

PERCEPTIONS OF ACTIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES FOR DIVERSITY  
TRAINING IN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS: A WISCONSIN  
CASE STUDY

By

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Abstract of Thesis

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Corporate Communications

Perceptions of Active Learning Techniques for Diversity Training in Academic  
and Professional Settings: A Wisconsin Case Study

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## Abstract

Diversity training is essential in today's ever-changing multicultural world (Junkette, 2005). According to the U.S. Census, by 2050, the minority population will represent approximately 54% of the nation's overall population. Studying how teachers of diversity topics present the material is essential to determining the best possible way to teach intercultural communication competency. Intercultural communication competency has four dimensions: cognition, affect, behavior, and experience/exposure (Grunzweig & Rinehart, 1998). Time, age of students or participants, and the level of sensitivity of diversity topics create a unique dilemma in understanding. Previous research and observations determined that active learning was a key component in diversity training environments, both in a classroom and in a professional setting. Active learning uses different activities and interactive teaching styles to involve students more in the learning process (Prentless, 2006). To further examine the topic, previous student focus groups from a small midwestern university as well as qualitative one-on-one interviews with the professors, participants of a local diversity training workshop, and the workshop trainers were all used to analyze the use of active learning in diversity college courses and professional trainings. The study indicated that both university professors and professional trainers reported using the same active learning techniques in their teachings. Secondly, students of both university professors and the diversity trainers reported that they enjoyed the use of active learning methods, particularly activities and team teaching. The students of both groups in this study felt that they understood the topics and would be able to apply the knowledge in a real life cross cultural interaction. The active learning methods were able to create a level of exposure which is vital to obtaining ICC. The results of this study imply that active learning should continue to be a part of teaching diversity topics.

## Perceptions of Active Learning Techniques For Diversity Training in Academic and Professional Settings

Diversity training is essential in today's ever-changing multicultural world (Junkette, 2005). According to the U.S. Census, by 2050, the minority population will represent approximately 54% of the nation's overall population. In addition to the changing demographics within U.S. borders, the world is also becoming more fluid internationally. Improved technology such as air travel and the Internet have made international relations much easier and more frequent. For these reasons, diversity training is especially important in today's schools and workplaces. Diversity training is necessary in order for individuals to interact with others who are different from them in a positive and productive way.

In 2008, the Chicago Community Trust's Fellowship in Arts & Cultural Management partnered with Business Development Directives and Graciela Kenig and Associates to launch a two-year diversity initiative throughout Chicago public museums. This is a proactive approach to the important topic of diversity. Given the size, length, and resources put behind this project it is evident that diversity training awareness is a very important topic for business.

Beyond big business plans in major metropolitan cities, diversity issues can occur anywhere. Whitewater, Wisconsin, is an example of a small town struggle with diversity. Whitewater is a small Midwestern town of approximately, 13,437 people. It is

predominantly Caucasian with about 92% of the population reported as White (2000 Census). At the end of the school year in 2009, threatening racist graffiti was discovered plastered on a door of a bathroom stall of Whitewater High School. In a town with such a homogenous racial/ethnic make up, diversity training may not seem relevant, but it is very relevant and necessary- especially given a racist incident at the high school. The high school took action and developed a task force and hired diversity consultants to help the school and community work through these problems. These two examples differ in size and location, but the goal of effectively educating people to accept diversity is the same. It is perhaps especially important to support diversity education in locations such as Whitewater, where racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation is less diverse so that limited exposure does not lead to excessive stereotyping and prejudices.

Diversity training takes place in varied environments. University classrooms and professional training sessions are two common places in which individuals learn about diversity. In my personal observations of these two environments, I have noticed similar patterns in content and style. However, I have also noticed distinct differences in goals and student motivation. Thus, I was curious to compare and contrast these two environments. I wanted to study the similarities and difference of what educators and students in both settings felt were effective techniques for teaching diversity and cultural awareness.

I also wanted to specifically explore how locale impacts diversity training. As mentioned earlier, small towns and less diverse regions may have a particular need for diversity training. Diversity educators and students in such areas may also face special

obstacles. Thus, I wanted to contextualize my research within a small town and less diverse regions.

To accomplish this goal, my study examines diversity training in a university setting and in a professional setting, using in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups to examine what active learning strategies professors, professional trainers, and students in both these settings feel are most effective at helping students learn about diversity.

Both the academics and professionals diversity settings are located in a primarily rural and predominately Caucasian section of Wisconsin. Thus, this study will examine how educators and students view diversity training within that context.

Given that we need to know more about cross-cultural training and active learning, this paper will explore how academic leaders and professors use active learning in their diversity training and how participants perceive their effectiveness. Specific research questions supporting this thesis will be delineated following the literature review.

### Literature Review

Diversity is an expansive term that includes everything from race, age, status, background, education, sexual preference, physical status, lifestyle, religion and geographic region (Ivanevich & Gilbert, 2000). The ultimate goal of diversity training is intercultural competency. Intercultural competency is the ability to recognize differences and respond effectively and appropriately in a cross-cultural situation (Wright, 2008).

*Intercultural Communication Competency*

Intercultural communication competency is an important concept in diversity training and university diversity courses. Intercultural communication competency, or ICC, is the ability for individuals from different backgrounds to have a successful interaction (Samovar & Porter, 2003). ICC involves much more than speaking the same language. ICC includes: respecting individuals from other cultures, making continued attempts to understand the world, being open and flexible to new learning, tolerating ambiguity, being sensitive to one's own prejudices, and having a desire to learn (Roux, 2002).

Intercultural communication competence has four dimensions: cognition, affect, behavior, and experience/exposure (Grunzweig & Rinehart, 1998). Cognition is having knowledge of a culture. To have a successful intercultural communication, an individual must first know something about the culture with which they are interacting. Affect is the motivation and willingness to communicate with others. To have a successful communication interaction in an intercultural setting, a person must be motivated to communicate and be open-minded. Behavior is the skill and awareness to demonstrate the appropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior in the situation. To demonstrate ICC, one must engage in effective and appropriate communication behavior. The final component of ICC is experience or exposure. While a person can have knowledge, motivation, and a strong communication skill set, if individuals are not given the opportunity to actually experience intercultural communication and practice what they learned, they will never be able to achieve full intercultural communication competency. Helping people improve their intercultural communication competency is the primary goal of diversity training.

### *Diversity Training in Education and Professional Settings*

Diversity training in both academic and professional settings is very similar in its structure and goals. In both environments, diversity classes are typically focused on topics such as relationship with self, relationship with others, and the relationship with the environment (Armour et al., 2004). However, while the content may be similar, the structure of the learning environments can be different.

Workplaces often provide diversity training sessions, workshops, or seminars. The workplace diversity sessions may be provided by a human resources department at the place of business or a professional diversity consultant may be called in to educate employees on diversity issues with the goal of creating cultural competence (Wentling & Rivas, 1999). In the professional setting, there is not a set amount of time for diversity training. A study reviewing the effectiveness of diversity training in the Midwest found that training ranged from one to eight hours and could be completed in one day or in a few short sessions over several days (Hite, 2006).

Diversity courses at the university level are set up according to the school's curriculum requirements, allowing for a variety of course formats. In general, college courses can devote significantly more time to content, allowing more in depth coverage through assignments, testing and classroom activities than professional trainings can. University classrooms are able to use testing and assignments in a way that most short professional diversity trainings are unable to do.

Time is one of biggest advantages in classroom diversity courses. The emotions and complexity of diversity topics require time to process. Concepts such as racism and

discrimination may be difficult for some people to process in a short amount of time.

Over the course of the semester, students have time to reflect on the course concepts and professors have the opportunity to use a variety of teaching techniques (Hite, 2006).

Audience represents another difference between a university diversity classroom and a professional diversity training. The audiences in both settings differ in median age, and perhaps is what they plan to gain from the training.

### *Benefits of diversity training*

The benefits of both educational and professional diversity training are numerous and include: better intercultural communication, higher morale, greater trust, increase in understanding, and deeper appreciation for differences (Wentling et al, 1999). Diversity training helps people understand their own strengths and weaknesses, reduces differential treatment, and builds skills necessary to work in a diverse environment. Diversity training is helpful in all settings because almost everyone interacts each day with someone who is different from them in age, sex, education level, religion, or other areas (Wentling et al, 1999).

Diversity training has particular relevance in school settings, where teachers not only need to teach a diverse student body, but also teach their students to deal with diverse others. Diversity awareness and skills are also important beyond the classroom. It is necessary in business settings for employees to interact with co-workers and clients from diverse backgrounds (Wentling et al., 1999). Many Fortune 500 companies understand how important such knowledge is. In Fortune 500 companies, 72% in the service sector and 80% in the manufacturing sector have some kind of diversity training

in place (Wentling et al., 1999). The Chicago example listed before displays how big companies are taking a proactive stance regarding diversity.

### *Challenges in diversity training*

There are challenges in providing diversity training. It is very important in both educational and professional settings to have support from higher administration or upper management (Wentling et al., 1999). If there is a lack of interest from employers, employees, faculty or students, then the training will not be successful. If upper management does not take diversity training seriously, that poor attitude can be seen by subordinates -- creating an unfriendly environment for diversity training.

Another challenge to diversity training is poor execution. A poorly conducted training has the potential to do more harm than good. For example, the session leaders might talk down to or degrade the attendees or make them feel guilty, which could create distrust or produce other negative outcomes.

Another challenge is that leaders may encounter unwilling participants (Watson, 2008). People who are not open to diversity to begin with may shut down emotionally, severely hindering any possibility for progress (Hite, 2006). Unfortunately, one bad experience with diversity training can negate the possibility for a positive change, especially in an individual who is skeptical of diversity training (Kiselica, 1999).

How can teachers of diversity training avoid creating a negative or ineffective experience for the student and thus ensure that the students fully gain the benefits of the training? Finding an effective teaching method that is able to reach a variety of people can be difficult. One solution is active learning. In diversity training, trainers use many

active learning techniques such as discussion, small group exercises, games, simulations, team teaching, and other interactive approaches (Armour et al., 2004). The most consistent training methods used are discussion and small group work (SCRC, 2006).

The goal of diversity courses and trainings is to improve intercultural communication competency. Active learning is way to help to reach the goal of better intercultural cultural competency, ICC. Some studies have suggested that, when teaching ICC, passive learning methods are not successful. Using active learning techniques can help students experience and practice the concepts being taught (Zimmerman, 1995). Students learn best about another culture by experiencing it, analyzing it, and applying their knowledge to other situations (Roose, 2001). The use of active learning techniques can help to create the cultural experience necessary for better understanding of the topic.

### *Active Learning*

Active learning uses different activities and interactive teaching styles to involve students more in the learning process (Prentless, 2006). For example, an instructor could show a video clip about a diversity topic, have the students break into small groups to discuss the clip, and then bring the discussion back to the entire class. Another example is, an instructor involving students in a game to help students to understand a concept. This could be a game where students were not allowed to talk to each other but had to accomplish a task to help to demonstrate non- verbal communication or language barriers. Active learning engages a deeper understanding of the topic because the learner must apply knowledge to an activity (Prentless, 2006).

### *Benefits of active learning*

Studies on active learning show numerous benefits. Two primary findings are that active learning engages students in the material and improves student retention. Some students can have difficulty staying interested in a traditional lecture-style classroom (Goldburg & Finkelsten, 2002). Active learning can keep material more engaging by relating the concept to students' life experiences (Hatcher & Hinton, 1996). When participants are more engaged in activity, they learn more (Pare & Maistre, 2006). Active learning is especially beneficial for topics where students have a lot of personal experience and expertise. Relating the information to their own "real life" situations makes information more applicable and interesting to students (Pare, 2006). Some examples of this include: if students have ever traveled to a foreign country or had an interaction with someone who does not speak English, they can relate their real life experience into the discussions and activities.

Some of the most encouraging research shows that students of active learning techniques retain information better (Levy, et al., 2006). Students who were taught the material using active learning had higher achievement than those who were not (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). For example, Koles (et al, 2005) discovered that students who tested lowest at the beginning of the study showed significant academic improvement with active learning techniques. High scoring students in the beginning of the course did not exhibit a difference between passive or active learning techniques. The exceptional students could succeed in all settings (Koles et al, 2005). However, students in the active learning group showed greater long term learning retention for all groups (the high and low scorers). The students in the active cohort also had a higher attendance rate and

reported greater affinity for the course. Overall, this study shed positive light on active learning and again, the retention of material, especially for students with a little more trouble grasping the concepts.

### *Active Learning Techniques*

Active learning can include a wide range of activities and techniques. Specific active learning techniques include think in pair exercises (where students answer questions with a partner) role playing scenarios, peer review, discussion with a partner or a small group, games, quizzes and tests, journals, concept mapping, case studies, role playing, and debate (McKinny, 2008). Active learning techniques also include the use of video clips and team teaching. Most of the research on active learning in relation to diversity training focuses on the techniques of discussion, group work, and team teaching.

### *Discussion.*

Discussion is a favored active learning technique. It is easy to incorporate into educational and professional training, making it a popular choice among diversity instructors. Discussion is also is something students are familiar with and feel comfortable doing, because students are used to professor-directed questions and small group work with classmates (Dugan & Letterman, 2008).

Studies emphasize the benefits of discussion (Ellis et. al., 2004). Discussion helps students build confidence about class topics and understand the topics on a deeper level. In a lecture only setting, it is easy for students to gloss over the material, and not everyone may fully understand the key concepts (Ellis et al., 2004). Discussion helps

them relate to the material by helping them to apply course topics to their own life experiences, and link them with new knowledge applicable to the real world (Goldburg & Finkelstein, 2002).

Discussion as an active learning technique can have some downsides. A problem with discussion is that students can be unsure about the expectations and topics can wander if the discussion is not set up properly (Ellis et al., 2004).

*Team teaching.*

Among the three active learning techniques discussed here, team teaching has the most current literature examining its pros and cons. Team teaching consists of a group of two or more instructors involved in planning, delivering, and evaluating a class or learning group (Levy et al. , 2006). Team teaching can create an enriching and supportive environment for both staff and students. Studies show that students are more likely to have an understanding of what is required in a team teaching environment and respond positively (Levy et al., 2006). Team teaching is usually interactive, and can keep students' attention. Many studies credit team teaching with increasing students' engagement and retention (Yellowley & Parmer, 2005).

Team teaching has been linked to higher student achievement levels, greater retention rates, improved interpersonal skills, and improved skills of analysis and judgment (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Students of team teaching classes report feeling more at ease, finding it easier to talk in class, and feeling more comfortable with the material (Carpeter et al., 2007). They also report enjoy being able to go to either instructor with questions. Students also benefit from the diverse backgrounds of their

instructors and like receiving multiple viewpoints on a subject (Vogler & Long, 2003). Team teaching also helps model teamwork, which workplaces value (Lage & Snavely, 1999).

Beyond the benefits for students, team teaching also benefits faculty. Teachers can draw from each other and help each other out when problems arise (Bowles, 1994).

Team teaching is not without its problems. First, both teachers and students need to be present and involved to be effective (Hatcher & Hinton, 1996). Additionally, students may worry that they have to please two instructors. Students may have some initial apprehension about the new team teaching style, because it is a new environment and both students and instructors need to adjust (Hatcher & Hinton, 1996).

#### *Group work.*

Group work is another active learning strategy, which refers to any activity that students engage in as a small group including, discussion, projects, role-playing scenarios, and games. Group work is a good way to apply knowledge and is enjoyable for the students (Carpenter et al., 2007). Group work allows students to apply key concepts of the class or training. Putting the new information into an activity such as a project or role-playing scenario allows students to see how the information can be applied to real life situations. Group work engages students on multiple levels. It encourages students to become more involved in their own learning process. It can be easy to passively listen to a lecture, but it requires deeper understanding and more involvement to use concepts in a group activity (Carpenter et al., 2007).

Group work does have some negative aspects. If students do not understand an activity or choose not to involve themselves, group work will not be successful. For group work to be most effective, all individuals involved need to take an active role.

#### *Summary of Active Learning*

In sum, despite some drawbacks, active learning has been shown to create a more in-depth understanding of material through a variety of different methods including team teaching, group work, and discussion. Diversity topics can be difficult to teach and understand. Thus, using active learning teaching in diversity education can be beneficial. Active learning can help overcome some of the difficulties of diversity training. For example, using active learning techniques can help students to grasp concepts such as racism and discrimination that may not be explained as well in a reading or lecture style. Diversity topics are sensitive, and active learning techniques such as in-depth discussion can help students relate to the topics on a more personal level. Finally, the key goal of diversity training is to improve intercultural communication competency. Research on ICC from previous studies by Roux, Grunzweig, and Yamazaki clearly demonstrates that experience is an essential component of ICC. Thus, by providing students with apparatus for hands on learning, active learning techniques such as discussion, group work, and team teaching should aid students in gaining ICC. These methods can help create a better understanding of the material by involving the learner in the material.

Based on the research, it seems logical to propose that the use of active learning techniques in diversity training would be beneficial and that both educators and students

would report positive outcomes of active learning in diversity settings. However, the use of active learning techniques in diversity training has not been studied in depth, so such connection still needs support.

Academic research on active learning is not specifically focused on diversity training courses but rather looks at the impact of active learning in general for a variety of education topics. Based on the connections established in the literature review, I would like to explore the link between active learning and diversity education. I would like to examine if and how diversity educators view active learning techniques and what they feel they provide. What active learning techniques have instructors found to be the most effective? If the instructors feel they are beneficial, do the students as well? Do cross-cultural workshops and classrooms use the same teaching techniques? Are they effective in each setting? In addition, I wanted to examine if trainers in educational and professional setting use the same teaching techniques, and if so, are they effective in each setting. Finally, because I feel diversity education is especially important in non-diverse contexts, I want to specifically examine diversity training programs in small towns and or regions with limited diversity so that findings about what is effective in those settings can be passed on to others who train in such context.

The research questions being examined in this study are:

RQ1: How do academic professional use active learning techniques in their teaching?

What do they view as the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques?

RQ2: How do professional diversity trainers use active learning techniques in their teaching? What do they see as the strengths and weaknesses?

RQ3: How do participants in academic diversity education settings view active learning?

RQ4: How do participants in professional diversity education settings view active learning?

### Methods

This study is an exploration of the differing perceptions academic instructors, professional trainers, and students have regarding active learning in the diversity context. This study should be considered a preliminary study of the opinions of professors, professional trainers, and their students. The goal of this exploratory study was to capture a detailed understanding of how diversity teachers, trainers, and students view active learning concepts and describe the similarities and differences of perceptions between existing groups.

In order to gather an in-depth picture of the opinions of the study participants, this study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research has the goal of observing and understanding social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative researchers use interviews and focus groups to gather interactive and descriptive data that provides an in- depth look at the material being studied.

When studying people, qualitative research allows researchers to take into account the complexity of the human experience by hearing an individual's opinions (Meloy, 1994). Qualitative research generally takes place in natural settings and focuses on the content of the interviews or focus group (Marshall, 2006). Qualitative research is able to get a personal, reflective, and extensive understanding of participants' opinions (Marshall, 2006).

I conducted qualitative interviews of university professors, professional diversity trainers, and students of professional trainers. I also had access to qualitative data from a previous study of focus groups of students in undergraduate cross-cultural communication courses conducted in the Spring of 2007. The questions used for the professors, professional trainers and their students were modeled after the interview guide used for the student focus group (Penington & Wildermuth, 2005). A copy of each interview guide is provided in Appendix A, B, and D.

### *Participants*

#### *Professors.*

I interviewed two female professors at a small Midwestern university. Both professors teach at least one section of cross-cultural communication per year, have taught at the university level for more than ten years and have utilized active learning methods in their teaching.

#### *Professional diversity trainers.*

The trainers were part of a small diversity consulting company in a mid-sized town in the Midwest. The company's owner and his team conduct professional diversity trainings throughout the country. I interviewed two trainers from the company. Both trainers were males, one Caucasian and one African American. Both were in their 50's, and both had extensive training experience. Both consultants have been involved in diversity consulting for many years and use active learning in their training.

#### *Participants (university students).*

As mentioned earlier, for the university students sample, I used data from three student focus groups at a small Midwestern university. The students had just taken a cross-cultural communication course. The participants who shared their race/ethnic background were 97% Caucasian and 4% "other." The average age was 22 years old. The participants consisted of approximately 44% males and 54% females. A few participants declined to provide demographic information.

*Participants (diversity trainers' students).*

The participants for the students of professional diversity trainers consisted of a convenience sample of individuals who attended a diversity workshop during the spring of 2008. The participants were three women ranging in age from 40s through 60s, two males in their 50-60s, and another in his early 30s. Of the participants interviewed, 85% were Caucasian. The students participated in an all day diversity training seminar during the spring of 2008 entitled "Creating a Culturally Responsive Climate." The workshop was team taught by the two consultants. Participants included employees from local businesses and members of local communities within a 60-mile range.

*Procedures*

In-depth interviews were used to gather data. An interview guide was used. (See Appendix B) but the interviewer could add to the questions in order to go more in-depth when appropriate. Participants first signed consent forms (Appendix C) before any of the interviews began. This reassured them that their answers would remain confidential and encouraged them to feel comfortable talking openly and honestly. In the write up, participants were given pseudonyms or were identified by initials or letters to ensure their

anonymity. The interviews were taped and later transcribed. The interviews took place in local coffee shops, participants' offices, or in one case, the participant's home. The undergraduate students' focus group took place in a classroom.

The data were coded using thematic analysis. When conducting qualitative research, inductive analysis to look for themes in the data is common (Denzim, 1998). After the themes have been determined, the qualitative research will tell the story of the data (Denzim & Lincoln, 1998). The researcher and an assistant first read through the two professor interviews, two trainer interviews, the six participant interviews, and the three transcripts from the undergraduate focus groups.

A few prominent themes presented themselves during the read through. Based on those themes, the researchers then mutually created a detailed coding list. Finally, all the transcripts were reread and coded. The five broad categories are listed below:

1. Types of diversity exposure: (as a student, professor, trainer, travel)
2. Types of active learning activities: (discussion, team teaching, games, video clips and more)
3. Nature of the training: (time, layout of the room, trainers) This only applied to the professional participants
4. Benefits of diversity training: (sense of camaraderie, learning new information. in active learning motivation, fun enjoyable environment and more)
5. Weakness of diversity training (number of participants, workload, control issues)

## Results

This study sought to investigate perceptions of both instructors and students regarding active learning and diversity training in classroom and professional settings. The following results will be broken down into the perceptions of 1) professors, 2) professional diversity trainers, 3) students of the professors, and 4) participants of the professional trainers.

**RQ1: How do academic professionals use active learning techniques in their teaching? What do they view as the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques?**

### *Professors*

The professors both had a number of years experience teaching cross-cultural communication classes and a few semesters experience teaching cross-cultural classes in a team-taught structure. Both the professors utilize active learning techniques frequently, listing team teaching, activities/games, and discussion as elements of their classroom structure. A summary of the active learning techniques will include what they reported using most often, and the strengths and weaknesses of those techniques listed.

### *Active Learning Strategies*

#### *Discussion.*

Discussion was referenced as an active learning activity commonly used by both professors. Both professors indicated that they used small group discussion. Topics for discussion were based off of video clips, readings, or activities and ranged from focusing

on race relations to cultural norms. Video clips included movies such as *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and *Remember the Titan*. Small group discussion could be on a variety of topics such as culture shock, intercultural interactions, worldview, prejudices and stereotypes, and specific cultures.

Professor B shared:

*Discussion is an active learning technique that I use. Usually they are based upon maybe showing a video clip (such as the Joy Luck Club or The Gods Be Crazy) or some kind of cultural interaction (Such as cultural norms).*

Professor A shared:

*We also have a lot of discussion in Cross-Cultural; it's the nature of the beast.*

*There are at lot of discussion based assignments and activities.*

The professors felt that discussion was able to bring in some of concepts that the video clips and games were demonstrating.

*Activities.*

Experimental assignments, games, activities, and projects (which will be discussed more in- depth later) were cited by both of the professors as important active learning strategies. One activity mentioned was a game called “Barnga” where students are unsure about the rules of the game, and no talking is allowed during the activity.

Another popular activity was a non-verbal game where students must learn to communicate without words or communicate in situations which are most the norm for their culture. Professor B shared:

*We have [the students] get up out of their seats and do some exercises with non-verbal communication such as standing very close to each other as they talk like other cultures might do.*

The non-verbal Barnnga and other games help students to "feel" some of the concepts that the professors are teaching, enabling students to understand some of the emotions that go along with the concepts. They are more able to more fully understand an idea such as culture shock by experiencing the confusion and frustration that results.

The professors also mentioned an assignment called "the experiential learning assignment" where students must put themselves in a cross-cultural situation and report about it. Some possible cross-cultural scenarios could be assisting a nurse in a mental health facility, spending an evening with an unfamiliar ethnic or religious group, or interviewing someone who is a new immigrant to this country. This paper includes a summary of the experience professors, trainers, and students had and an analysis of the communication, and tying in of class concepts that took place.

Professor B stated:

*We [students in class] do an experiential learning assignment where they [students] have to interview someone from another culture, put themselves in another culture.*

This activity is able to help students experience first hand a different culture, which is an important part of intercultural communication competency. It also helps the students to analyze the communication that took place when they were in their new cultural situation

and apply it to what they have learned in class since they have experienced some of the concepts during the activity.

### *Team Teaching*

Another active learning technique used by both professors, was team teaching. Both thought of it as a positive element of active learning. Professor A shared:

*Different professors bring different expertise, different overseas experiences, different ethnic backgrounds and different racial heritage, perhaps, of course, gender [or] sexual orientation and so on. You'd have diversity in teachers as well as diversity of examples and so on.*

Professor B added:

*I think the strength is, you do get a variety of ideas.*

Both the professors felt strongly about the benefit of multiple perspectives and expertise provided in team teaching. They felt that a professor who was an expert on a topic could provide a better lecture than they would have been able to do themselves.

### *Benefits of Active Learning*

#### *Engagement.*

Professors felt that students were more involved or immersed in the material when active learning was used. Professors felt that active learning helped students to be more engaged, and that when students were more engaged, they were better able to apply information to the real world. Professor A states:

*It (active learning) engages the student. It tends to increase motivation. It makes both the instructor and the student [I think] more engaged, and I think it does*

*have a positive impact on learning and in the case of cross-cultural. while the learning is really important, we have, I would say, even a broader goal of acceptance.*

Engaging students and increasing motivation is a good way to help in retention of the material. Students who are interested in the materials may pay more attention and therefore, remember the material better.

#### *Understanding and Exposure*

Another common theme among the professors was that active learning techniques helped provide better, more in depth understanding of the material. Professor B stated:

*I really feel that students or any of us learn best by experiencing something, really getting up and moving around, seeing, hearing and just totally experiencing something. So, that's definitely a plus to make the information hit home a little bit more.*

In a cross-cultural classroom experiential learning arose as an important element in teaching. Both professors made comments about the positive aspects of "experiencing." Active learning can be a way for students to gain a little bit of that experience and exposure to diversity concepts which then helps the student to understand the material better. "Experiencing" the material helps to achieve the fourth level of intercultural competency (exposure) that is an important part of understanding.

Active learning can give students exposure to other cultures through activities, games, and video clips. For example, a card game called Barnga, cited earlier in the paper, was referenced by one of the professors as a helpful game that provided students

brief exposure to what culture shock feels like. The professors felt that this first-hand experience and exposure to other cultures was very helpful in the understanding of the material. Professor A shared:

*It helps students to understand when they are exposed to another culture or experiences. Interaction - even if the interaction is being exposed to a movie or being exposed to a guest lecture or having a discussion in small group setting where someone in your group is comfortable sharing "hey I am a member of this group or my brother is, or my cousin or whomever," If It brings you a little bit closer.*

Professor B adds:

*I really feel that students or any of us learn best by experiencing something.*

The current research on active learning and intercultural communication supports this claim. Intercultural communication competency involves cognition, affect, behavior, and experience/exposure. By helping students to have a level of exposure or experience, active learning techniques create cognition, affect, and behavior.

*Acceptance.*

Exposure and acceptance were closely related. The professors felt that the activities helped students to understand the material and relate it to their own experiences. Professor A referenced Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954) which states that exposure to another culture is positively connected to future acceptance of that culture (Emerson et al., 2002). Professor A implied that active learning techniques help in providing students

with small levels of exposure, which in turn, should aid in acceptance of other cultures.

Professor A:

*Just sheer exposure or what some researchers call mere exposure. Merely being exposed to an item increases the likelihood that you'll learn something about it and like it more.*

In the study Three Weeks There and Back Again, by Penington & Wildermuth (2007), the students who participated in a short term study abroad program reported "life changing" exposure and gained intercultural competency. The student participants in this study had the opportunity to travel abroad for their exposure, which most diversity courses are unable to do. Even if students are unable to travel, through mere exposure to another culture helps students of diversity courses more fully understand the material and concepts.

*Fun and enjoyment.*

Both professors mentioned fun and enjoyment as a common benefit of active learning. Both stated in their interviews that students enjoyed the active learning activities. Professor A shared:

*"One is kids like them [Active Learning games and activities]. And I know that sounds like "oh how pedagogically effective is that, " but, there is something to be said for affective learning. People enjoy the class period.. They found it interesting. I think that does trickle down to learning the concept more as well"*

Professor B:

*"I think it [active learning activity] can be fun. It gets people to laugh and talk a little bit more."*

Professor B states that because active learning is fun, it appeals to a greater number of people. Some students can have difficulty applying what they learn in a traditional lecture style classroom (Goldburg & Finkelstein, 2002). Age, gender, and learning style all play a role in effectiveness of learning. Professor B feels that active learning is able to include more individuals than other teaching styles.

*Active learning appeals to just about everybody. Active learning has been proven to help those who may not learn as well in traditional lecture only situations.*

#### *Team teaching benefits*

The professors listed several team teaching benefits. One benefit was that, in team teaching, the student has the opportunity to interact with each professor and may understand one better than the other; this can be important to the student who needs a question answered or help on a project. Professor A states:

*I would say students also have greater access and some very pragmatic things, like maybe I couldn't keep my office hours, but [another professor] was in, so they could ask [him/her] questions about the course or maybe just for whatever reason they just didn't feel comfortable with person A. You have other bodies you can communicate with about the class. Sometimes the way a person teaches it (material) or the way a person communicates. It just doesn't seem to sink in for them. There is someone else they can go to that might be able to articulate in a slightly different way so they get it.*

The professors also felt a personal benefit from team teaching, which in turn, they felt positively impacted student learning. The professors liked how there were a variety of ideas about how to do things and experiences to draw from during the planning of the class. Professor A stated: *"You share the wealth, you share the expertise, you learn from one another."* In an ideal situation, one of the professors may be an expert on a particular topic. The professor who is the expert can then share his or her expertise with the class in ways that the other professors would not be able to. *"Students get exposure to faculty with varied expertise,"* professor B states.

#### *Weaknesses of Active Learning Techniques*

The professors did note some disadvantages of active learning techniques. Professors listed the following drawbacks; lack of control in team teaching, the workload, the possibility of exercises not working, offending others, and students not understanding the material.

##### *Lack of Control.*

Team teaching did have some drawbacks: one problem professors cited was that, when team teaching, the professors have to give up some control. Both professors said that it can be hard to give up the control. They may not always get to do things the way they want because they have to coordinate and agree with the other professors in their team teaching staff.

##### *Workload.*

Another possible drawback of active learning is that it is a lot of work to put together an active learning class. One professor said that it takes a greater amount of time

and work to pick the right activities, video clips, and discussion pieces to insert into a class than with a lecture only format. Depending on the workload, professors may not have extra time to devote to planning active learning activities.

*Activities gone wrong.*

The two professors interviewed also stated that exercises could backfire and not go as planned. For example, during group discussions, professors can have a situation where no one is participating, which does not work well for the activity. It is also much harder to estimate how the students will react to the activities and discussions. So much success depends on students' and participants' willingness to participate that active learning techniques can be very unpredictable.

Professor A states:

*You can have a dead room, and it's like pulling teeth to get someone to answer.*

*You (need) to get someone to answer and to be willing to engage.*

Another issue that the professors mentioned related to cross-cultural classes in particular is that the topics are often very sensitive. Diversity classes discuss a range of topics from the historical elements of racism, affirmative action, and emigration, to current hot button topics involving diversity. The discussions could backfire and become hurtful and offensive to some in the classroom, an unplanned consequence of the activity.

Another weakness one of the professors pointed out was that with active learning, it is harder to make sure that the students are learning all the concepts that the professors want them to acquire. During a lecture, a professor can clearly point out what specifics he/she specifically wants the students to take away from the lecture. It is not as simple in

an active learning setting. For example, in a traditional lecture setting, a professor may have a Power Point presentation that lays out exactly what he/she wants the students to learn from the lecture. In a more active learning environment, the professor may conduct an activity for students to experience the concept instead of passively listening. Professor A shared:

*When you lecture, you are very certain the students at least heard the material once, because you went through each of the points and you know that you did. But, if you decide to replace that lecture with some kind of active learning exercise or simulation, you don't always know for sure that they got those five points from the readings, or those five points you really need them to know.*

While the professors in this study do list a number of weaknesses, overall their comments were clearly more positive than negative. The two professors in the study are in agreement with each other on their perceptions of the positives and negatives of active learning in diversity context.

**RQ2: How do professional diversity trainers use active learning techniques in their teaching? What do they see as the strengths and weaknesses?**

*Professional Diversity Trainers*

I had the opportunity to interview two professional diversity consultants for a small independent consulting company that provides workshops and diversity trainings for a variety of businesses in the Midwest. Both had been professional consultants for a number of years. One had previously taught cross-cultural classes at the high school level. Both frequently use active learning techniques in their diversity trainings. The

following sections will review what active learning techniques trainers reported using most often and the strengths and weaknesses they see in using active learning in diversity training context.

### *Active Learning Techniques*

Both consultants reported that they did use active learning techniques frequently in their training. Discussion, both in small groups and in large groups through audience prompting, exercises and games, and team teaching were listed as the most common active learning techniques used by the professional trainers.

### *Discussion and Activities*

The trainers involve the audience by getting them to discuss the topics and material in small groups. Trainer B feels this is an effective way to help the audience process the information. Some of the activities used include picture board activities where participants draw out what they want to discuss, also a famous person exercise, where in small groups, people come up with five famous men, women, African American, Asians, homosexual men and women and Native Americans. This game is a good way to look at how society views minorities. Another game is a circle exercise where participants stand in a circle and take steps back if the group they are associated with has experienced a particular prejudice. For example, the instructor would say "have ever been told you cannot vote, " and women and minorities would take a step back. In the end, it is a visual model of discrimination throughout history.

Trainer B shared:

*We do a lot of activities where we put out information and we have the participants kind of process that information and figure out how it applies to their lives, and then they share among each other.*

Prompting the audience was another common form of discussion referenced by the professional trainers. Prompting the audience involves throwing talking points out to the audience in small workshops and involving the whole crowd in the discussion. Topics could include current diversity issues, a specific incident at a workplace, or historical examples. Discussion was considered a very valuable exercise by the trainers because it helped them to get the audience more immersed in the subject matter.

The trainers wanted each participant to feel personally and, more importantly, valued, in the training. By including the participants in the discussion, the trainers felt that the participants felt more valued. Trainer C shared:

*I think it's [discussion] really helpful especially if you're trying to get a discussion and dialog. I really believe that to have a participatory workshop requires us to realize, yeah, we have things to offer, but then so do our colleagues so we really need to get them to share as well so we can learn from each other and realize we're not in this all by ourselves.*

The diversity trainers felt that discussion was one way for participants to feel more involved and to be able to add their own experiences to the lecture to help the concepts feel more relatable.

Specific activities, such as creating a picture board to help guide the participants in the discussion, were specifically mentioned by Trainer C, as particularly helpful. The picture board activity involved the trainers giving small groups a plain poster board and markers. The participants were asked to talk within their small group and write down some of the points they discussed. The groups then shared their discussion points with the entire group.

*I find it works really well if you have your participants write what you really want them to respond to.*

The trainers wanted to give the participants time to think about their responses so they felt more comfortable participating. The trainers felt that the topics involved in diversity trainings can be difficult to discuss, and that having a few extra minutes to think about the topic before a discussion, can create better communication.

*Team teaching.*

Team teaching was listed as a common active learning technique for both the trainers, who worked with each other and with other trainers. The two trainers interviewed have been working with each other for years and felt that they had developed a style that balances their personalities. They are comfortable feeding off of each other and assessing each other in achieving the goals of the workshop. Both specifically said that working with another trainer helps them to observe a room and get a real feel for how the training is going. Trainer B shared:

*The greatest strength and the greatest value [of team teaching] is that we are constantly watching each other's back. If one person misses a point then, the other person is in tune to it and can bring it up.*

Trainer C also feels that one of the greatest benefits of team teaching in diversity training is having the ability to observe the room and see who the training is reaching and work your training around it.

*You get to observe the audience when the other person is speaking. They get to do that when you're speaking, and you observe people and you get to see things that the other person doesn't because they're engaged in presenting or they are involved in working with a small group, and you get a chance to observe the entire group.*

In team teaching, partners are usually different from each other. Diverse backgrounds of trainers provide different perspectives, which the trainers view as a huge benefit of team teaching. Their different perspectives came from their upbringings, different cultural backgrounds, work experience, and travel. Trainer C shared:

*I find in doing diversity work, it's really helpful to work with someone who is either of a different gender, a different ethnic group, or different racial group than I am, just because we help to reinforce what one says. I as a white person may say something and a person of color colleague will reinforce it, or will ask me questions that I wouldn't necessarily ask and visa versa depending on ethnicity, race, religion, whatever it is they are interested in. Now I'm only inclined to ask a female gender questions that I may not ask a male. They may*

*ask a black person racial questions they won't necessarily ask a white person. So it really helps to have that mix in the room. There is a real comfort level that they develop there.*

The trainers felt that their own diversity was an excellent way to not only model some of the concepts they were teaching but also provide a bit of expertise by their own personal experience.

#### *Benefits of Active Learning Techniques*

*Fun and exciting.*

Both professional trainers listed a number of benefits of active learning techniques in diversity settings including fun and enjoyment, engagement in the material, motivation, and application. The professional trainers felt that a benefit of active learning was that it allowed them to present the material in new and exciting way to really resonate with the participants. The trainers wanted to make sure the participants understood the material well and felt that active learning techniques helped with this process. Trainer B shared:

*I want people to leave there saying "oh man, he just really gave it to me in a way that I can take it, that I can accept it. "*

The trainers felt that by enjoying the activities could help participants fully understand the concepts. The trainers were looking for participants to understand the concepts.

*Engagement.*

The trainers felt that, active learning helped engage students, the major goal for using the active learning techniques. Trainer C stated:

*If you tell them, they forget. If you show them, they remember. If you involve them they understand..... that's not to say that it's a bad method [lecture] but there are some kids out there that don't learn through lecturing. I realized that [lecture] wasn't the main or primary way in which all kids learned.*

Active learning techniques were used frequently throughout the workshop. The trainers wanted to help the participants to understand the material and felt that active learning was the best way to fully engage students.

*Motivation and Application.*

The trainers were in agreement on the point of motivation. Both of the trainers stated that motivation was a key goal of their training styles. Diversity training has the goal of motivating its students to first understand the material and, next, to use it in their everyday lives. Trainer B stated:

*I think the strengths are that, anytime you get people involved in their learning situation where they can be an active participant, where they can share ideas, where their historic beliefs can be challenged, it's an opportunity for growth. I have seen it, I have seen people literally change almost overnight once they've been provided with the information.*

Trainer B also shared:

*"I want people enriched and enlivened about the prospect of learning something they may not have had access to prior to training."*

This statement exhibits how Trainer B strives for a level of excitement and motivation in his training sessions.

The ability for students to apply what they learn in their diversity trainings to their everyday life was another benefit of active learning listed by both trainers. Trainer C explained:

*"If you can't apply that knowledge in your family and to yourself it's just nice information, but it's not doing anything with it."*

Both trainers put a high emphasis on providing useful information that participants could take with them far beyond the workshop. They did not want to deliver training that was not able to go beyond the day of the training session.

#### *Weaknesses of Active Learning*

Although both professional diversity trainers made positive remarks about active learning, they did list a couple weaknesses including lack of control, discomfort by students, and how workshops or training can get out of focus. Examples included when a topic of discussion becomes too heated or off topic. Trainers have to learn to adjust to the situations. Activities can vary in how much time they take up, and trainers have to give up some control with the time, discussion flow, and overall feel of the classroom.

Trainers may not be able to accomplish everything they wanted to do. Another weakness is that some people cannot fully understand the nature of cross-cultural training, or may not want to be involved. Active learning can force people out of their comfort zones, which can be negative.

**RQ3: How do participants in academic diversity education settings view active learning?**

### *University Students*

How do active learning participants in academic settings view active learning? What do they feel is effective? The student focus groups revealed some clear patterns of university students' perceptions of active learning. I will review what students identified as the two most common active learning techniques and what students felt were the strengths and weaknesses of active learning.

#### *Active Learning Techniques*

##### *Activities.*

Students mentioned various assignments, projects, and games used in the course. The tools were referenced as a fun way to incorporate everything the students learned. Within the assignments, the interview assignment and the card game “Barnga” were mentioned multiple times and were rated very highly. The games and activities really seemed to have an effect on the students and helped them to understand concepts such as culture shock. One student shared this glowing remark: *“the card game was amazing. I honestly felt it was one of the best things I’ve done in class.”* Student Z shared:

*“I would say the best one was the card game. It was something fun, and no one knew what was going on at all. And the level of frustration, I mean it was a perfect experience of how people can feel what you go through in a more cultural setting than just a game. I thought it was a good experience. I told my wife about it. I got home and I was like we did the coolest thing. I have never really done that.”*

Another positive activity praised by students was the experiential paper. Students said it was interesting and forced them into a potentially uncomfortable situation of interviewing a stranger, but that it was actually a really fun and convincing activity.

Student S shared the following:

*My favorite part of the course was the experimental paper. I interviewed a friend of the family that's from England. I had so much fun talking to her.*

The paper was praised highly. Students like the activity; it was fun, but they also learned.

Another activity was the proximity activity (where students had to stand close together) to demonstrate what is okay for personal space, depending on the culture. This activity was referenced as a good activity by a few students as well.

#### *Team Teaching.*

Most of the students rated team teaching very highly. The students enjoyed the different lectures styles, different teaching styles and different perspectives on the issues being taught. A common consensus was that those differences kept the class interesting. The following statements illustrate students' perspectives on team teaching. Student D shared:

*"I also enjoyed the variety of having three different instructors. One thing it made you do was pay attention more. You get used to one professor, and their teaching style. But when you have professors presenting in rotation, it kept the presentation fresh and I appreciated that."*

The research on team teaching does cite that having multiple perspectives is one of the positive benefits of team teaching. Different teaching styles appeal to different students (Vogler & Long, 2003).

*"I liked the team teaching because it gives you something new every week. It also gives you the benefit that, if you don't like how someone grades, you don't get stuck. You're going to have all three and at least you're not stuck with that person the whole time." –Student N*

*"I think it was nice to have a different lecture everyday. If you didn't get a lot from a certain teacher. It was nice to look forward to the other teachers teaching the class. It was something we would go wow. It was something we'd also go back home and say we would have never known that, but in class we learned this. It kind of comes at you throughout. You were able to relate somehow. You learn different things from different teachers because they are all different people with different experiences, so it was better to have three instructors."*

The students enjoyed the different lecture styles that the professors provided. They felt the team teaching kept it interesting. Team teaching can help students to feel more comfortable with the material. Team teaching can help in student engagement and retention (Yellowley & Farmer, 2005).

### *Benefits of Active Learning*

The university students listed several benefits of active learning including application and future use, learning new concepts and exploring other cultures. In the following section, university students' perceptions of benefits will be explored.

*Application and future use.*

The first benefit of active learning that student participants voiced was that it had a practical application to work and life. Students stated that the concepts in class were applicable to everyday life situations. Some students felt that they had been acting socially appropriate before they took that class, but after the class, they realized that what they thought was polite may not actually be polite in all cultures. Others listed how it would help them in their future business careers. Students reported on how important they felt the class was. Student S shared:

*"Before this class I would try to be as polite as possible, but I didn't know what was polite for that culture. And so now, I would try to attempt to act more like somebody from their culture and now I know enough not to make a total fool out of myself."*

Multiple students listed that the active nature of the class helped them to realize that the diversity class would be a benefit to their future careers. The material was interesting because it was practical and useful. One student said he planned to move to California once he graduated and knowing about the Hispanic population would be helpful. Others cited out of town travel for business and how diversity education would be beneficial. Student X shared:

*"As far as business, because I'm a business major, it helped me in terms of just communicating with other cultures, specifically other Asian cultures.*

*"It's good relating to other cultures because it is something we'll always have to deal with."*

*Exploring new cultures.*

Trying new things was an unexpected benefit students mentioned multiple times. Perhaps because students felt they understood the material well, they felt more comfortable applying the material in new setting. Students stated that they had a new willingness or desire to try new things using their newfound cultural knowledge. Students had an interest in studying abroad or exploring different cultures around them.

*Learning new concepts.*

Learning new ideas was a prominent benefit of active learning mentioned by the students. The students had multiple comments about some of the new concepts they learned throughout the course.. Student J shared:

*I thought the most beneficial thing for me was the opportunity to study that area I was going for the travel program during the break: using some of Holfstede and other cultural issues and applying that to my travel study.*

Student K added about how they learned new things they could apply at a later time.

*The course concepts are really good to know for the future, having to take and apply them [the concepts] to situations and analyze them.*

Students in the undergraduate class did have overall positive things to say about the active learning techniques used in the class. They felt that they learned the material well and felt comfortable applying the concepts to their real life.

One quote from a student demonstrated how he didn't feel like he learned in the traditional sense but he did take away something from the course. Student J shared:

*" Even though I wasn't learning IQ wise, I could see myself getting a better sense of things. Active learning may be a step outside the box for students and they may not fully understand how they are going to learn by playing games versus the lecture only environment they are used to."*

Active learning does not feel like traditional classroom lectures. Student J didn't feel like he was learning because the classroom felt so different. He did say he was getting a "better sense of things" which one could interpret as learning.

#### *Weaknesses of Active Learning*

Students did report some weaknesses of the cross-cultural class but they were mostly related to non-active learning activities such as the length of the readings or difficulty of the exams.

#### **RQ4: How do participants in professional diversity education settings view active learning?**

##### *Professional Participants*

The last group I will examine is the professional participants and their perceptions of active learning. The professional training participants who took part in this study came from a variety of backgrounds. Most had some experience with diversity training from college classes, a few through community organizations, a few in their professions, and many had attended workshops in the past.

##### *Active Learning Techniques*

All the participants interviewed had positive comments about the active learning approach used in the workshop. These techniques included the activities and games. A

few specific activities were cited such as the rope exercise, which is an exercise that paints a visual representation of discrimination in America. Participants also enjoyed the interactive discussions. Participant R shared:

*" I like the fact they are very interactive. The instructors are very interactive with people in the workshop and interactive in the sense they get everyone involved."*

Participant N shared:

*" I liked the interaction between people."*

The interviewed participants stated that they enjoyed the activity and discussion- based approach.

#### *Design of the Training.*

The professional training participants' mentioned the actual design of the training the most compared to any other group. The design of the training refers to the size, room set up, and time issues. A few comments about the training stood out. The first was participants' mention of a time appropriate training; that they felt the trainings didn't waste a lot of time with unnecessary information or activities. Participant H was a busy professional woman and she felt the training was a good use of her time. H shared:

*" I thought it was very well done, very pertinent. I didn't feel like any of my time was wasted because you know... sometimes you sit there in the workshop and think "oh jeeze".*

I think it is important to remember to keep activities not only interactive but appropriate for the participants in the workshops. If activities feel silly or childlike, they

will not go over very well and therefore, will not have the same benefits as a well done appropriate exercise.

A second design element was the size of the workshop being either too small or too large. The group was about 60 people and some felt it was too large for everyone to participate. The participants felt that it was more difficult to have good discussions where everyone had a voice or to play some of the games.

*Team teaching.*

All the participants mentioned that team teaching was a positive aspect of the diversity training. Every participant had high praise for the instructors. The most listed benefit of team teaching was that it provided a diverse perspective. The trainers each brought unique and different experiences to the training as one of the instructors was Caucasian and the other was African American. Participant F shared:

*" Just the fact they have different perspectives, one is Black and one is Caucasian, so they have different perspectives and they can correlate how they are similar, just to give people that tangible, and be different and still alike."*

Participant E shared:

*"I've attended [diversity workshops] in the last three years and a number of them were taught by one person. So you really get bombarded with the Black perspective, or just the Hispanic perspective."*

The participants felt that the two trainers worked very well together. *"They really complement each other when they're doing these workshops."* The trainers together kept the workshop pace going well and incorporated numerous concepts in an interesting way.

### *Benefits of Active Learning*

Numerous benefits emerged with a few overlapping categories. Camaraderie, learning new concepts, understanding the material, and motivation were listed as benefits.

#### *Camaraderie.*

Camaraderie was the first common theme. Most of the participants enjoyed learning about diversity in a room full of people they felt they had something in common with. The workshop was attended by a variety of individuals in the community including health professionals, law enforcement, teachers, and just interested citizens.

Participant R shared:

*"I liked getting to meet people from other organizations and other agencies and seeing the things that maybe we had in common that we were going through and were similar and maybe getting some of the insight from them from different experiences that they also had."*

Participant H shared:

*"The interaction with the folks there [people at the workshop]. To know that there was a room full of people that feel the same way."*

Other participants also listed they used the workshop as a way to network and get motivated to make actual concrete changes with the new contact information. Participants also stated that they enjoyed meeting people in the community who were interested in the same things they were. Participant L stated:

*"Meeting people who are interested in the same [things you are is one of the] positive aspects of diversity training."*

*Learning new concepts and Understanding the Material*

Learning new things was another common aspect of the workshop that participants listed as a benefit. Students of the workshop felt that the information was presented in a way that they learned new things. Participant H shared:

*I've gained many ideas on what to do when I am in a situation that I don't think is fair. Or you know, ideas to help others understand. And know that a lot of the times where there are problems with racial or you know religious, or sexual orientation these problems that come up are lack of education and I think that the more we can educate people the better it's going to be, and so I've learned how help educate.*

Understanding the material was an important benefit listed by the participants. One participant felt that during the diversity class he began to more fully understand the prejudice that he had experienced in his own life. Concepts became more meaningful because the participants understood them better. Once he was presented with the information in a different format, it made sense and was a very powerful experience for him. E stated:

*"I needed something visual to equal what was in here (points to heart), referring to the exercise where members of the group step into a circle and take a step back if they had had certain experiences."*

Participant N shared:

*"It helps me to see the big picture a little better, and to appreciate other people and advantages."*

The participants felt they benefited from the visual examples the games provided. The games helped them to understand the material on a deeper level. Understanding is an important step in achieving intercultural communication competency.

*Motivation.*

Motivation was important and often mentioned as a benefit by participants of the active nature of the workshop. The participants felt that it was a reminder of the importance of diversity knowledge and how they could apply it to their lives. Some participants were motivated to continue their work on diversity from the workshop. The high level of motivation may be connected to participants feeling engaged in the material, understanding the material, and feeling comfortable enough to apply what they learned. The workshops motivated participant R to schedule meetings with others she met at the workshop, and participant H felt motivated to teach others about diversity. H stated:

*" To continue the message. I don't ever see myself stopping, it's something I want to continue throughout my life and hopefully touch others in the same way"*

Participant R shared:

*"In some ways it helped to motivate me to work with the economic support specialist."*

Participant S shared:

*[I was motivated to] facilitate study circles [diversity training sessions in his areas].*

Participant N shared:

*" It [active learning workshop] encourages me to keep on keeping on, and work to make our society more inclusive.*

Motivation was felt in powerful ways. The participants of the workshop seemed motivated to apply their diversity education in their professional and personal lives.

#### *Weaknesses of Active Learning*

The participants did report a few weaknesses of active learning. The most prominent complaint was the size of the diversity training. Some wanted it smaller and others wanted it bigger so more people could participate. The workshop had about 60 participants. There are potential advantages and disadvantages when dealing with different class sizes. Smaller groups make it easier for everyone to participate in discussion. Larger groups may help with some different activities. A few participants wanted to see a more diverse crowd. A few participants made mention of activities that they did not really feel worked out. For example, an activity involving a poster board meant to help participants visualize the discussion, was listed as an activity that did not work out as well as the trainers would have liked. In a professional training it is important to use active learning activities that don't feel too juvenile. An activity that participants feel is too juvenile could hurt the training and create negative outcomes.

#### Discussion

The findings from this exploratory study of perceived outcomes of active learning in a diversity training context generally support previous positive research on active

learning. Both professors and professional trainers indicated that they used active learning in their diversity courses and mentioned specific types of active learning that they used often. Professors, trainers, students, and participants all indicated that they perceived active learning as beneficial in teaching and learning diversity material. While some weaknesses were listed by all groups, results consistently indicated that perceived benefits outweighed perceived costs in relation to active learning and diversity. The following section will discuss implications of the current study's findings and connections to previous research.

#### *University Professors and Professional Trainers*

Both the professors and professional trainers indicated that they utilized active learning techniques frequently, listing discussion, activities/games, and team teaching as elements of their classroom structure. Professors and professional trainers may have a different set up given the difference in time and atmosphere between a workshop and a semester long class, but despite these differences, they listed the same three main active learning techniques, (discussion, projects and activities, and team teaching) as essential to teaching diversity topics.

#### *Discussion*

Discussion was a commonly used activity mentioned by both professors and trainers. They perceived it as a well-received active learning strategy that students felt comfortable with. The professor's and professional trainers' use of discussion supports the view that active learning strategies which encourage personal reflection are especially valued in diversity contexts. For example, using popular movie clips which infuse

difficult concepts such as cultural differences or racism into the story, helps students recognize the complex theories in an applied setting. By showing popular clips as a basis for discussion, educators are able to create an environment where students are able to reflect on and potentially understand complex topics on a deeper level (Ellis et al., 2004). When students understand topics fully, they will be better able to apply that knowledge to real life cultural situations (Lusting & Koester , 2006). The educators also felt that discussion involves students in the topic on a more personal level, which helps the student stay engaged and retain the material better.

Because discussion is a familiar activity for most students, it's easier to bring individuals into discussion as an activity (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Every participant has something they can share and add. With the topic of diversity, personal experiences can add a lot to participants' overall understanding of complex concepts.

### *Projects and Activities*

Projects and activities were popular active learning techniques with university professors and professional trainers. They felt that the students responded well to activities and games. The professors used activities such as the experiential project, which put students into a cross-cultural situation to help students experience a different culture. Some of the activities the trainers used were a picture board, a rope exercise to demonstrate discrimination, and a few other exercises where participants get up and move around. For both university professors and professional trainers, activities were all designed to aid participants in staying engaged and to help make the training more experiential.

Exposure is an important part of intercultural communication competency and diversity training. For both professors and trainers the games and projects were a way to create exposure, and help students experience the fourth level of intercultural communication competency. As described by Lusting (2006) and Allport (1954), exposure is an important aspect of creating cultural competence. According to Allport's contact theory, more contact with people that are different, helps in developing acceptance (Emerson, 2002). As professor B stated, "*I really feel students or any of us learn best by experiencing something.*" The exercises such as the proximity game, the Barnaga card game, and the experimental project created cross-cultural experiences that engaged students and provided them with a small level of exposure to cultural differences. In diversity classes, exposure of any kind to a different cross-cultural experience can help in understanding and application. Active learning activities are a way to create exposure and thus move students closer to the goal of obtaining intercultural communication competency.

#### *Team teaching*

Both professors and professional diversity trainers listed team teaching as a much used and well received active learning strategy. The professors felt that team teaching helped to better prepare them for the classroom and provided an excellent teaching environment by incorporating multiple perspectives. The trainers also rated team teaching highly. Both trainers felt that one of the greatest strengths of their workshops was the fact that they were able to team teach, which allowed the participants to get multiple ideas and perspectives.

In support of the professors' and trainers' views on the benefits of team teaching, previous research found that team teaching is linked to higher achievement levels, greater retention rates, improved interpersonal skills, and improved analysis (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). The professors and trainers felt that biggest strength was the multiple perspectives and expertise that a team-taught class can provide. Both also stated that team teaching was beneficial because they felt that it modeled diverse individuals working well together.

Previous research found that team teaching helps students feel more at ease and find it easier to participate. The professors and professional trainers support this finding, stating that providing their two perspectives made it more comfortable for participants to talk. Trainer C said that people are more likely to ask certain questions to one individual versus another.

Having multiple instructors also helps create a comfortable and safe environment for participants, which is especially important in a diversity setting. Each instructor has his/her own ideas about what can make it easier for students to share their opinion if it is different than one of the instructors'. Since diversity training does involve sensitive material, if the environment feels hostile, training may do more harm than good (Watson, 2008).

What does this mean for the future of diversity training? Both groups listed team teaching as a positive active learning technique. Perhaps diversity courses should be team taught as they seem to provide enhanced expertise and multiple perspectives. If team teaching is not an option, guest lectures or showing relevant video clips may also be a

way to bring in an expert and to provide multiple perspectives. Showing an expert or a different perspective can help make the material more relevant. If diversity training is seen as important and relevant, then some of the possible negative implications, such as shutting down emotionally, are less likely to occur (Wentling et al., 1999).

### *University Students and Professors*

University students and professors had some similar ideas about the strengths of active learning and some notable differences in opinions. The university students listed activities and team teaching as their most frequently mentioned active learning techniques. Professors listed discussion, activities, and team teaching most frequently. In the following section I will review what students and professors said about activities and team teaching and discuss the implications of these findings.

### *Activities*

University students praised diversity activities such as the Barnaga card game and the proximity exercise. The students felt that these games and activities helped in representing the concepts discussed in class. The activities were designed to give students exposure to a particular cultural fact or situation in order to create better understanding. Activities use active learning as a way to explain a concept in a different way than a lecture. For a topic such as culture shock, being able to understand some of the feelings by experiencing them personally really helped students to understand that topic on a deeper level.

### *Team teaching*

Team teaching was rated well by the students. The students enjoyed the different lecture styles and perspectives that a team teaching environment provides. The students commented that team teaching helped them pay attention more because the different teaching styles of the professors kept things different and fresh. This benefit of different teaching styles was discussed in the team teaching literature (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). The students also felt it was a benefit that they could hear a different speaker every week because in case they didn't really like one professors' lecture style, they had other teachers the next class. Vogler & Long (2003) agree that having multiple viewpoints is one of the benefits of a team teaching classroom.

A great benefit of active learning is students being able to understand diversity concepts well enough to feel confident applying them to real life situations (Levy et al., 2006). The students reported developing a good understanding of the material and an ability to apply their new knowledge in a practical way (Pare & Maostre , 2006). According to Levy et al. (2006) one of the benefits of active learning is the ability to retain information better. Retention and appropriate future application are some of the main goals of diversity classes. Students felt that the class concepts were important and applicable in their own professional and personal lives. A few students specifically mentioned application in the business world and how it would benefit them to have diversity knowledge.

A willingness to try new things was an unexpected benefit of active learning in the diversity training context that students mentioned multiple times. Perhaps because

students felt they understood the material well, they felt more comfortable applying the material in new settings. Students reported that they were very engaged in the process and that some of the material was eye opening for them. Students stated that they had a new willingness or desire to try new things using their newfound cultural knowledge. This ties nicely into the diversity class's goal of having students use what they have learned. The student's desire to use their new knowledge shows an interest and enjoyment of the class and its material. A few students specifically mentioned that they wanted to study abroad. Another student shared how he wanted to explore some of the other cultures locally.

Students and professors had some notable differences in what they perceived as effective active learning techniques. The first difference is that students did not list discussion as one of the main active learning techniques. Professors mentioned discussion as a very popular and effective active learning technique. Just because students did not mention discussion does not necessarily mean that they see discussion as ineffective. It could mean that students are so used to discussion as part of the lesson plan that they don't view it as active learning. It could also mean that discussion is not seen by students as effective as other active learning techniques.

Students listed activities more than any of the groups interviewed. Students felt that games and exploratory activities really helped them to understand the material better. Perhaps this is due to students needing frequent activity in today's fast paced electronic world. The normal adult attention span is approximately 20 minutes (Chaney, 2005). When students are conditioned to television, they can find it harder to pay attention to a

typical fifty minute lecture. In a lecture, students can begin to lose interest as the lecture goes on (Chaney, 2005). A study at Purdue University discovered that students' benefit from breaks at the beginning and end of class and activities and video clips inserted into the classroom period (Chaney, 2005). So students may have responded to activities and games more than other groups due to their attention span.

In another study about student retention, the researchers discovered that as lectures increased the proportion of material that the students remembered decreased (Wilson & James , 2007). Thus, activities and games may be more mentioned by students because they help students retain information longer.

Students listed team teaching as a positive active learning technique but for different reasons than the professors provided. Students liked having the different professors each class because they felt it kept the classroom fresh and interesting. Students appreciated that if they did not like one professor's teaching style, they had another lecture style to look forward to the next class. They also liked having more professors to go to for questions. The professors report that the strength of team teaching was the expertise that a professor could provide. Students did not mention this advantage.

One possibility for the differences in perceptions could be that when a professor is an expert on a topic, they love teaching it. This love of the material may come across in the lecture style and students interpret this enthusiasm as a fresh and exciting lecture. Another possibility is that professors are more concerned with learning outcomes and students are more interested in how much they enjoy the class, so their goals are slightly different.

What does this mean for the future? Students not referencing discussion as an active learning technique could show some needed structural changes in the classroom. Discussion is a popular technique because it is easy to infuse into the classroom, but if it is not received by students as an active learning technique, professors may want to consider adding more activities into the classroom because while they may take more time and energy to create, they seem to have significantly more impact on students than discussion does.

Another implication is that professors may want to frequently mix things up in the classroom. Having a variety of activities in the classroom helps maintain students' attention (Chaney, 2005). Students enjoyed the games and different activities and they liked having different professors teach each lecture. Keeping things interesting could keep students engaged.

#### *Professional Participants and Professional Trainers*

The professional trainers and professional participants had similar perceptions of active learning techniques, although there were some differences in opinion about what was an effective technique. Professional participants felt that team teaching, activities and the overall structure of the training were positive aspects of active learning. Professional trainers felt that discussion, activities, and team teaching were positive active learning techniques.

The participants were the only ones who made mention about the design and set up of the trainings as a positive active learning technique. Participants made mention of the facility, number of participants, and how time appropriate they felt the training was.

This is very important to note for professional training. Busy working people do not want to attend a seminar or workshop that they feel is a poor use of their time. More than one participant stated that active nature of the training helped ensure that it was useful and time appropriate

### *Team Teaching*

All of the participants listed team teaching as a positive active learning aspect of the training. The participants had glowing reviews of the trainers. The participants liked the different perspectives the trainers brought in both style and background. The fact that they were different races was seen as a good way to provide different personal perspectives. The two different instructors were seen as a positive element that demonstrated some of the concepts taught in diversity training. The trainers modeled the behavior they were teaching. Having two instructors from different cultural backgrounds can contribute to personal stories and demonstrate modeling (Aguilar & Woo, 2000).

### *Benefits of Active Learning*

The participants felt that the activities helped them to understand new concepts and provided them with motivation to go out and change the world.

The participants felt motivated to take their new knowledge and use it. Participant R organized a meeting with others. One gentleman who was a community leader said he felt inspired and proud to continue diversity education. The workshop helped to reinforce what he felt were important aspects of his work.

Camaraderie was a benefit that only participants mentioned. The workshop was a place where the participants felt they were interacting with others who had similar backgrounds, interests, and ideas. Participants were able to make business contacts.

Professional settings have a different context than a university classroom. The ages of the students, time issues, and the goals of the class are set up differently. Professional students viewed the training as a way to advance professionally and to network.

What does this mean for future diversity trainings? Future trainings would want to use team teaching if possible. The multiple perspectives helped students understand the material better.

#### *University Students and Professional Participants*

Both the university students and the professional participants listed activities and team teaching as the most effective active learning techniques used in their classrooms and diversity workshops. Both groups had a noticeable absence of discussion as an effective active learning technique. As mentioned earlier, this may be due to discussion being such a part of most classrooms that students don't recognize it as an active learning technique. It may also be that other activities are more memorable.

Both student groups rated team teaching highly. All students enjoyed the multiple perspectives that having two or more instructors provided. The university students put emphasis on how they enjoyed having a new professor for each class and felt it kept things interesting. The professional participants enjoyed the multiple perspectives of a diverse group of trainers.

Both groups of students enjoyed the active learning techniques and felt that they helped them to understand the material better. An example was that the university students felt that the Barnaga game demonstrated culture shock and helped them to understand culture shock on a deeper level. The professional participants said that the discrimination rope exercise helped them to visualize discrimination and understand it on a deeper level. The fourth level of intercultural competency is exposure. The goal of diversity classes is to develop intercultural communication competency. Professors and professional trainers may worry that they are not able to provide that fourth level of exposure without placing their students in a true cross-cultural experience, but is not realistic that all classes will be able to take their students out of the classroom into a totally different culture to teach communication competency. It is very encouraging that students felt they did gain a level of exposure through activities and projects. Instructors can effectively teach diversity topics, including exposure, if they use a variety of good activities that simulate exposure on some level.

### *Summary*

Based upon this study, instructors should continue to use team teaching when possible. If they are unable to do so, perhaps bring in guest lecturers or video clips that provide a different perspective. Active learning activities should continue to be used frequently. Instructors should be aware of the activities to make sure they are not seen as too childish. Students really enjoyed having an interactive interesting classroom. More importantly, they felt they really learned from it. This study supports that students may be

developing intercultural communication competency through active learning techniques as well as team teaching. Intercultural communication competency is a vital part of a successful cross cultural teaching and active learning and team teaching may help to achieve that goal.

This study was able to assess what students felt worked and didn't work in more in depth way than a simple evaluation at the end of the semester or workshop. It would be useful to instructors to keep tabs on the activities they are using to see if students feel they are effective right away. Instructors could pair an activity with an assessment of the activity to make sure it's achieving its maximum potential.

In sum, this study shows encouraging findings of how instructors can use active learning to their advantage to help in achieving intercultural communication cultural competency.

#### Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited in several ways. First, because of the qualitative nature of the approach of this study, its conclusions cannot be generalized to other audiences. The size of the sample was very small. Yet, allowing participants to provide their own perceptions related to questions posed, can help us better understand the topic and in this case from multiple perspectives.

Another limitation of the study was that all of the groups were made of convenience samples of people who chose to participate. The students of the professors and professional diversity consultants who did not volunteer to participate may have different opinions of the diversity trainings than those who did volunteer. The lack of a

control group is another limitation of the study. Qualitative research has many benefits but also has limitations including difficulty in establishing parameters. The concern with the lack of a control group is that it is difficult to tell if the resulting positive remarks about active learning are connected to active learning only or if other factors are associated as well.

Future research could examine some of the overlapping links between all the groups more in depth. All groups rated team teaching very highly with particular emphasis on the benefit of providing diverse perspectives. This is a link that could be studied further for diversity classes and other classes as well because team teaching was so well received.

Age and active learning techniques could be studied more in depth. The professional participants were older with a medium age range of 45-55, whereas the university students had an average age of 22. The younger university students enjoyed the games and activities more than the professional students who listed the discussions as more valuable. Is this simply due to the younger students wanting to have more "fun" or a break from the routine? It could be that it is important to have age appropriate activities that don't make adults feel childish. Future studies could examine if this was really an age issue and older adults learn better using different techniques or if it was simply a preference in activities. This is especially important when considering the case of Whitewater High School which was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. To really make a positive impact on high school students, diversity training techniques used for adults or even college students may not be effective.

Time is another factor that could be studied more in depth. A traditional university course has much more time than a professional diversity training session. Future studies could examine exactly how much of an issue time is when looking for positive and long lasting outcomes, and how future trainings with limited time could benefit from different teaching techniques.

### Conclusion

This study provided a glimpse into a sample of professors, professional diversity consultants, and their students. One significant aspect of the results that all participants had very positive perceptions of active learning in diversity trainings. Both professors and professional diversity trainers felt that active learning involved the students, helped them to understand the material, and to apply it to their lives. All the students also felt that team teaching was a useful active learning technique to help them understand the material. Overall, it was encouraging to see that teachers and students are in tune with each other about the benefits of active learning in this context.

Another encouraging result of the study was that both the university students and the participants of the trainers appeared to be more aware of other cultures and understand what were appropriate behaviors specific to different cultural interactions. Many of the students from both environments planned to use knowledge they gained from the diversity training in their daily lives. The goal of diversity training is intercultural communication competency and providing students with an understanding

of other cultures in hopes they will apply that knowledge to their work and professional lives. The students in this study appear to be on that path.

In this sample there is a link between high ranking of active learning activities and self reporting of understanding and future use. The students of both environments commented on how they felt the activities helped them understand the materials. Given the positive results of this study and the importance of diversity knowledge in today's world, research on the best ways to deliver diversity training should continue.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Diversity Training Participants**

*Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me to discuss your experiences in the diversity training seminar. Please sign the consent form and we can begin the short interview.*

1. What training session did you attend? *Mercy Health Mall Creating a Culturally Responsive Climate?*
  
2. What is your past experience(s) with cross- cultural communication courses or training?
  
3. What did you like most about the training/workshop?
  
4. What did you like the least?
  
5. What is your opinion of the instructors?
  
6. Do you like the team taught format?
  
7. Overall, what do you see as the benefits you have gained from this training/workshop?
  
8. What, if anything, has this motivated you to do?

9. What readings, activities, assignments or teaching styles et. Caused you to learn the most about cross-cultural issues. What were the least helpful?

10. What suggestions do you have for how to improve the course in the future?

Thank you!!

## **Appendix B**

### **Diversity Consulting**

*Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to discuss your experience with diversity training. I am currently working on my thesis that is examining the effectiveness of active learning and team teaching in diversity training. I understand you utilize both of these practices in your diversity training. I have some questions I would like to ask you to further understand your teaching and experience with these methods.*

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. How long have you been a diversity consultant? (probe S&J Consultants)
2. Do you mostly consult/teach on your own or with another consultant? How often? Who? What is his/her background?
3. What do you feel are the benefits of team teaching?
4. What are the drawbacks/issues of team teaching?
5. What active learning methods/techniques do you use in your training? Active learning is defined by participation in learning and non passive techniques such as group exercises and small discussion.

6. What active learning techniques do you find to be the most successful?
  
7. Have you any active learning and/or team teaching methods to be unsuccessful ?
  
8. Have to done any testing to measure the effectiveness of your methods teaching team teaching and active learning ? If so, what were the results?
  
9. What general insight do you have on the topic of diversity training? What trends have you seen through the years?
  
10. Is there anyone else in the field you feel would be especially helpful for me to contact?

Thank you!

## Appendix C

**Consent Form -Interview**

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Rachel Laurin a graduate student at UW-Whitewater on teaching cross-cultural material.

The purpose of this study is to investigate instructors and students of cross-cultural classes and training sessions perceptions of teaching methods being utilized.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a one on one interview about your experiences with cross-cultural teaching. The interview will take approximate 30 minutes to complete. There is no direct risk to being involved in this study. However, there is no direct benefit to you either.

The data that results form this study will be kept private and confidential. In any sort of report that may be published, no information will be included that would make it possible to identify a particular subject. Copies will be kept on my laptop and only researchers will have access to the records.

Your decision about whether or not to participate in this study is completely voluntary. In addition, at any time while you are participating in the interview you may choose to withdraw form the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Rachel Laurin at [LaurinRK24@uww.edu](mailto:LaurinRK24@uww.edu), 608/289/0799 or Dr. Wildermuth at [wilderms@uww.edu](mailto:wilderms@uww.edu). You may also contact Denise Ehlen, IRB Administrator, [ehlend@uww.edu](mailto:ehlend@uww.edu).

If you agree to participate, please sign the consent statement below. I will keep a copy and a copy will be provided to you for your records. Thank you.

I have read the information. If necessary, I have asked questions and received answers. I am 18 years of age or older and I consent to participate in this study.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D (University Student Questions)**

### FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR OUTLINE

#### Focus Group Protocol

1. Welcome and explanation of the study
2. Ice-breaker...past experience (s) in cross cultural communication, not counting the course itself.

#### Questions:

1. What did you like most about the cross cultural communication course? The least?
2. What readings, activities, assignments, or teaching styles etc. caused you to learn the most about cross cultural communication? The least?
3. Overall, describe what you see as the benefits you've gained from having taken cross cultural communication.
4. What, if anything, has the course motivated you to do?
5. What suggestions do you have for how to improve the course in the future?



