

MIA[®] Initiative

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Transforming High Aspirations into Human Agency

Abstract

This is an approach to education that targets agentic habitus through development of the emotional intelligence in participants. This intervention that measures the results of the application transformational learning through the use of organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices. The MIA[®] Initiative aims to three sightline systemic thinking transformations:

- 1) Seventy percent of poor children who graduate from Head Start, they do so with a reading level of 1st grade. However, by the time they reach 4th grade, these same children are reading at kindergarten level (ECLS-K). We are proposing to apply the mindfulness into action teaching methodology in the current Head Start parent program to guide them in supplementing existing program of early childhood education for their children to perform at their grade level. The sightline systemic thinking transformation is to measure if elementary school students perform at their grade level after leaving Head Start by doing MIA[®] with their parents.*
- 2) In 02/03/2023 a 14-year-old girl committed suicide after a video of her bullying at school was posted in social media. The school district said that they do not have a bullying problem and stated: "We work to identify ill will before it is carried out," it has three anti-bullying specialists and a 27-person crisis team to respond to such incidents, as well as annual anti-bullying assemblies for students and staff training. The high school has three police officers assigned and said they are always called when assaults occur (thus, police officers can implement MIA[®] with students as they identify students with issues and at risk to drop-out school). The sightline systemic thinking transformation is to measure drop-out rate with at-risk students by doing MIA[®] with police officers within schools.*
- 3) Forty six percent of college students drop out before their sophomore year. This intervention is an application of how transformational learning through organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices can reduce the drop-out rate as done in previous studies. The results in the drop-out reduction rate were presented at the International Transformative Learning Conference at Columbia University in 2018. The sightline systemic thinking transformation is to measure college drop-out rate before and after implementing a MIA[®] process.*

This white paper is about the human development of participants before and after the implementation of MIA® and it is structured as follows: (1) Background Information; (2) Introduction to the concept of Transformational Learning vs Transactional Learning; (3) Research approach, implementation and results.

(1) Background information about the MIA® (Mindfulness into Action) Research methodology

Reflecting back to 1996 about her experience as a new immigrant parent, Dr. Vergara realized that her biggest challenge was completely unknown for her. She could feel its influence in her behavior, but she could not grasp what exactly was.

Now after over 27 years of experience in the field, doing her research she found that this unknown challenge was our taken for granted assumptions, our unknown unconscious self-sabotaging behaviors. Since 2005, in her interactions with Dr. Edmund W. Gordon, she learned about “habitus” from Bourdieu¹. As a new immigrant, she knew and feel it, but she did not know it had a name. Habitus refers to those behavior tendencies that humans seem to enact on a subconscious level. Habitus is structured by the person’s social class. Habitus is developed in people everywhere as a function of the ways of which they live their lives and their status in the society. For financially disadvantaged populations, the “habitus” they develop naturally has limited utility as they function in the cultures that have gained hegemony. MIA® seeks deliberately to broaden “habitus” of the populations that are targeted by providing acculturation experiences, educational services, and the cultivation of agency to compensate for the social isolation that has contributed to their limited “habitus.”

Scholars such as, Senge² describes this involuntary habitual life as mental models, yet we continue to operate within “the Veil” (Du Bois³). Peter Senge questions if we are prisoners of the system or prisoners of our own thinking. In his book “The Fifth Discipline” he describes mental models as deeply engrained assumptions, generalizations or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we act. If we can identify our mental models, this information can help in appreciating the forces that are shaping reality and how we are part of those forces and therefore, we can in turn affect them.

The MIA® Research methodology is based on a dissertation⁴ from Teachers College Columbia University with Dr. Edmund W. Gordon as the Chair Dissertation Committee. Since the autumn 2005, Dr. Gordon has been interacting closely with Dr. Vergara as she has continued developing her practice⁵. She developed a strong interest the construct “habitus” (those behavior tendencies that humans seem to enact on a subconscious level) and the possibility that they can be transformed. This research methodology is a combination of organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices. Dr. Gordon has monitored closely this dissertation to become a robust research approach that includes qualitative and quantitative analysis. The analysis of the data of the implementation of this practice with college students at educational institutions in New York, USA; Trondheim, Norway, and Ibarra, Ecuador; found that regardless of their race, age, gender, culture, language, geographical location or socio-economic status, most participants tended to overcome their subconscious constraints or reduce the constraining force of habitus, as they continuously apply these techniques and indigenous practices in their lives.

Now, we are proposing to add the MIA® model to these three areas: Head Start program, police officers and college students to measure the academic impact through an App/Platform to make this work sustainable.

¹ Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 78-79

² Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

³ Du Bois, W. E. B. (1989). *The souls of Black folk*. New York, NY: Penguin.

⁴ Vergara, M. I. (2016). *Mindfulness into action: Transformational learning through collaborative inquiry* (Doctoral dissertation, TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY).

⁵ Gordon, E. W., & Vergara, M. I. (2009). Supplements to schooling. In H. Varenne, E. W. Gordon, & L. *Theoretical Perspectives on comprehensive education: The way forward*. Volume two of the perspectives on comprehensive education series. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

(2) Introduction to the concept of Transformational Learning versus Transactional Learning

Freire’s theory pedagogy of the oppressed (2000)⁶ speaks about banking. Banking is the way of teaching as a lecture; this is when the professor is in front of the classroom doing Transactional Learning. It is a transaction of information. Currently, in schools, colleges and most professional development training, transactional learning is used. On the other hand, MIA[®] is a model of transformational learning that through organizational learning techniques and Indigenous a person’s perception transforms.

(3) Research approach, implementation and results

The proposed research approach moves beyond prior efforts to disrupt inequities because it acknowledges and addresses negative “habitus” with the Mindfulness Into Action (MIA[®]) Research methodology that helps participants to find, observe and change negative habitus in their lives (unknown unconscious self-sabotaging behaviors, implicit bias). **Neuroscience states that 95 to 98% of our actions are unconscious** (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995)⁷. According to Bourdieu, “habitus” is a system of internal models- habits of the mind, habitual ways of thinking. Habitus can be positive such as self-confidence or negative as limiting beliefs. MIA[®] model of transformational learning uses experiential learning when participants apply the organizational learning techniques proposed project and indigenous practices to increment their emotional intelligence to address negative “habitus”. To make sure students achieve higher expectations, we need to help their families understand the process they are going through as they learn how to better adapt to the American culture and expectations.

Demonstrated through research, implementation of this model produces results at the personal level within six weeks and results at the organizational level after six weeks. The power of proactive and effective problem solving not only involves efficiency (system thinking), but most importantly it also evaluates the individual’s perspectives (systemic thinking).

Table 1. Components of System and Systemic Thinking

	Current Strategy	Proposed Strategy
	System Thinking	Systemic Thinking
Quantitative	X	X
Qualitative		X
Objective	X	X
Subjective		X
Tangible	X	X
Intangible		X
Individual Perspective		X

MIA[®] model of transformational learning uses experiential learning when participants apply the organizational learning techniques proposed project and indigenous practices to increment their emotional intelligence to address negative “habitus”. To make sure students achieve higher expectations, we need to help their families understand the process they are going through as they learn how to better adapt to the American culture and expectations. Taking in account the collectivistic cultural values of the Latino community, the MIA[®] Research is “engaged research” looking at the process through which community participants construct and take the initial steps toward an actionable and empowering strategy for closing the academic achievement gap for their children.

⁶ Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

⁷ Pradeep, A. K. (2010). *The buying brain: Secrets for selling to the subconscious mind*. John Wiley & Sons.

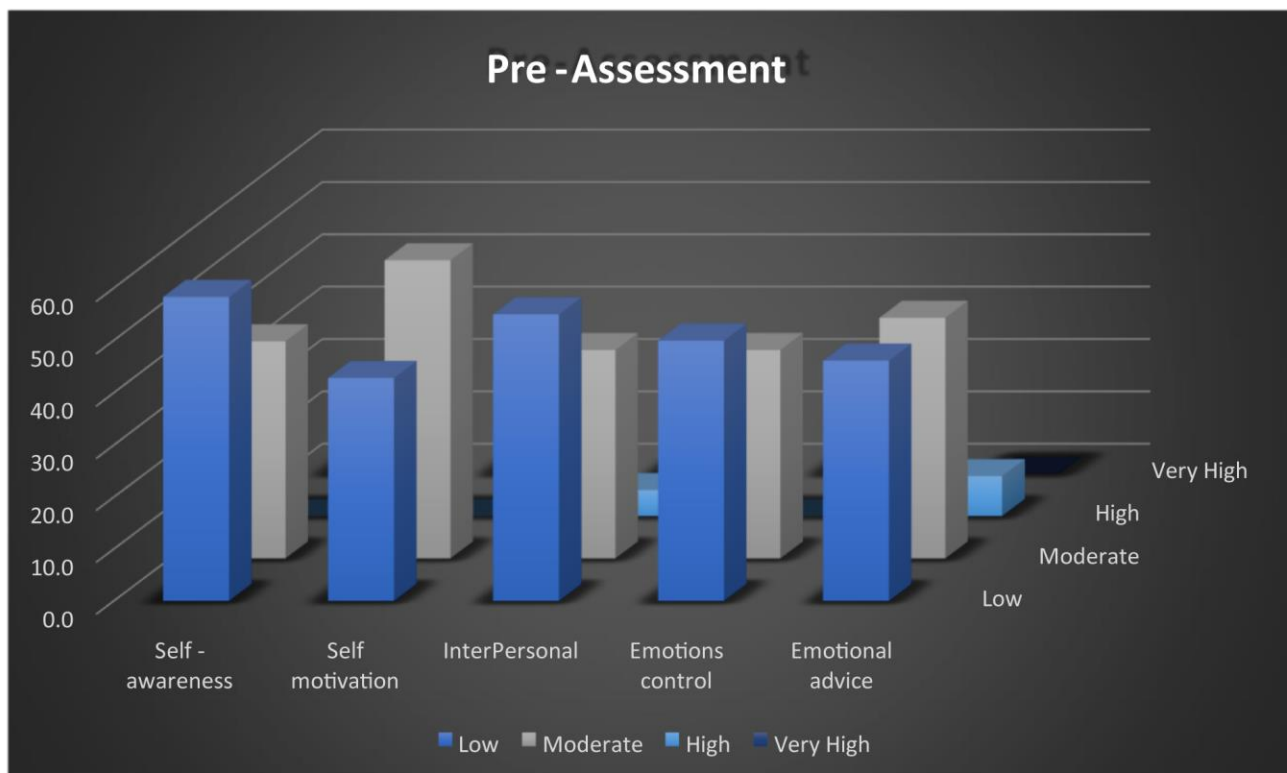
Implementation - The MIA[®] intervention as a new research paradigm

With participants, we begin with an online pre-assessment test to identify their level of emotional intelligence, their vulnerability to stress and leadership style. Since, we cannot see these unconscious behaviors, this test shows their level of awareness when they begin the process.

With school students, as one of its assessment tools, the Wide Range Assessment Test (WRAT4-PMV) as a quantitative method. This assessment tool enables us to monitor academic performance using brief, repeated tests that are parallel to the multiple demands of schooling and are psychometrically sound. As part of the model to include mixed methods approach, MIA[®] is a proactive systemic approach by making sure students keep reading at their grade level under the monitoring of their parents. We cannot wait until these Head Start students get to 5th grade and lose their academic gains⁸. Monitoring and assessment activities, a key dimension of MIA[®] model, are measuring progress against quantitative objectives (enrollment in regular courses and students' grades) and benchmarks.

With organizations, in the same way at the organizational level, the department identify a list of "issues". In this way, we can identify what changed every week by doing the MIA[®] process until all issues are resolved. At the personal level with the online pre-assessment, data shows that the level of self-awareness, self-motivation, interpersonal, control of emotions and emotional advice in participants is low and moderate.

Figure 1. Personal pre-assessment



With weekly meetings where we apply MIA[®], during the first week with a series of reflection exercises that participants use during the week, at the meeting we speak about what they found using a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative (using free apps) and qualitative components (journaling).

⁸ Galindo, C., & Reardon, S. F. (2006). Hispanic students' educational experiences and opportunities during kindergarten. *Report to the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University.

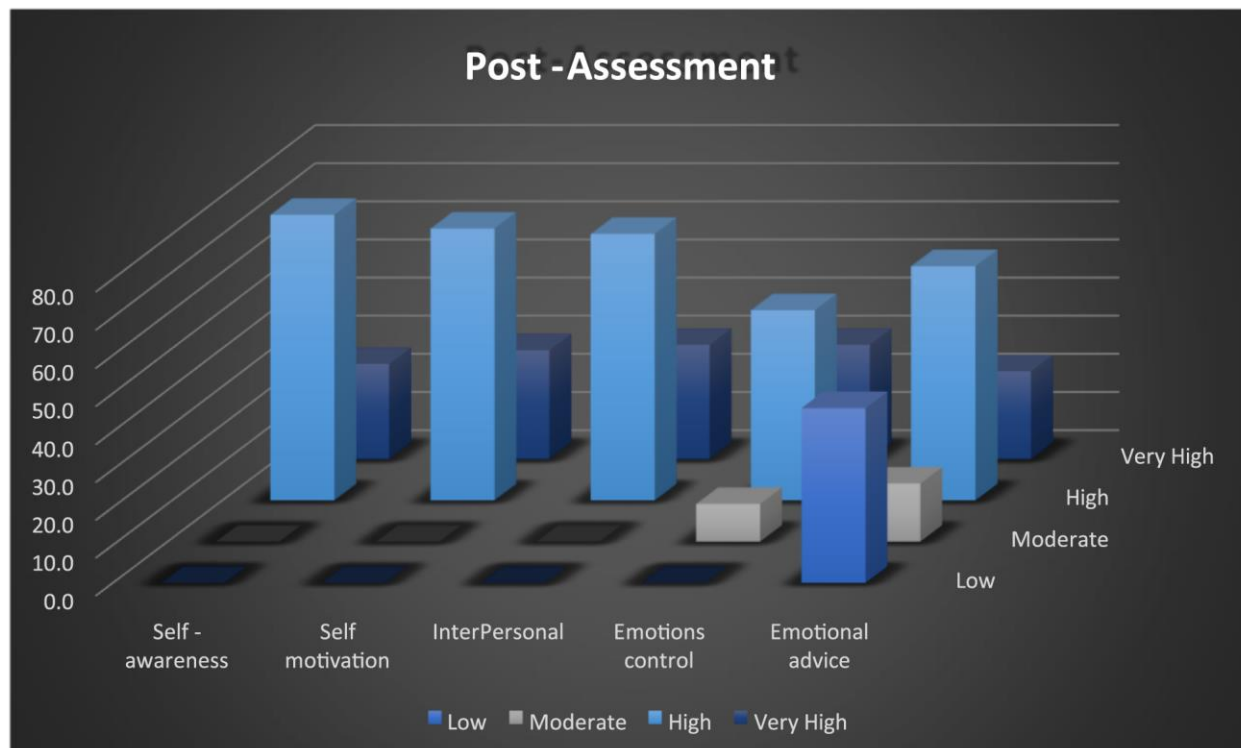
During their week, they use apps on their phone to track emotions in order to identify unconscious patterns of behavior. Since these are unconscious behaviors, it is important to find them. Once participants found an unconscious behavioral pattern, they consciously can work on it during the following week. At this point, we provide Indigenous practices to help participants to identify from where in their lives these unconscious behaviors were acquired. Indigenous practices help participants to release these self-sabotaging behaviors consciously.

The MIA[®] process is done continuously every week, in order to train participants to do the process themselves, eventually. It takes about six weeks to transcend the veil (Du Bois) and participants look at problems with a different perspective. Dr. Vergara calls this moment of transcending the veil: the “third head”. The third head is a place of neutrality where participants are clear-minded and grounded, capable of moving into action in complete mindfulness. The person achieves mindfulness by week six, then this person moves into action (for that reason MIA[®] comes from Mindfulness into Action, not from mindfulness practices like yoga). When implemented at a corporation, after the seventh week, executives (on the third head), were able to solve a problem they had for over thirty years in their corporation. Likewise, the problems we face as a nation are older than 30 years. By using MIA[®], we can look at them from a different perspective and solve them (as we measure the results with the MIA[®] App and Platform).

Here a video of a description of the “third head”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63td4AQx6Rs>

As a sustainable process, the MIA[®] process continues with organization learning techniques and Indigenous practices that help participants to become more effective. By the fourth week, participants take the online post-assessment test which shows the level of self-awareness, self-motivation, interpersonal, control of emotions and emotional advice changed to high and very high.

Figure 3. Personal post-assessment

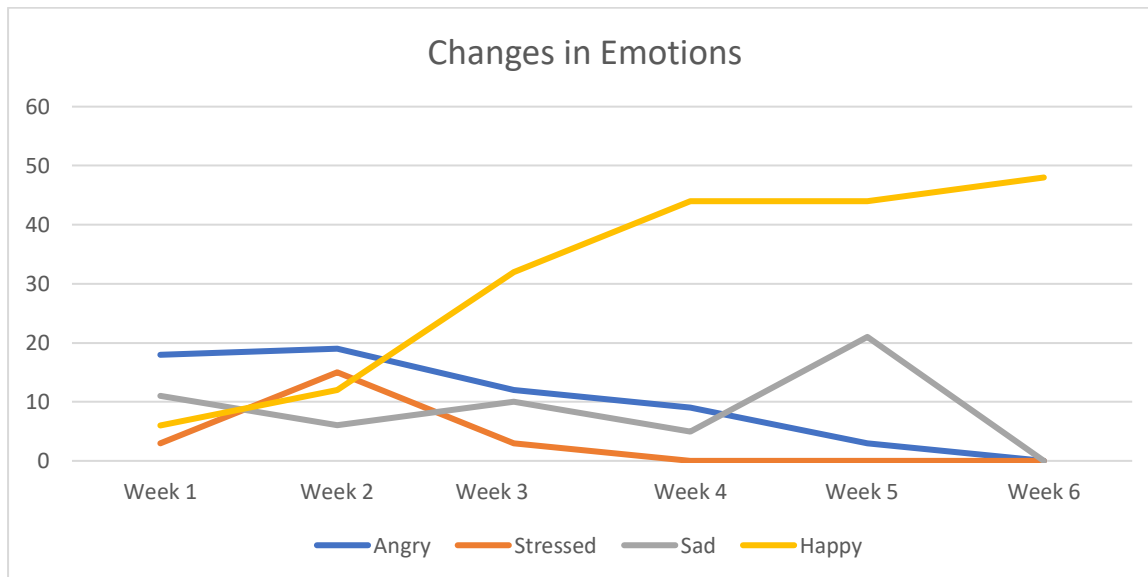


Results

In 2008, Educational Testing Services (ETS) funded a research study of the application of Dr. Vergara’s practice with parents of students at the elementary school level. At the beginning of their school year, all students, were behind their reading grade levels when they were evaluated. This study was done at a Salvation Army with students who were part of their after-school program. They’re twenty students that were from 6 to 12 years old, from different grade level, different towns, all Latino from different countries. After working with their parents, by the end of their school year, all students were reading at their grade level.

The MIA® Research approach are investigations whose answers are not given; but instead, these answers surge from the research itself as participants identify, observe and change their own taken-for-granted assumptions. Dr. Vergara spent a few years teaching in Ecuador and continuing to gather data to identify the impact of her practice. This time studied with the college dropout rate for financially disadvantaged students, as her subjects. Her finding held. Dropout rates dropped for students who were exposed to the modification of habitus as reflected in self-regulation and addressing dysfunctional behaviors in a systematic way. Regardless the subject matter, all students transformed. In class, students learned to identify and change self-sabotaging behaviors as they gathered data regarding their social and emotional growth while learning the subject of study. Please see below a table showing the results of social/emotional growth **at the personal level**.

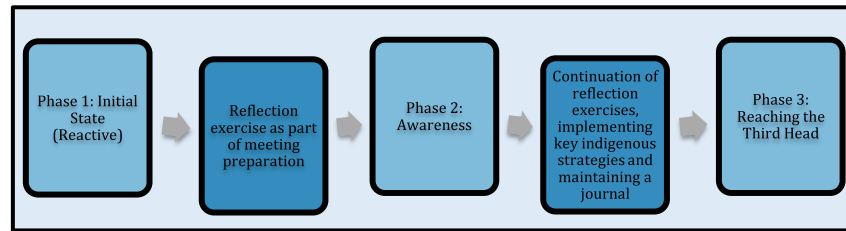
Table 2. Data Describing Emotional Intelligence Growth



It is important to notice that the daily life activities of this person did not change, what changed was her perception when facing her daily challenges.

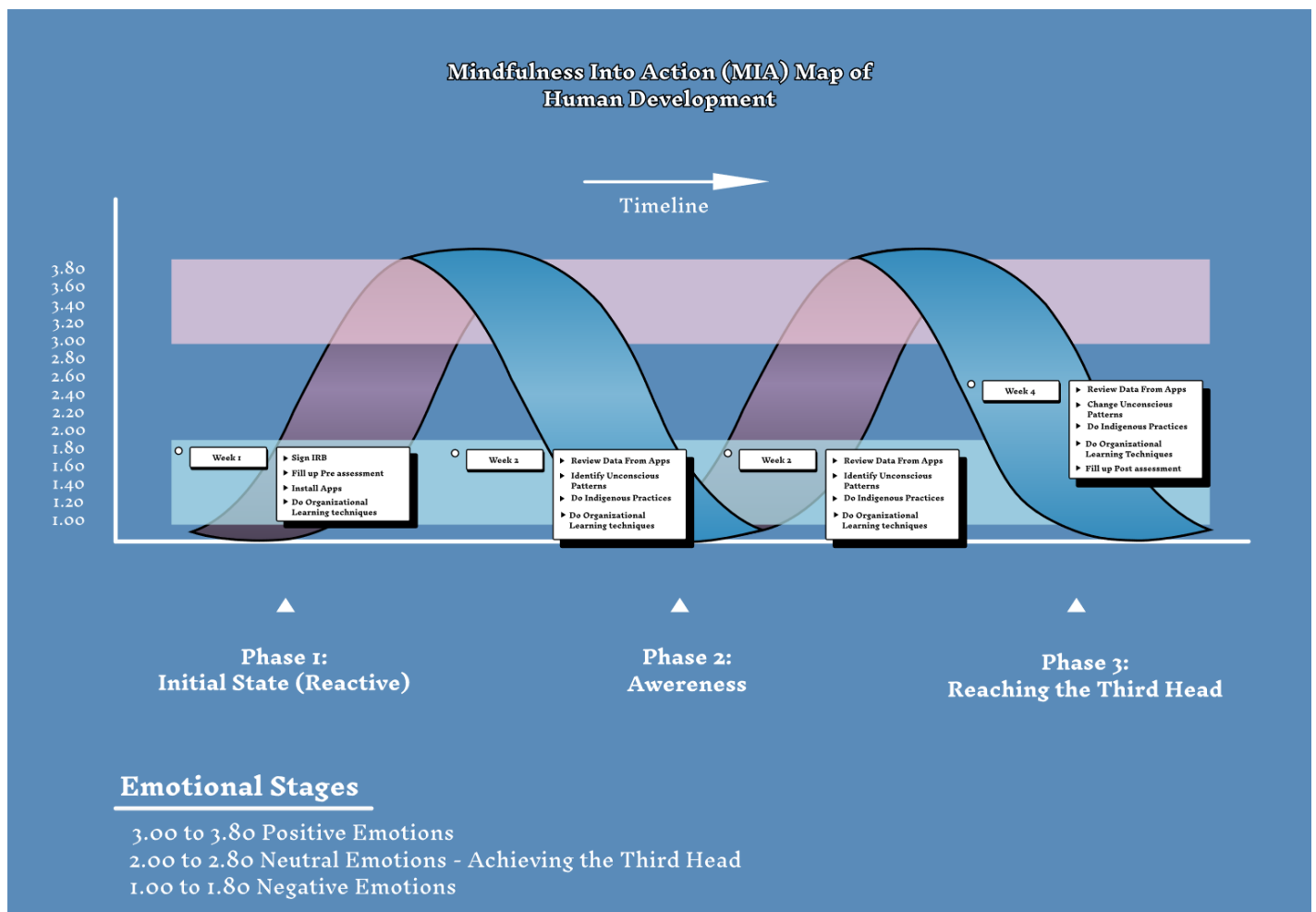
During week one, the person is in the reactive state that is phase one. Then, we begin to do reflection exercises while applying the organizational techniques and indigenous practices during week two where the person moves to phase two. During phase two the person is aware of self-sabotaging behaviors but cannot change them, yet. As participants continue with the reflection exercises, Indigenous practices and organizational learning techniques, they achieve the “third head”.

Figure 4. Visual representation of the transformational process



When working with individuals, we talk about how to facilitate them to develop a more "empowering view of their current reality". By this we meant to help them to seeing current reality that reinforced rather than undermined their sense of confidence in shaping the future. "This reality" is perceived by most people like the pressures they live by day after day, crises that must be reacted to, and limitations that must be accepted. Due to such ways of defining "reality", their dreams (visions) are like illusions or must better say delusions which are not an achievable end. How then can we create an intervention that could help people see reality as a medium for creating their visions rather than a source of limitation? The MIA® Model intervention is addressing this issue by helping people to see their problems in terms of underlying systemic structures and mental models rather than just short-term events. Through time, this process of human development is a spiral. Please see below details in figure 5.

Figure 5. Mindfulness Into Action Map of Human Development



MIA[®] Logic Model of the action research implementation

OBJECTIVES	VERIFIED INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION
I. Individual & Organizational Pre-assessment	Individual Pre-assessment tools & Organizational Pre-assessment	Results of individual and organizational pre-assessment
II. Implement and follow MIA process to identify unconscious biases and self-sabotaging behaviors	Weekly meetings with participants	Recordings from weekly meetings with participants
III. Individual & Organizational Post- assessment	MIA Emotional Intelligence & Leadership Assessment	Results of individual and organizational post-assessment
IV. Evaluation of changes after the implementation of the MIA methodology	compliance in identified paragraphs	Evaluating organizational strategies
GOALS	VERIFIED INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION
1) Identify and changing unconscious and self-sabotaging behaviors in participants	Through the Mindfulness Into Action Research methodology participants will be able to develop a sophisticated and mature thought process	Students at their grade level in reading/math/science. Significant reduction of drop-out rate.
2) Implement the MIA process	Participants will achieve higher-order-thinking to develop a strong organizational maturity	Developing organizational strategies
MIA COMPONENTS	VERIFIED INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION
I. Pre-assessment	MIA Emotional Intelligence & Leadership Assessment	Report
II. Implementation of MIA methodology	Data from weekly meetings	Interview Protocol
III. Post- assessment	MIA Emotional Intelligence & Leadership Assessment	Report
IV. Analyzing and Evaluating changes	Data from Reports	Report

ACTIVITIES		MEANS OF VERIFICATION
1) Individual & Organizational Pre-assessment	First week	
1.1. Adaptation of instruments		Instruments adapted
1.2. Pre-application of instruments		Instruments applied
1.3. Personal Analysis		Table with data
1.4. Organization Analysis		Table with list of issues
2) Implement and follow MIA process to identify unconscious biases and self-sabotaging behaviors	Second, third and fourth week	
2.1. Reflection Exercises		Notes from participants
2.2. Organizational/Indigenous practices		Report
2.3. Post-application of instruments		Table with graphics
3) Individual & Organizational Post- assessment	Fifth week	
3.1. Identifying unconscious behaviors		Report
3.2. Organizational learning strategies		Report
3.3. Follow up of organizational strategies		Report
4) Evaluation of changes after the implementation of the MIA methodology	Sixth and seventh week MIA methodology continues as a sustainable process	
4.1. Evaluating changes at the operational level		Report
4.2. Development of Final Report		Report
4.3. Presentation of Final Report		Presentation