intervention group thought about and learned from their experience in general and about certain experiences, specifically. Asking a person what they believe about a certain thing may open the door to seeing their values, goals, and intentions. Interview questions and/or writing prompts were designed and presented to draw

out participants' emotional responses or reactions to experiences.

An example of one of the strategies designed for this aspect was listening to, learning the words, singing together, and analyzing the song: "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." "He ain't heavy, he's my brother" was the general seminar theme in May 2018. The preparation for this exercise included: introduction of the song, listening to the song with a video display of pictures of brother and brother or sister and brother, reading the words together, singing, and open Socratic seminar discussions in which informants shared their thoughts and feelings about the theme of the song. This was followed by a free-write session for the informants. The theme, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother," was the subject of a Norman Rockwell painting and also a motto for Father Flanagan's orphanage Boys Town near Omaha, Nebraska, USA.

The following are verbatim samples of informants' comments about the seminar theme, Shuya, May 2018: "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." Informant responses to music and the song.

"The lyrics have given me some food for thought, and quite a lot of food of a different kind. Family, love, people, world, strong emotions, life, world, people, love. I've got to notice that this world has become big, complicated, and an indifferent one, a cruel one, but still full of life and love, strength, compassion, generosity, and kindness. One must never underestimate the power of love which is one of the things to support life in our world. The kindness is still here, the love, the friendship. If not, then who or what will keep this world from self-destruction. Don't forget to tell the one's you love about your love, because 'Love is a life.' Don't close your eyes when you see someone's suffering, pain, and despair. Don't shift your head aside when a child is crying, or a man being beaten. Do act when you're able – able to change something. Give people a piece of the warmth in your heart – the world is too cruel for being indifferent." Student's song interpretation, Shuya, 2019. "When I listened to this song, I remember my elder brother and I can say that he is a person with which you can share your problems and he supports you in any time. He will never refuse from help. I feel gladness when I'm together with him. I can open my feeling only to him. When you're in a difficult situation he will protect you and give you useful advice. It's a big happiness to have such a close person. We should protect our close people." Student's song interpretation, Shuya, 2019.

Learning songs and singing together enriched this experience as verified in subject comments and student presentations. During the seminars, singing was an everyday activity and students began feeling free enough with me to request certain songs. Initially, as expected, some were a bit self-conscious or shy about singing but soon they became more and more comfortable, and many said they waited for this part of the day when we could sing together.

Table 8. Understanding and appreciating cultural diversity.

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
23. We want more seminars, please come back	47	29
24. It is helpful to meet foreigners	42	29
25. Good opportunity to communicate	41	24
26. Good mix of activities	38	14
27. I liked making our student presentations (cultural sharing)	38	32
28. Prefer American English	28	14
29. This was interesting	27	24
30. I enjoyed teaching methods to include students	25	20
31. Good to have a different experience	23	21
32. It was interesting to see real people	23	20
33. Initially a shock to see foreigners	20	10
34. First contact with real Americans	19	8
35. I liked the discussions	18	12
36. Local life is limiting; the seminars open eyes to the world	3	2

The results relative to this theme indicate that exposure to elements of another culture and the opportunity to meet, become acquainted with, and share experiences with members of a different culture were valuable in the development of intercultural competencies. This aspect of the intercultural experience was a significant factor in the process of transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies. Perceptions and attitudes about cultural diversity represent a good starting point where one may begin to value other cultures [5]. This is coincident with emotions that are often influenced by the way we feel, and in turn, easily affect behavior. Thus, how we treat each other is related to understanding, appreciation, and the values of trust, a sense of freedom to do, or be, or to say, and happiness. An expanding worldview, as well as appreciation of different cultures and culturally new experiences and awareness, are consistent with the theme as seen in the informant statements presented and evaluated below. The responses recorded in Table 8 and the data extracts that follow represent statements showing congruence with understanding and appreciation and fit this theme based on the informant statements in the data collected, as well as observational and evaluative analysis.

3.2. Data Extracts

“What activities and lessons were particularly helpful or impactful for your learning and enjoyment? ‘Well, When I think about our university years, the most memorizing

(memorable) was our seminars with you because we were here to study English and to learn English in a different cultural setting, and the days were very bright and unforgettable. That was, this is, exactly how we should learn; not as usual in lectures, reading books and doing homework. But this is like studying English in real situations. You don’t have to be prepared when you just can be spontaneous and end up with other people (from different cultures) and you help other people. Well, of course there were many activities and also working in small groups and conversational activities where we have the opportunity to speak our mind, say what we think’.” Student Interview, Shuya, 2018.

The main connection to the theme and sentiment of this data extract seems to be on language learning opportunities, but within a different cultural framework and emotional atmosphere. Stepping outside of one’s normal learning routine, and perhaps out of our comfort zone, may uncover value in doing things another way and finding benefits and advantages in the value of diversity. When diversity is supported as a worthwhile challenge, learners, informants, acquire and apply new skillsets to accomplish goals and achieve outcomes for self-improvement and to serve their communities. The narrative indicates coherence with language learning while the informant clearly articulates an understanding and appreciation for the value of cultural diversity and its connection to the teaching and learning environment and related pedagogies.

It appeared that the informants viewed this as an opportunity to learn more about other cultures with new information

and the desire to understand more. She seemed to demonstrate the feeling that she was part of a group of wonderful people. But she apparently could not adequately describe her feelings because the nurturing atmosphere that was relaxed and friendly clearly impressed her. She did indicate that it was very cool because in such an atmosphere she found herself in a comfort zone. She was enthusiastic about learning more new songs and was one of many who expressed hope that our team would come to Shuya for longer periods of time. Observation, Shuya, 2015.

Through innovative and classic methods and pedagogy, activities, lessons, workshops, interactive and experiential learning, and the all-important element of time together, each seminar and program guided all participants to integrate while allowing them to experience a cultural awareness at a low level of stress or self-disclosure. Participants were warmly welcomed to the seminar and music proved to be an out-

standing opening to set the mood. Each seminar was structured and designed to promote the development and growth of intercultural competencies while inspiring enthusiasm for new learning [9].

Different teaching strategies were used to reach different learning styles while creating a safe, open, trusting, comfortable, and often, fun learning environment. The seminar sessions were designed to help the participants progressively move along the intercultural growth continuum. Activities and interactions transpired from simple to complex and facilitated participant achievement conceptually, from superficial to deep. This inspired transformative learning, as the data revealed. The processes and strategies were shared with informants and the process of moving through the stages was introduced and emerged from shared experiences with a focus on expected outcomes.

Table 9. Cognitive Flexibility.

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
37. Improved my communication skills	47	29
38. The seminars are useful	46	24
39. Increased language skills	45	20
40. We discussed relevant ideas & real-life stuff	44	18
41. Increased knowledge of American culture	40	16
42. Helped my listening comprehension	38	15
43. Repetition helped (songs, reading, etc.)	38	23
44. We discussed important things	36	13
45. Increased my knowledge	33	12
46. Improved listening skills by hearing English	30	22
47. Increased my understanding of language	29	20
48. Enjoyed analyzing 'proverbs'	21	12
49. I like the new opportunity and experiential learning	20	10
50. Increased my understanding & awareness of nations	16	12
51. Increased my critical thinking skills	14	12
52. Gave me time to think, contemplate, reflect	12	9

The findings co-incident with this theme support ways in which the cognitive aspects of transformative learning are impacted by the emergence of mental models that change the way one may think about various topics and concepts, including other cultures. These pertain to mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning as contrasted

with emotional or volitional processes. This is characterized by evaluating information followed by assimilating and accommodating new schema of fundamental nature. Then, to build upon scaffoldings of increasingly more complex concepts and experiences that prompt learners toward reflection and development of more sophisticated thinking skills [15].

Ultimately, critical thinking skills provide a pathway to outcomes reached by design and not randomly or by mere chance. Affective learning typically occurs simultaneously, and examples abound within other themes [12]. The list in the next table includes those informant statements that seem to align with cognition most closely.

3.3. Data Extracts

“Listen to your body, negotiation is important, stay positive no matter what. It was a pleasure to have conversations with you and maybe we could communicate more. I liked learning the psychology tips, American slang, and Americanisms.” Student’s written statement, Shuya, 2016.

This data extract indicates a cognitive function in thinking pragmatically and conceptually in regard to learning. There are various ways in which we learn; here, experiential learning and metacognition seem inspirational to this student’s approach. Specifically, informant statements such as: “helped my listening comprehension, increased knowledge of American culture, and I like the new opportunity.” Experiential learning and real meaning-making were grasped and/or accomplished by the informant. Also, the informant highlighted language acquisition, as a viable component of the language and culture seminars. The possibility for new learning fits well with the theme of cognitive flexibility. While cultural knowledge does not equate with cultural competence, the ability to communicate in a second language is related to an increase in intercultural adaptability [2].

Transformative learning changes the way informants see themselves and how they see the world. When a learner is finding new ways to express their feelings and to learn new things about different cultures in fundamental and deliberate ways, the outcome can be life changing. For example, responses like: “increased my knowledge, gave me time to think, contemplate, reflect, and increased my knowledge and

awareness of nations,” leads to the assumption that thinking about new topics and thinking in different ways opens the door of this theme for new and different ways of looking at things.

Informants in the intervention group indicated cognitive engagement and some development of cultural competencies with verbatim statements such as: “I learned elements of new cultures.” One girl said, “I’ve learnt a lot of new things about different cultures and differences between them.” Even synthesis of ideas about different cultures was manifest in statements like this: “Closer connections with each other that we were lucky to make. We truly became a small ‘village’ in a week, where everyone is friendly to each other, and no one is forgotten. Even more new cultural and linguistic information we got from you. Every time you come, I feel like all the boundaries that were built by world policy are being broken with every song we sing together and every word we say to each other.” Observation, Shuya, 2016.

Cognition may occur through assimilation, accommodation, and thought processes that form new mental models and representations of one’s reality; this, in turn, may change the way we think about something (Hunter, 2008). The resulting new construction of mental scaffolding from shared and expanded life experiences helps to develop new and more sophisticated ways of thinking about certain topics. The educational elements were, of course, fundamental to the seminars. Student expressions included statements such as “usually the professors just lecture at us, and then for the test we have to repeat what we’ve been told. In the seminars, statements like the following verified the thinking or cognitive involvement of the informants: “Here we get to say what we think” and “I’ve learnt a lot about psychology,” and “you help to improve my self-confidence, my speaking skills, my understanding of the real aim of my learning English,” and “also they learned (sic, taught) us to communicate with people and understand myself.”

Table 10. Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment.

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
53. Nice to have fun & smiles	46	31
54. Increased speaking confidence	47	29
55. I felt respected	46	12
56. It was nice that all opinions were accepted	37	19
57. More awareness of other customs and cultures	35	24
58. I like the question box	34	30
59. I was not afraid to speak	28	24
60. Lower ‘fear factor’	28	19

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
61. Our world has barriers; seminars help reduce barriers	26	15
62. It was important to discuss problems	23	16
63. Good to hear other points of view & perspectives	19	17
64. Helped learn about life, how to live, behave, gain life skills	15	5
65. Negative opinions accepted but need to be explained	11	5
66. This will help to go abroad	10	9
67. Are there opportunities for exchanges to USA?	8	15
68. Increased personal gratefulness	5	42

Cultural self-awareness and assessment are foundational to transformative thinking and the development of intercultural competencies. We need to know who we are before we can become aware of who others are and how we may fit into the big picture frame of humanity. These, as in the wisdom of the ancient Greeks in the aphorism, "know you." Traits of self-awareness and self-assessment and application of these abilities are fostered and developed in ways that help learners grasp the complex processes in building intercultural competencies by gaining awareness, skillsets, purposeful values, and personal behaviors and practices consistent with these traits [9]. Informant comments follow in Table 11. below.

3.4. Data Extracts

"Thanks for the cultural seminars, you teach us to be more tolerant of other people. I can practice my English skills." For this student, the evaluation of an idea and its application came forth in this way; "I would like to talk more about different problems and the ways they can be solved. I'm thinking about teaching tolerance now. It would be nice to teach some Russian kids to be more tolerant," and "cultural seminar is the possibility to get acquainted with another culture and find differences between Russian culture and another one." Written Statement, Shuya, 2016.

In becoming tolerant of other people, the informant, in addition to being able to see from others' perspectives, must have the essential aspect of cultural self-awareness [8]. Interestingly enough, this informant clearly indicated in her statement that she wanted to talk more about various problems related to tolerance and the ways they may be solved. She shared her feeling that it would be nice to teach Russian youngsters to be more tolerant. Transformative growth emerges from purposeful action on behalf of the informant to become more tolerant and to develop a sense of self-awareness while considering the world around them [11]. These attributes are reflected in this theme, as the informant

wrote, "The experience of communication with interesting people and ability to practice English. It was great to have actual themes, family atmosphere, and outdoor classes. The cultural seminars are the good, but we need more time for communication and to practice English."

This informant successfully performed the task of self-assessment. It is clear that she recognized her needs and desire for increased and improved communication skills. She indicated the favorable experience of communication with interesting people and the ability to practice as indicated in the section regarding music, the seminar theme was "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." Interview, Shuya, 2018. Additionally, informants' responses may be considered representative of one learning about themselves and their recognition of novel elements of a different culture; new songs, meeting new people, interacting in small groups, new subject matter, and the ways others do things.

For example, comments such as: "I felt respected," and "I was not afraid to speak," and "Good to hear other points of view and perspectives" may be indicative of the cultural perspectives and natures of the teachers, as well as the intra-culture that developed within the program. This theme, in conjunction with Learning Through Interaction, also promoted a positive, invitational, and inclusive atmosphere. This helped the informants to reflect on culture, awareness, and the inclusive environment where they felt comfortable to be themselves.

"Tell me, (informant's name) how do you feel about the freedom to speak, and openness during the seminar? 'I want to share the great experience about this whole seminar. I'm really appreciate your work; you do a really great work. You spend a lot of time away from your home with us, uh, trying to, um, you have all the possibilities to improve our skills. All the guys and all the girls here at the university are really glad that you are here with us. You charge us with your energy and your positive self, here it is great. In our usual classes, we are more into listening and not speaking, just listening to the teacher

and more into answering when we are asked. But you are always asking for our impressions about our opinions and that's a little bit unusual to us and we are almost always scared and scared about what we repeat but you always encourage us not to be afraid and that there's not pressure and you say, 'no one is going to bite you' and say not to be afraid to gain our skills. And I think it is really precious moments of our seminars." Interview, Shuya, 2018.

This interview was spontaneous as she was sitting in the main hallway, and I was walking along on my way to the cafeteria and decided to stop and chat for a few minutes. She

clearly was aware of her own culture and the elements of culture that impacted her studies and education at the university. She further recognized the differences in educational practices between our foreign teaching team and formed an impression of our culture of education as well. Her responses affirmed this with statements such as: "It was nice that all opinions were accepted, "It was important to discuss problems, and "our world has barriers, seminars help reduce barriers." This theme relates to increased awareness and the willingness to reflect and be self-analytical.

Table 11. General openness and understanding other worldviews of Others.

Student responses	Frequencies	
	Written statements	Interviews
69. Increased cultural awareness & exchange	47	30
70. Opportunity to talk with native English speakers	47	29
71. Appreciate cultural exchange with Americans & Finns	43	6
72. Build on common experiences	41	20
73. Impressed by the nature of teachers and teaching	39	31
74. Expanded my worldview	38	17
75. Felt the importance to be 'one' as people	33	32
76. I like the openness and freedom	27	24
77. Understood political barriers vs. culture	26	10
78. Increased my understanding & acceptance of others	20	15
79. Gave me a better picture of Americans	20	22
80. It is helpful to see cultures from different angle	18	32
81. Good to know about others & see & understand in person	17	20
82. Helps reduces prejudice and bias of different people in Russia	15	10
83. It was good to get feedback	15	14
84. Helped me understand about building 'people' bridges	14	12
85. Inspires me to help others, Re: Africa aid, noble work	14	19
86. Saw different ways of living from the Africa presentations	14	22
87. I learned to think about humanitarian aid	13	12
88. Realize Americans not always like TV and movies	3	2
89. Increases altruism	3	1

Local environments along with the effects of globalization and migration often create dichotomous conflicts from incongruent worldviews. Yet the same forces of globalization require people from various backgrounds to work together and construct avenues of cooperation [9]. Advances in tech-

nology and social media have given rise to a new kind of openness, communication, and information sharing that connects people from culturally diverse backgrounds. For example, church pastors in West Africa and South America have contacted European and North American churches after

reading doctrinal positions from church websites. This opens a connection for sharing worldviews, and in these particular incidences, openness to discuss religious interests. Yet, the value and importance of face-to-face and person-to-person interaction cannot be understated.

This theme and the other four themes are interconnected. This emphasizes the complexity and interdependence of the themes, and the constructs were consistent with the research questions guiding this study. There is an old saying, "to have a friend you need to be a friend." This may lead to increasingly open and understanding relationships with those from other cultures, both parties must share these characteristics and the willingness to consider the worldviews of others.

3.5. Data Extracts

"This is an opportunity for us to understand and show to others that the people that our government calls enemies are just like us. I was at a barbeque for the first time this year. I learned a few words in Hawaiian, increase your team to 7 or 8 people that will be better, and come to us more often!" Written statement, Shuya, 2018.

This data extract is somewhat remarkable in that the respondent made a leap from the seminar to geopolitics with reference to people supposedly considered enemies, but now seen as friends. It is clear that this informant recognized the importance and value of building bridges, rising above political barriers, and learning about cultures. For her, it was important to know about others, see them and understand them in person. The theme also, although having its own specific focus, emphasized openness, positivity, and understanding. Incidentally, as a gesture of good will and cultural sharing, the senior students planned and hosted an off-campus Bar-B-Q for our teaching team.

"Specifically, how have the seminars impacted you personally in your attitudes about, or appreciation for, other cultures?" "I think that's influenced me a lot and it's a great experience. The more I get involved in such participation, I get more open for other people, or for, education, um, I don't know, new ideas. I've been waiting for the seminars. I missed you and was looking forward to seeing some new people, too. You always bring good vibes with you." Interview, Shuya, 2018.

These data extracts provide a view on the worthiness of personal relationships and face-to-face interaction. This statement indicates the importance of personal relationships to this informant, a testimony to the openness experienced during the seminars. Examples include: "I like the openness and freedom, and increased cultural awareness & exchange, and expanded my worldview." The expected outcome from this theme was increased openness to each other, to different viewpoints, and to different worldviews.

The informants were divided into several groups with different students from other courses and levels. Typically, they work and study with other students in their particular course

and level, but we (the staff) decided that heterogeneous groupings would be a good strategy for the seminars. This informant expressed that it was really good and helped the students to be more outgoing and more communicative with others. I observed some of these newly grouped students sitting together, walking in the hallways together, and gathering in the cafeteria together with members of their new groups. She also stated, "all of our seminars were useful for us because they were about different themes." She liked explaining the meaning of proverbs (words of wisdom), for example "What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity," Addison). Her experience in standing in front of a lot of people during the large group meetings, in which she admitted being a little bit nervous, was really helpful and interesting. When I asked her what she felt we could add to the seminars, she didn't know what to add, but said, "it's really cool, you all are doing a great job, and thank you very much!" Observation, Shuya, 2017.

3.6. Summary

The qualitative data compilation was gathered from informants. Their input in the contexts of formal, semi-structured, naturalistic settings of the seminar curriculum, and extra-curricular events, was rich. The comments represent a large sample of the results of individual informants. The literature supports the use of open-ended questions and interviews to explore, uncover, and explain important phenomena and issues. This provided the means to conceptualize and develop meaningful, relevant, and purposeful questions to discover the true views and feelings of the informants [3, 8, 17, 7]. Evidence for the themes is provided in the quotes, multiple perspectives, descriptions, and narrations, along with tables, models, and figures that help interpret how the findings answer the research questions in tandem with the quantitative findings [7]. Informants provided written responses over the duration of the seminars that were reported as close to verbatim as possible.

4. Results

All 98 students completed the pre- and posttest survey CASQ. All 47 students of the intervention group completed the series of language and culture seminars and participated in activities, discussions, and interviews from which qualitative data was gathered. As shown in the data analysis, the mean difference on pre- and posttest scores was statistically significant for both analysis of variance, ANOVA, and t-tests ($p < .05$). The intervention group result was $F(1,46) = 8.796$, and the comparison group $F(1,50) = 0.892$, for the repeated measures ANOVA. Using paired sample t-tests, the intervention within group value was $t = 8.484$ and the between groups value was $t = 10.358$; ($p < .05$). The comparison within group pre- and posttest scores was $t = .453$, $p < .05$; this

finding is not statistically significant. Effect size was determined to indicate the strength of the statistical relationship between the means of the two variables: participation in the seminars, (the intervention group) and non-participation, (the comparison group). The effect size of 1.64 (Cohen's *d*) is large, and thus meaningful in its indication of strong practical significance of the research outcome.

These results indicate a possible and probable strong relationship between the impact and influence of participating in the language and culture seminars (the intervention) on the development of positive perceptions of, and possibly positive attitudes toward, others from members of the intervention group. In other words, we observed and measured possible probabilistic increases in transformative learning and thinking in the development of intercultural competencies, increased positive perceptions of others, and the possible increase in positive attitudes toward others through quantitative pre- and posttest comparison of mean scores and extensive qualitative analysis of voluminous data. With this study, a preponderance of reliable data was important because of the complex nature of the constructs evaluated [13].

The mixed methods design offered a workable and pragmatic combination for conducting the research. This methodological partnership of qualitative ethnographic action studies concomitant with empirical research appears to have resulted in a superior study when compared to a single method study [4]. This research method enabled us to fit together through the design, approach, and methodology a better interpretation of the results. Quantitative data provided empirical evidence relative to the theory behind RQ1 and the purposeful collection and evaluation of qualitative data provided the support, enrichment, and confirmation of the quantitative data as proposed in RQ2. Thus, according to this study, young people participating in a series of purposeful language and culture seminars do experience transformative learning and do develop increased intercultural competencies. The mixed methods research design achieved an effective analysis of the data mutually supported by qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For example, question no. 14 on the CASQ is "How familiar are you with the main cultural beliefs of at least one of the populations of color in your country? On the pretest, 38% of the intervention group informants indicated Fairly Well. On the posttest for the same question, the same students responded at a 62% indicated Fairly Well. The 24% increase indicates a positive difference. The qualitative data provides indications of how and why. Some differences are uncovered in statements by multiple informants such as:

"I have more awareness of other customs and cultures,"

"It was nice that all opinions were accepted,"

"Increased my understanding and acceptance of others,"

"It is helpful to see cultures from a different angle,"

"Helps reduce prejudice and bias of different people in Russia."

5. Discussion

The results of this study corroborate the findings of other researchers as presented in the literature review and six qualified peer reviewers, three PhD level and three with a MA degree. Intercultural experiences are associated with increased cultural competencies and sensitivities, humanistic values and idealism, transformations, and increased awareness of the role of culture in the lives of young people and their ability to relate positively to others. This research study also offers evidence that intercultural experiences may help people to become more understanding of diversity.

5.1. Transformative Learning

This study offers promising results that involvement in language and culture seminars may improve the abilities of young people to become more culturally competent and possibly undergo transformative thinking regarding others and other cultures. It is hoped that these experiences will promote an increase in international and intercultural education and experiences for young people. Life today is both a microcosm and macrocosm of intercultural environments in a culturally complex world. Therefore, considering and respecting other cultures and worldviews appears to be of ever-increasing importance. The surrounding culture and values around us shape the way we see the world and who we are. Furthermore, exposure to other cultures may change us and influence our thinking. For example, we may see different cultures as a source of richness and understanding in an early phase of life that the ways we are different are not necessary about right or wrong, just different. Understanding yourself and your own behavior better helps when mirroring it to other cultures.

A process model has been developed from the findings of this study. It shows relationships and outcomes based on the operationalization of conceptual underpinnings of transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies. These underpinnings appear to have positively impacted the perceptions of, and possibly positive attitudes toward, others held by the young people in the intervention group of this study. The Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies designed from the findings of this study (Figure 3) proposes an original pathway for the transformative process to occur and is based on the successful evaluation of the research questions analyzed from the data collected during this study.

The model illustrates a carefully studied phenomenon, described by ethnographic methods including interviews, observations, formal and informal communications, immersion, and empirical data collected from the quantitative CASQ instrument. The purposeful qualitative sampling techniques uncovered data-rich cases and procedures to obtain information. The sample size of 47 informants in the intervention group was a statistically suitable size to extract accurate and

rich data within the length of time dedicated to the study. The research design, with various and multiple data gathering procedures and strategies, provided adequate detail to support validity while maintaining the emergent nature of the quali-

tative data. The design also provided for commonality of meanings and the use of the low-inference descriptors for meaningful communication between the authors and the informants.

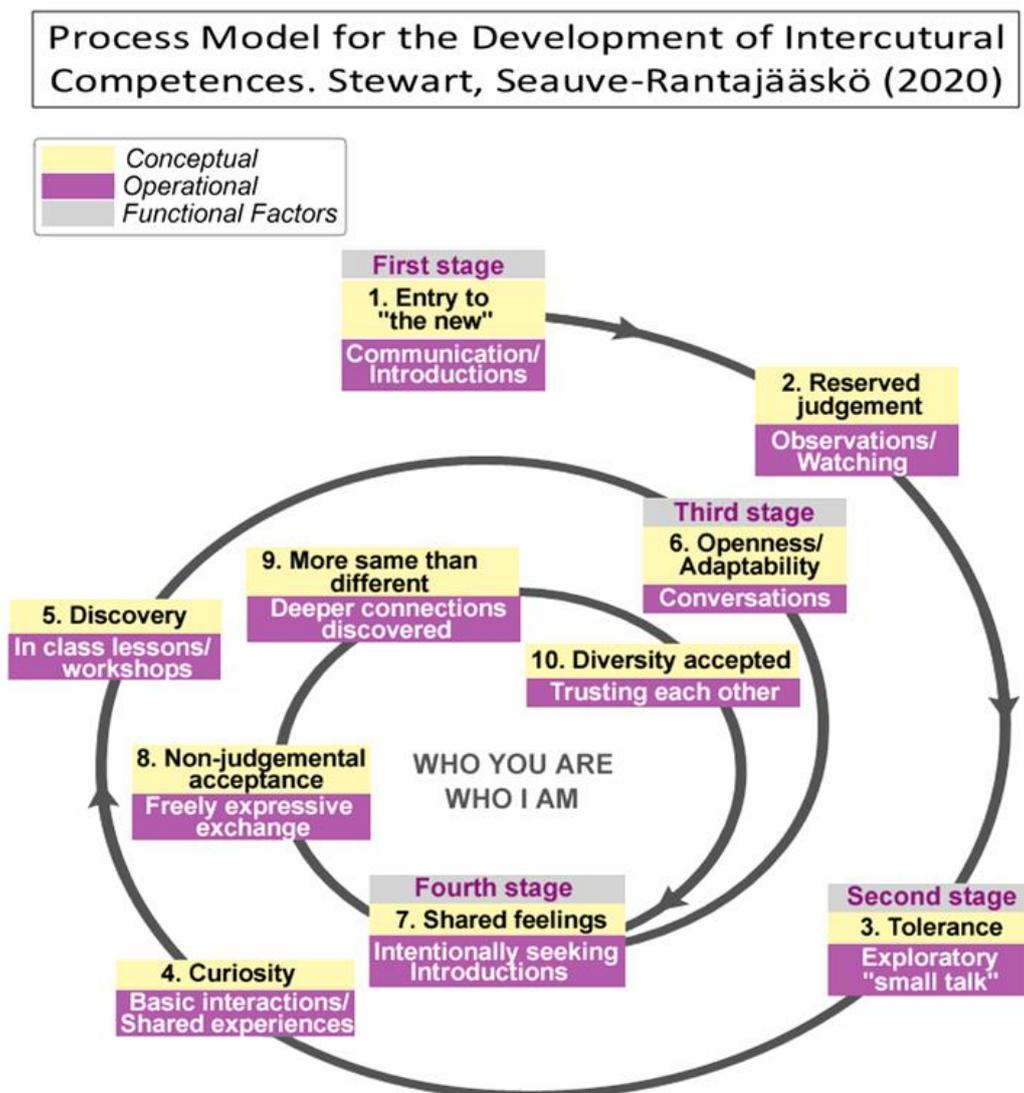


Figure 3. The Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies [19].

5.2. Intercultural Competencies

The process model merges diagrammatically the concepts of intercultural competencies, transitions, and perceptions/attitudes of intercultural experiences and relationships with intercultural competencies, transformations, and positive perceptions and attitudes toward others. The model matches the exploratory and descriptive aspects of this study and findings. The function is to focus on specific events, interventions, and processes with related concepts relevant to empiricism, pragmatism, philosophy, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, emergent information, and events that uncovered meaningful data.

The developmental processes indicated by the model form a helix of informants' mental and emotional migration from superficial introductory interactions to progressively deeper and more complex engagements with others. The operationalization occurring within each stage, accompanied by the concepts involved, indicates the levels of behavioral and emotional, affective, cognitive, holistic, and transformative internalization from impacts and influences of the experience on the individual. The process is not universal in the impact but rather is dependent on the capacities and willingness of the participant to engage in the process. Neither is the process static; rather it is fluid, flexible, and emergent.

The results of this mixed methods study indicated statistically significant differences in the development of intercultural

tural competencies and positive perceptions of others as empirically and qualitatively determined between the intervention and comparison groups. The qualitative data supported the empirical findings of the quantitative data collected from the CASQ. The findings indicated that an undetermined but significant number of intervention group students seemed to experience development and progression in transformative thinking and transitions to the fourth stage of the Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competence. At this stage, the young person apparently must develop the competencies to recognize the important aspects of their own culture, shown on the model as WHO I AM and to respect and accept the important elements of another culture, shown as WHO YOU ARE.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

The proposed theory based on the results of this study indicate that student informants receiving the intervention show a statistically significant positive difference in their perceptions of others compared to informants in the comparison group receiving no intervention. This fits with the empirical quantitative data and correlates with the qualitative data, emergent themes, the process model, and the work of other researchers. The methodology, analytics, findings, and conclusions verify the importance of existing theory providing the background and justification for this study and findings [10]. The study has united learning theories, descriptive research theories, transformative and intercultural competency learning theories, and intercultural educational-social theories. This was observed through the interaction and conceptualization of how the results coalesced affirmative answers to the research questions. The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study described and explained the findings we intended to uncover. Quantitative research, deductive reasoning, and empiricism generated CASQ predictions and probabilities. Qualitative research, on the other hand, as an emergent in-

ductive process helped explain more fully the findings of the study. There is a dual functionality of theory because with quantitative and qualitative research the purpose, interpretations, and intentions may be seen as different [13]. This meant that operationalization of both methodologies opened the door to pragmatism. This allowed for the free use of methods and philosophies to put the pieces together and find answers to the research questions and gain further and deeper insights.

5.4. Practical Implications

The practical thrust of the study is seen in the probabilistic positive transformations of culturally related perceptions and possibly attitudes toward others over time, setting, and experience. The findings seem to indicate a positive main effect and measurable effect size. The process model indicates relationships and outcomes based on the conceptual underpinnings of the study and paved the way to the development of The Intercultural Competency Growth Continuum: Functional Factors for the Development of Intercultural Competencies (Table 12.). The factors are based on the relationships and patterns of informant responses. They are (a) nature of communications and reserving judgments; (b) tolerance, curiosity, and discovery; (c) openness and adaptability; and (d) the cycle of accepting diversity. This describes, based on the study’s results, the corresponding factors, behaviors, actions, and activities that relate to and complement the process model and overall findings. The factors are intervening steps of the interactive learning experiences designed to help informant group members move along the Intercultural Growth Continuum. The sequence, significance, and number of factors may vary depending on context, setting, subjects, objectives, and the intended internal and external outcomes. The factors, interwoven with the process model, contributed to the desired outcome: changing perceptions and possibly attitudes, and thus accepting diversity through transformative learning experiences and the growth in intercultural competencies.

Table 12. The Intercultural Competency Development Continuum [19].

	Starting point Phases 1–2	Second stage Phases 3–5	Third stage Phase 6	Desired outcome Phases 7–10
Conceptual functional factors	Communication, reserved judgement	Tolerance, curiosity, discovery	Openness & adaptability	The cycle of accepting diversity
Stage specific emphasis	Heterogeneous groups, defining community values	Activities which promote curiosity and lead to discovery	Experiencing a safe, non-judgmental environment Willing self-disclosure (taking off our “masks”)	New competencies, transformations, perceptions and possibly attitudes
Breakdown of activities in the context of a language and culture learning semi-	Dining together (sharing everyday life activities together) Music & songs (uniting through the universal language) Art & workshops, outdoor activities, sports, walks, and talks			

	Starting point Phases 1–2	Second stage Phases 3–5	Third stage Phase 6	Desired outcome Phases 7–10
nars and camps	Field trips together (unique shared experiences) Shared poems & stories (activities that purposefully create discussion) Games & skits (activities for fun and laughter)			

The concepts of the Functional Factors for the Development of Intercultural Competencies and the grouped thematic factors for the model were derived from informant interviews, conversations, comments, statements, and responses to prompts to support the model empirically and qualitatively. These components define stages of development along the Intercultural Growth Continuum and Functional Factors. These were integrated with the overall findings for the creation of the Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competence.

The transitions occurring move from simple to profound and from basic to complex. Shared experiences from the language and culture seminars and similar programs showed a probabilistic connectedness and possible correlation to the capacity of developing intercultural competencies [7]. This, for any learner, is acquiring new knowledge. Processing knowledge involves cognitive skills such as compare and contrast, critical thinking, analytical and evaluative abilities, and flexibility in thinking. Using these skills, the participant observes, listens, interprets, and relates while developing and experiencing an informed shift in their personal frame of reference. Promoting culturally relevant activities and conversations for engagement and interaction with others helps the students to form new mental models. They either enhanced or acquired abilities to navigate, communicate, and behave in culturally diverse situations more appropriately, effectively, and successfully.

For example, we considered interactions related to the Functional Factors. Dining together has a much more powerful impact than one may realize. As a basic human need, food exists across the globe, the way one sees and appreciates different foods has a role in cultural identity. Sharing meals together can, at the same time, be very personal but also very collective. Music and singing together have a long history in cultures across the world. Involving music and songs in seminars is done purposefully considering the numerous variables each situation may present. Participants' enjoyment was clear with many requests to sing together.

Art, workshops, outdoor activities, sports, and games can be used as means of inclusion for shared experiences with limited stress or anxiety in interacting with others. These are especially important in the beginning, as integrating and communication skills or timidity may otherwise seem inhibitive. There can be something magical about an outing or trip together. Field trips together offer a change of scenery, new

experiences, discovery, and many times it shuffles the routines enough to create new or to reinforce developing relationships. Returning to campus often creates a sense of arriving home together and enhances the sense of mutual bonding around a familiar experience and setting. Humor may be a challenging aspect when functioning in an intercultural environment; however, shared laughter has a powerful impact on building togetherness and a sense of joy. Discretion and sensitivity are needed. What may seem funny to some may not be so for others.

Involving literature, typically poems and stories, is commonly recognized as a natural part of language and cultural learning. Thoughtfully selected stories and poems serve as a basis for generating meaningful discussion resulting in the realization of common human values, understanding the other's perspectives, and cultural sharing. Full group gatherings and evening programs are when all come together. Culture sharing in the evening programs is an opportunity to celebrate the aspects of other cultures and participants create their presentations with pride and joy as members of their culture and citizens of their homeland. This sharing emerges as an empowering experience to better understand one's own cultural identity and show genuine interest in the cultures and experiences of others. The informants' comments and statements illustrate the influences of seminar activities and content on their impressions and thinking. Additionally, we have long held the belief that students learn better when they enjoy and appreciate the learning environment and have some fun.

5.5. Limitations

It is worthwhile to consider possible revisions, enhancements and testing of the CASQ. The questions were perhaps too sophisticated in content and vocabulary. To mitigate this, copies of the questionnaire were available in the Russian language. Congenial relationships between teachers and students were maintained throughout the study. This may have contributed to an experimenter effect. Due to the timeline of the study, world events such as political and social incidents are out of the control of the researchers but may have influenced informants. This was a quasi-experimental study and selection was non-random although the groups were matched as closely as possible in terms of demographics and academic standing, as convenience samples. The quantitative component relied on pre- and posttest scores. The pretest familiarizes

the subject with the questions and constructs being studied and could have impacted their thinking. Experimental diffusion may have occurred if some members of the comparison group sought contact with intervention group members to find out what's going on.

A self-report questionnaire was used, the CASQ; one cannot discount the possibility of bias with this type of repeated-measures instrument. It appears that the CASQ accurately addressed the constructs being measured, and comparison and peer analysis was supportive. Nevertheless, construct validity must be considered. Observation was a key component in the qualitative component of the study and was conducted systematically so that the data remained flowing and emergent. Criterion-related observer and intra-observer practices were maintained, and it appears that acceptable levels of reliability were maintained. Qualitative validity was addressed with conformity of standards with the goal of trustworthy and authentic data. Thus, member-checking, triangulation, and peer review were all necessary to obtain dependable, credible, and confirmable data [13]. With qualitative studies observer bias is possible, as well as, the influence on the participants due to their involvement. In this case, a program that the participants particularly enjoyed. A mixed methods convergent design mitigates limitations by using parallel questions to assess the same concepts, using the same sample size. Using an integration strategy for convergent data analysis helped to minimize and limit validity threats. All things considered, total objectivity and reporting on all activities is virtually impossible. As humans working with human subjects, inherent limitations exist. Every attempt was made to conduct a superior study. We acknowledge our fallibilities and recognize aspects of this study could have been approached in different ways and other researchers may see and interpret this study differently.

6. Conclusions

This study's findings also seem to make a strong statement supporting the value of mixed methods research. It is not often easy to avoid quantitative elements in most of the qualitative subject matter, and qualitative components may be quite important to quantitative research, consistent with a starting point or origin of theories, concepts, and constructs [17]. The quantitative component showed the value of numerically quantifying statistically significant differences in the comparison of within and between mean scores. The qualitative component added a dimension to the findings that expressed the informants' feelings, perceptions, sentiments, and attitudes that helped to explain the statistically significant differences uncovered in the quantitative data.

For example, the quantitative findings answered RQ1: Yes, the data from the present study indicated an apparent definitive positive impact of transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies for the intervention compared to the comparison group. This apparent develop-

ment of positive perceptions and the possible increase in positive attitudes toward others was supported by the findings. Although RQ1 is clearly answered, it is important to clearly understand how this transition becomes manifest in the informants' perceptions, feelings, opinions, possibly attitudes, and behaviors. The qualitative complement provided data based on the informants' own interpretations of making meaning from their experiences. This helped in understanding, describing, and finding relationships from their personal experiences and relating them to the phenomena studied as dynamic human processes.

We also see the importance and existence of the natural setting in which expressions of social, personal, cultural, relational, and subjective thoughts emerge. It provided the opportunity for meaning and knowledge to be seen as tentative constructs that may change over time and setting through new and shared experiences. Culture has been seen as instrumental in shaping the minds of individuals and facilitates meaning making in various settings and circumstances [18]. Meaning making inclines an individual to face the world and comprehend the encounters in their appropriate cultural context. While the quantitative data told the story of how much, the qualitative data provided a view of the what, why, and how, and added meaning to the how much determined by the quantitative results.

In reflecting on combining quantitative and qualitative research in a single study, it made sense intuitively to have data from both methodologies to address the research questions. From a practical standpoint, the design was efficient in facilitating data collection over the same timeframe. Data collection for each method could be gathered and evaluated separately using the techniques germane to the method and directly compared for informants' perspectives from the qualitative data with perspectives extracted from the empirical data adding a voice to the informants. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the informants' perspectives and greater meaning to the statistical significance.

From the work of other researchers on the use of mixed methods, it seemed clear that for this study superior results could be obtained with a mixed methods research design [5, 7, 13]. Overall, this mixed methods approach allowed the freedom to rigorously gather data from both quantitative and qualitative research to more completely, and with greater assurance, answer the research questions.

In essence, we hope this study and its results will inspire future researchers to seek additional answers to the many questions we face in learning how to foster greater cross-cultural appreciation worldwide. Predominating may be this: in the face of diverse and continually evolving world conditions, what are the most effective, efficient, and purposeful ways to develop and institute programs and practices to encourage pluralism, eliminate racism, support migration, reduce refugee crises, promote shared experiences, appreciate others, and accept differences? There appear to be promising possibilities for the support of increased interest in

transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies. To succeed, we propose political and social activity at several levels: governmental engagement and action, organic and grassroots movements and awareness, and a public global appeal on the principles of equality. This would include educational programs in public institutions to prevent stereotyping based on culture or ethnic background, protect citizens' right to free speech, and discourage all forms of discrimination based on culture or ethnic background. We also advocate that parents and youth mobilize against divisive curricula in schools and places of employment.

Cultural diversity, as we hope most people understand, has positive potential and we should aim for a mutual goal that challenges young people from all cultures and backgrounds to achieve their full potential and to recognize the value of other cultures. Differences in culture need not be a source of conflict. This will be supported by with courage to withstand efforts that combat equality and intercultural dialogue, and to be heard and to speak the truth. This may require one to swim against the tide, showing courage to stand against mob mentality, and courage to discount possible scorn from elitists. Ultimately, when enough people recognize the value of transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies, we will find the courage to stand together, supporting equity and acceptance with truth, equality, and justice as the outcomes of transformative learning and intercultural competencies.

Consistent with the results of this study, transformative learning opportunities and experiences appear to foster the development of intercultural competencies and an increase in positive perceptions, and possible increases in positive attitudes toward others. Learning from experience is more than just being there. Learning occurs within our capacity to construe those events and situations in which we are engaged and then to reconstruct them in transformative ways [20]. Making meaning from intercultural seminars may play a small yet significant and effective role in transformative learning and thinking, and developing intercultural competencies through positive and constructive shared experiences, effective communication, and constructive dialogue. In doing so, it may help create a more conscious, kinder, gentler, and increasingly tolerant society. Generations of young people await and deserve opportunities to develop and grow skillsets and mindsets to become positive and culturally competent global citizens.

An important aspect of the study was to promote communication through sharing ideas and opinions. The IV was framed to be inclusive and active, such that the action of participation was learning by doing. This trends from participate to participant and transforms actions into identities and encourages ownership and authenticity where participants express themselves as, "this is the way I am."

Although the results of this study are not generalizable, probabilistic thinking based on the findings of this study indicate that regardless of cultural and geopolitical differences be-

tween Russia and the west, transformative learning and transactional behavior are not limited to the western world. Dialogue, interactive and authentic discussions, shared experiences, and openness to others' thinking are supported by transformative learning and lead to the development of intercultural competencies. This research was conducted in Russia, however, there is every reason to believe that similar studies in other countries and within other cultures may result in similar findings.

Our world is a global environment inclusive of many different cultures. This mixed methods study shows promising outcomes and positive impacts from transformative learning on the development of young peoples' intercultural competencies. Thorough, conscientious, and accurate, veridical collection and analysis of voluminous qualitative data uncovered emergent themes that corroborated the quantitative findings. These findings indicated probabilistic increases in positive perceptions of others and the growth of intercultural competencies. It is hoped that research of this nature and practices and programs consistent with it, will lead to educational programs that utilize transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies to provide for, and influence, more inclusive and culturally competent global societies and all aspects of social environments.

Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CASQ	Cultural Assessment Survey Questionnaire
DV	Dependent Variable
IV	Independent Variable
RQ	Research Question
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Tomm Stewart conducts intercultural workshops and seminars facilitating highly effective programs with the Center For Teacher Effectiveness. This provides for better teaching and learning, excellence in every classroom, and increases in intercultural competencies. Developing quality and positive relationships has been the underpinning of Tomm's work. As a teacher and principal, Tomm was a semi-finalist and finalist for the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Teacher of the Year and was a Regional Vice Principal of the Year. Interest in cultures and education outside the classroom inspired innovative, effective, and motivational teaching methods in unique environments. This includes educational, medical, and sociological missions to 20 countries across 5 continents. Tomm has directed language and culture camps/seminars for young people from many countries. This prompted a successful research study in provincial Russia from 2013-2020. The mixed methods study examined *The Impact of Transformative Learning on the Development of Young Peoples' Intercultural Competencies*.