

THE

MINDFULNESS INTO ACTION RESEARCH INITIATIVE

WITH DR. MARIANA VERGARA

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2024

Transforming High Aspirations into Human Agency

Abstract

The Mindfulness into Action (hereafter written as MIA®) approach to education is one that targets agentic habitus through the development of emotional intelligence in participants. This intervention measures the results of the application of transformational learning using organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices. The MIA® initiative targets three sightline systemic thinking transformations:

1) Seventy percent of poor children who graduate from Head Start do so with a first-grade reading level. However, by the time they reach Grade 4, these same children are reading at kindergarten level (ECLS-K). We are proposing the integration of the MIA® teaching methodology as part of the current Head Start parent program. The intent is to guide parents in supplementing existing programs of early childhood education in order for their children to perform at their grade level. The sightline systemic thinking transformation is to measure any change in student performance at their grade level after leaving Head Start by doing MIA® with their parents.

2) On February 2, 2023, a 14-year-old girl committed suicide after a video of her being bullied 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." The district 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 that are, reportedly, always called when assaults occur. This means, theoretically, that police officers can implement MIA® with students as they identify and intervene with at-risk students. The sightline systemic thinking transformation is to measure any changes in dropout rate with at-risk students by implementing 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 changes in college dropout 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® research methodology

Reflecting about her experience in 1996 as a new immigrant parent, Dr. Vergara realized that her biggest challenge was completely unknown to her at the time. She recalled sensing its influence on her behavior, but she could not grasp exactly what it was.

Now, after over 27 years of experience in the field and doing her research, Dr. Vergara found that this unknown challenge was our taking for granted assumptions, our -unconscious and, therefore, unperceived self-sabotaging behaviors. Since 2005, in her interactions with Dr. Edmund W. Gordon, she was introduced to the concept of habitus proposed by Pierre Bourdieu¹. As a new immigrant, Dr. Vergara sensed 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 in which they live their lives and their status within 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, describe 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 our reality and how we are part of those forces and, therefore, we can affect them.

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.

The MIA[®] research methodology is based on Dr. Vergara’s doctoral dissertation⁴, Teachers College Columbia University with Dr. Edmund W. Gordon as the Chair Dissertation Committee. Since autumn 2005, Dr. Gordon has been interacting closely with Dr. Vergara as she has continued to develop her practice⁵. She developed a strong interest in the construct of habitus (those behavior tendencies that humans seem to enact on a subconscious level) and the possibility that they can be transformed. This research methodology uses reflection exercises and organizational analysis. Dr. Gordon has closely monitored this dissertation to ensure a robust research approach that includes qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Data analysis from 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 had a tendency 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,
- School/district police officers,
- and college students

to measure the academic impact through an App/Platform and making this work sustainable.

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

Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* theory (2000)⁶ speaks about banking. Banking is the way of teaching as a lecture, as when the teacher 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 in which, through organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices, a person’s perception transforms.

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.

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

(3) Research approach, implementation, and results

The proposed research approach moves beyond prior efforts to disrupt inequities because it acknowledges and addresses negative habitus using the MIA[®] approach. This research methodology helps participants find, observe, and change negative habitus in their lives, i.e., unknown unconscious self-sabotaging behaviors, and implicit bias. **Neuroscience states that 95 to 98% of our actions are unconscious** (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995⁷; Pradeep, 2010⁸). According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus is a system of internal models, i.e., habits of the mind or habitual ways of thinking. Habitus can be positive, such as self-confidence, or negative, as limiting beliefs. The MIA[®] model of transformational learning uses experiential learning when participants apply the project’s proposed organizational learning techniques and indigenous practices to increment their emotional intelligence to address negative habitus.

As 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 |

The MIA[®] model of transformational learning uses experiential learning when participants apply the organizational learning techniques 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.

⁷ Greenwald, A. G., & Banaji, M. R. (1995). *Implicit social cognition: attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes*. *Psychological review*, 102(1), 4-27

⁸ Pradeep, A. K. (2010). *The buying brain: Secrets for selling to the subconscious mind*. John Wiley & Sons.

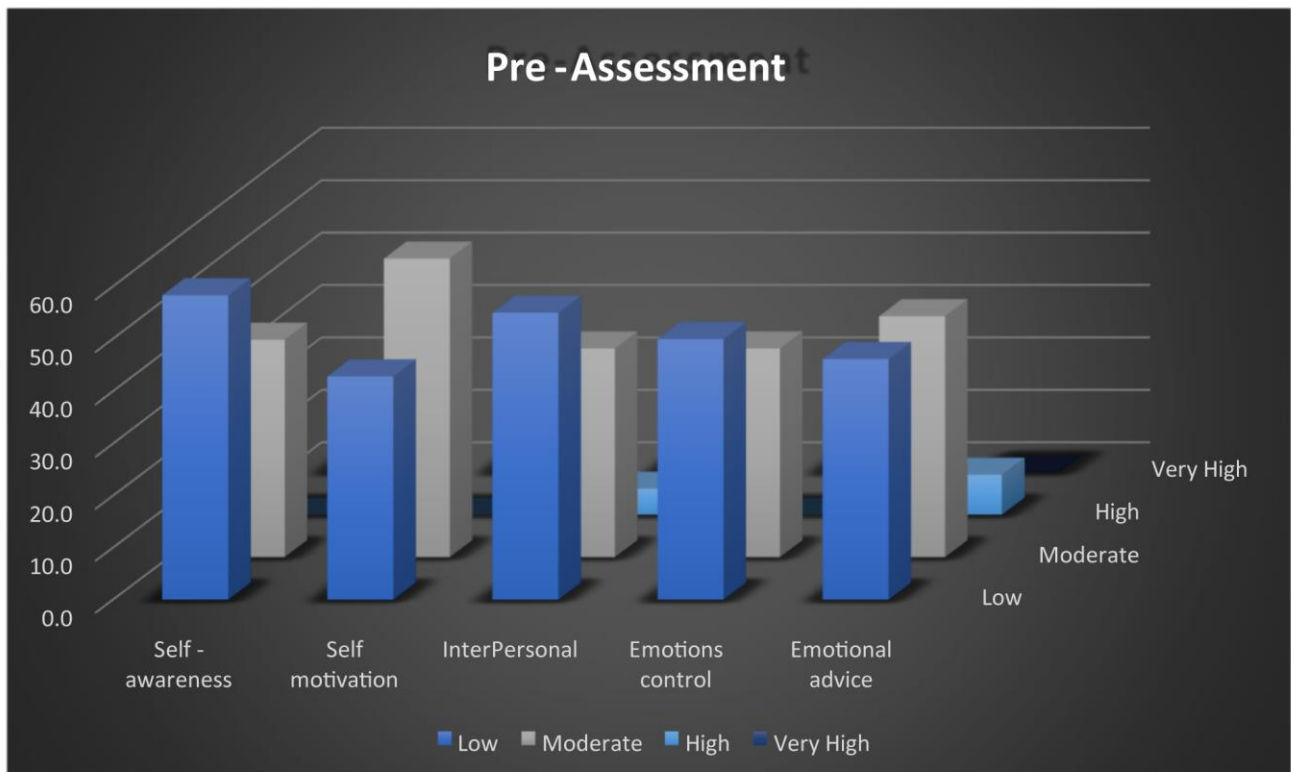
Implementation - The MIA[®] intervention as a new research paradigm

With participants, we begin with an online pre-assessment 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.

The Wide Range Assessment Test (WRAT4-PMV) is used as a quantitative assessment tool with elementary school students. 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 mixed methods approach, the MIA[®] model uses a proactive systemic approach that, under the monitoring of parents, ensures that students keep reading at their grade level. We cannot wait until these Head Start students get to 5th grade and lose their academic gains⁹. Monitoring and assessment activities, a key dimension of the MIA[®] model, are measuring progress against quantitative objectives (enrollment in regular courses and students' grades) and benchmarks.

Within organizations, similarly at the organizational level, the department identifies 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 can be used to show that the level of self-awareness, self-motivation, interpersonal, control of emotions, and emotional advice in participants is low and moderate.

Figure 1. Pre-assessment



⁹ 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.

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

During their week, participants use apps on their phone to track emotions with the intent to identify unconscious patterns of behavior. Since these are unconscious behaviors, it is important to find them. Once participants find 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 release these self-sabotaging behaviors consciously.

In order to train participants to eventually do the process themselves, MIA[®] is done continuously every week. It takes about six weeks to transcend the “veil” (Du Bois)¹⁰ or when 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. A person achieves mindfulness by week six, then they move into action. When implemented at a corporation, after the seventh week, executives (now on the third head) were able to solve problems within their corporations that they had dealt with for over thirty years.

By using MIA[®], we can look at long-term problems from a different perspective and solve them (as we measure the results with the MIA[®] app and platform).

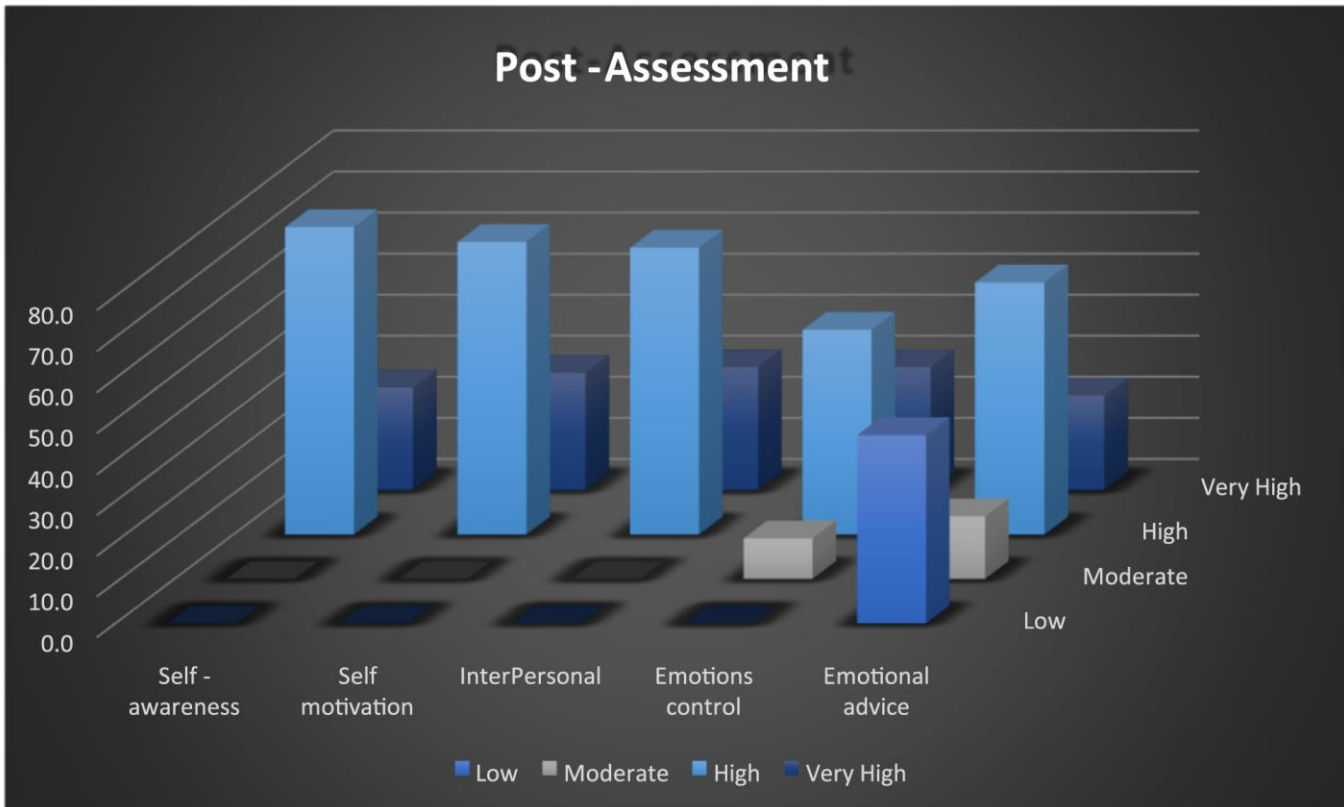
You may view a video description of the “third head” here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63td4AQx6Rs>

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

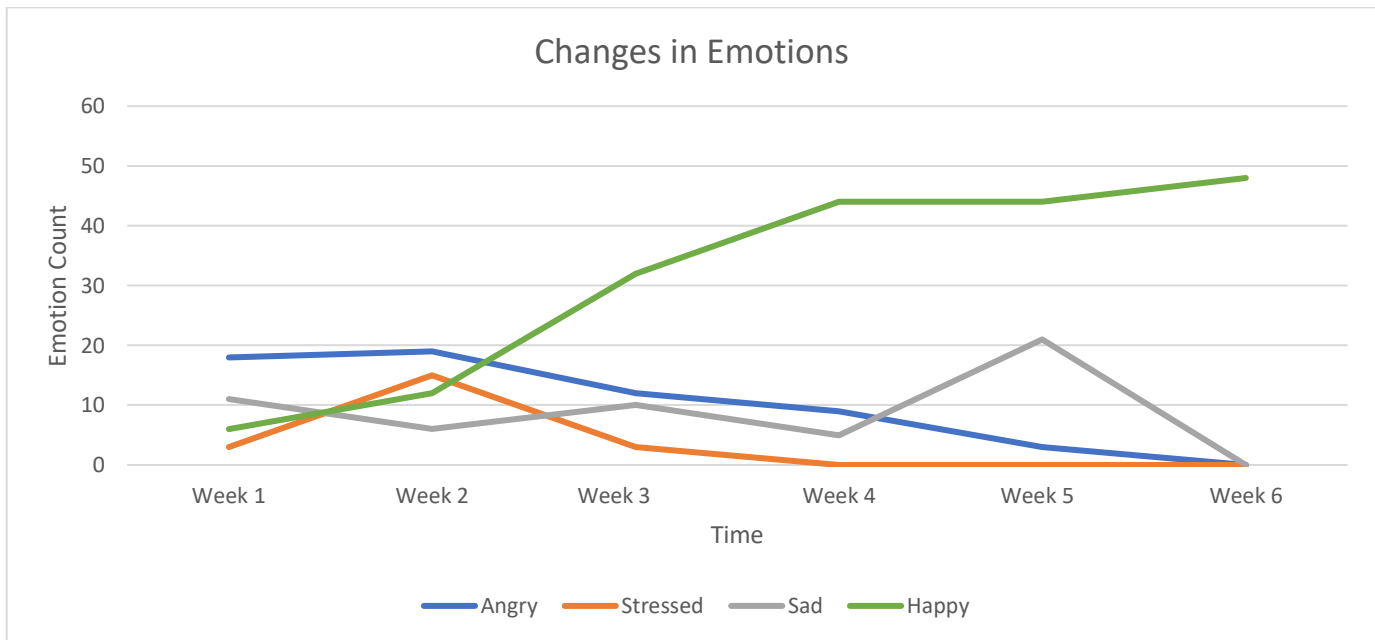
¹⁰ Du Bois, W. E. B. (1989). *The souls of Black folk*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Figure 2. Post-assessment



Results

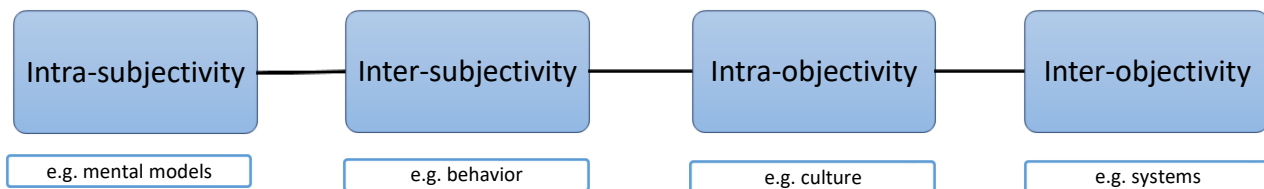
The MIA[®] research approach includes investigations for which answers are not given. Rather, these answers surge from the research itself as participants identify, observe, and change their own taken-for-granted assumptions. Dr. Vergara spent a few years teaching in Ecuador and continues to gather data to identify the impact of her practice. Her study at this time focused on the college dropout rate for financially disadvantaged students, as her demographic. The resulting data supports Dr. Vergara's findings. Dropout rates decreased for students who were exposed to the modification of habitus as reflected in self-regulation and addressing dysfunctional behaviors in a systematic way. Regardless of 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. Refer to Table 2, below, to see the correlation between social/emotional growth and reduced stress levels among the participant group.

Table 2. Data Used to Describe Emotional Intelligence Growth

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

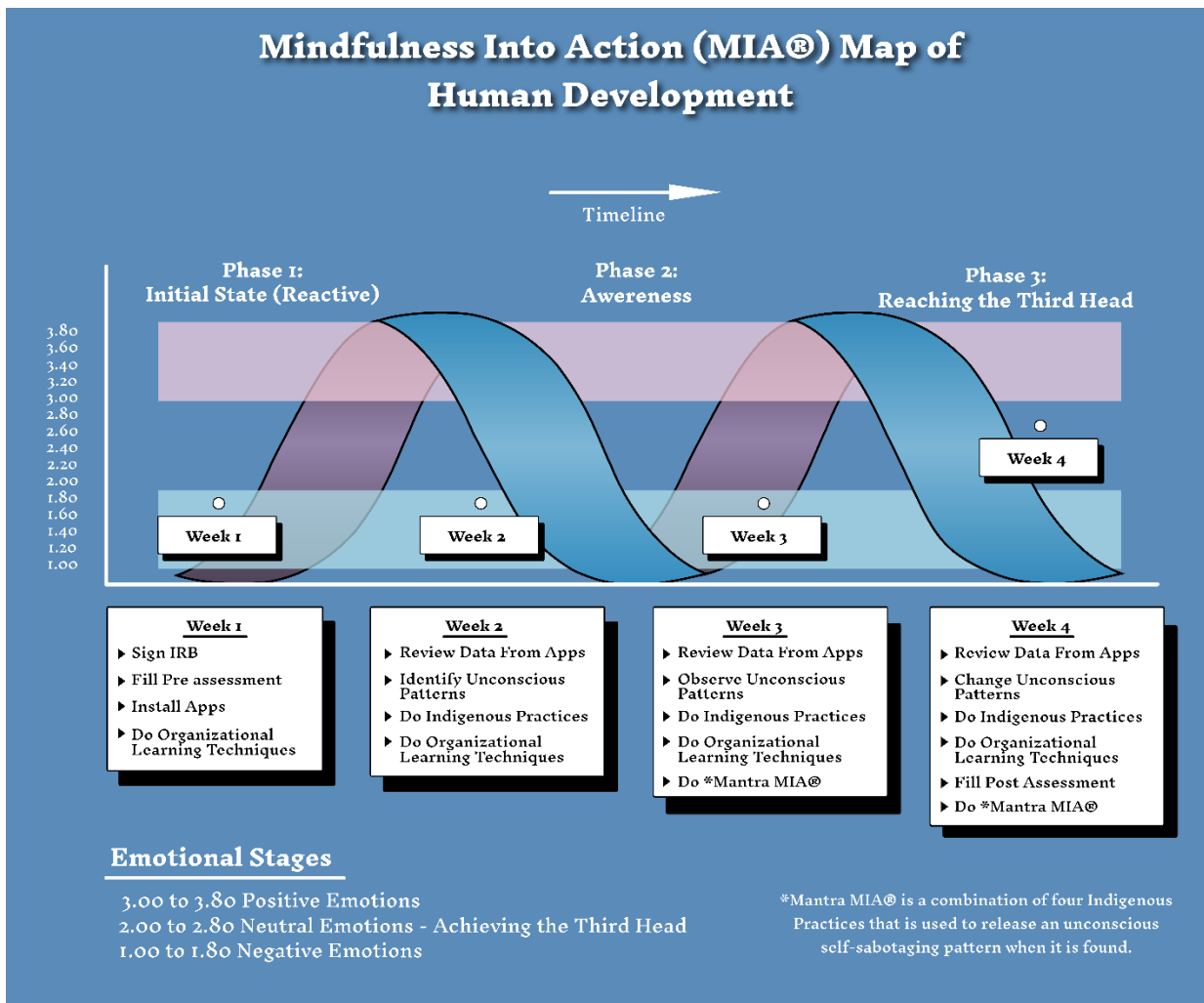
From Individual to Systemic Changes

When working with individuals (intra-subjectivity), we talk about how to facilitate them to develop a more "empowering view of their current reality." By this we meant to help them view their current reality that reinforced, rather than undermined, their sense of confidence in shaping the future. Most people perceive their reality through the lens of daily pressures they live with, crises that must be addressed, and limitations that must be accepted (inter-subjectivity). Due to such ways of defining "reality," individual's aspirations are like illusions or, perhaps, delusions that are not an achievable end (intra-objectivity). This begets the question of how then can we create an intervention that can 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 (inter-objectivity) rather than just short-term events.

Figure 3. Theoretical Model Showing the Movement from Intra-subjectivity to Inter-objectivity.

At the personal level, 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. Mindfulness Into Action Map of Human Development



From the indigenous knowledge perspective, this figure represents the “Infinite Serpent,” also known as “the breath of life.” A person goes through life in this spiral of personal growth with ups and downs. Scholars in organization theory, such as, Argyris (1982)¹¹, Kegan & Lahey (2002)¹², and Torbert (2004)¹³, have all found this spiral in human development, as well.

¹¹ Argyris, C. (1982). The executive mind and double-loop learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, 11(2), 5-22.

¹² Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2002). *How the way we talk can change the way we work: Seven languages for transformation*. John Wiley & Sons.

¹³ Torbert, B. (2004). *Action inquiry: The secret of timely and transforming leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Table 3. Mindfulness Into Action Research Logic Model

| OBJECTIVES | VERIFIED INDICATORS | MEANS OF VERIFICATION |
|--|--|--|
| I. Individual & Organizational Pre-assessment | Pre-assessment MIA® Emotional Intelligence test, Stress test & Global Leadership Profile | 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 | Post-assessment MIA® Emotional Intelligence test, Stress test & Global Leadership Profile | 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 |
| I. 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 |
| II. 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 | Pre-assessment MIA® Emotional Intelligence test, Stress test & Global Leadership Profile | Report |
| II. Implementation of MIA® methodology | Data from weekly meetings | Interview Protocol |
| III. Post-assessment | Post-assessment MIA® Emotional Intelligence test, Stress test & Global Leadership Profile | 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 |