

The Leadership Practicum Reformed as Intercultural Formation and Dialogue

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The purpose of this essay is to affirm the value of experientially based leadership formation in doctor of ministry theological education, which traditionally has been the hall mark of religious leadership with the African American context. It suggests that by re-envisioning and broadening the goals of the leadership practicum as a core practice within the Doctor of Ministry Program (DMin), students may gain invaluable intercultural competencies as they carry out their ministry, regardless of the context- congregational, denominational, societal, or global. The ability to increase one's awareness and understanding of cultural and ethnic literacy, personal formation and development, attitude and values clarification, multi-ethnic and multicultural social competence, basic ministry skills proficiency, educational equity and excellence, and empowerment for missiological (intercultural) reform are possible. Students learn best about the need to affirm ethnic identity, to be inclusive, to appreciate diversity, and how to overcome fear of human diversity, such as xenophobia, racism, and hatred toward those with different worldviews and orientations, as they intentionally engage in ministry through times of cultural disorientation. Stated differently, DMin graduates will comprehend better the journey toward intercultural competence with more

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clarity as they discover the truth expressed by Maya Angelou, “We are all human; therefore nothing human can be alien to us.”²

The Methodological Components of a Leadership Practicum Based on an Intercultural Competence

It is the purpose of this essay to call attention to the methodological components of a leadership practicum designed to increase intercultural competence. I suggest that at least for one semester or three credit hours course, DMin students would participate in intentionally guided periods of theological praxis, while actively engaged in action-based research within a different ethnic or cultural context. Faculty mentors and expert practitioners would assist or accompany students as they seek to process the meanings and implications of assumptions, actions, reflections, informed reactions, and decision making that arise in response to these cross-cultural or cross-ethnic contexts.

Encouraging students to take advantage of opportunities for social and cultural boundary crossing related to their specific ministry interest or research problem utilizing the lens of intercultural studies is one valuable way of increasing their professional vocational insight as leaders for the church, society, and the global community. DMin students as congregational and ministry leaders can engage in mission and ministry while examining “faith in light of experience” and “experience in light of faith.”³ A threefold model of theological praxis that encourages attention to exploring professional vocational concerns from an intercultural perspective can be extremely helpful in broadening learning insights and strengthening dissertation projects as they encounter and engage the worlds of tradition, personal position, cultural beliefs and assumptions, and implications for actions. What follows is the recommendation of one flexible methodology leading toward intercultural competency. (The methodology is also presented in the companion article as also relevant

² Maya Angelou has shared these words referencing Terence, a slave whom Terentius Lucanus, a Roman Senator, brought to Rome, took under his wing, and educated him. Amazed at his abilities, he soon freed him out of respect for his abilities. Terence eventually became a celebrated playwright around 170 BCE. He famously wrote: “*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto,*” or “I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me.”

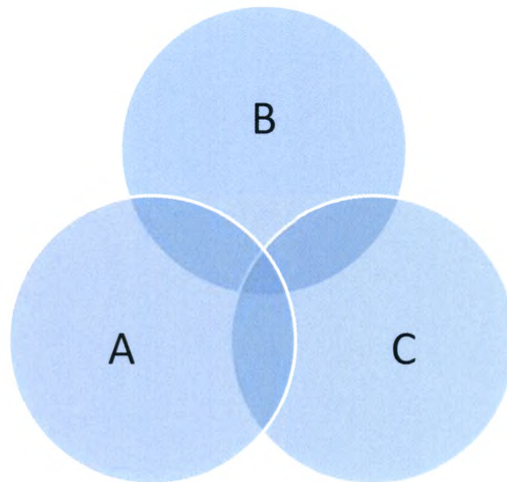
³ This is a mantra of the former director of the Ministry and Context Office, the late Michael I.N. Dash.

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and applicable to the development of interfaith or interreligious perspectives on issues encountered in the practice of ministry). With the goal in mind of increasing intercultural competence, faculty would encourage students to examine and engage interculturally in an andragogic methodology that: (1) *Engages* (asks questions); (2) *Explores* (investigates closely the ministry issue of concern); (3) *Explains* (enters into dialogue); (4) *Examines* (investigates lived examples); and (5) *Evaluates* (assesses the responses and outcomes). Encouraging DMin students to develop an attitude of openness and reflection when engaging people of other cultural

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The Tripartite Nature of an Intercultural Religious Leadership Practicum that Engages Action Based Research
Figure 1



Circle A: The Intercultural Encounter

Based on a Professional Vocational Ministry Concern That Could Benefit from a Cross-cultural or Intercultural Encounter

Circle B: Sacred Text

The Ultimate Definer of the Meaning and Value of Human Diversity

Circle C: Intercultural Competence

Effective Communication and Participation in an Intercultural Situation to Effect Change

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is essential today. In *To Be One in Christ: Intercultural Formation and Ministry*, Fernando A. Ortiz recommends the following specific intercultural actions:⁴

1. Articulate a vision of the church and society that invites the spiritual inheritance of diverse cultural groups to complement and enrich each other.
2. Promote cultural awareness such that persons and groups not only become more conscious of their normative values, assumptions, worldview, preferences, behavioral norms, etc., but they can also identify how their culture resonates with or resist the gospel message and/or the faith tradition.
3. Foster cultural affirmation by enabling persons and groups to identify ways that their ethno- or sociocultural religiosity gives fuller voice to latent dimensions of the gospel and/or faith tradition, as well as ways that their religiosity can assist the larger faith community to have a fuller knowledge and appreciation for the new theological insights, prayer forms, pastoral priorities and expression of discipleship that are consistent with the gospel, but not adequately explored.
4. Cultivate cross-cultural literacy by providing varied and ongoing opportunities for persons to view events, situations, ambitions and problems from the perspective of other cultural groups and learn how these groups engage the gospel message and the faith traditions to address these realities.
5. Facilitate ongoing opportunities for intercultural sharing that enables persons from different cultural communities to participate in each other's communal life and celebrations, prayer, community service, education of the public and theological reflection.
6. Acknowledge that some persons may use referents other than ethnicity to name their cultural identity that is, youth culture, American culture, etc., and invite them to help their conversation partners see the convergent injustices of racism,

⁴ See chapter 8, "Becoming Who We Are: Beyond Racism and Prejudice in Formation and Ministry" in Ortiz and McGlone, *To Be One in Christ*. Please give publisher

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classicism, ageism, sexism, homophobias, and cultural arrogance.

7. Remember that culture belongs to the group, not simply a person, and ensure that the conversation partners who help construct the vision and the plan of our catechetical efforts actually constitute a diversified group of well-informed and representative spokes-persons of their respective communities.
8. And anticipate the need to work through the stressful feelings of isolation, alienation, fear, or anger that are inevitably evoked by the challenges of meaningfully engaging with persons unlike ourselves.

The concept of intercultural competence has expanded rapidly and urgently in the twenty-first century, and has required institutions of higher theological education to re-assess critically their policies and procedures related to theological leadership formation in a multi-culturally complex and dynamically global world. One might assume that there has developed, as a result, a significant body of literature devoted to the study of the intercultural competent student; but it does not exist. Though DMin administrators and educators are concerned about whether they are graduating intercultural competent students, there is little sign of a theology of intercultural competence upon which to draw. To speak of such a theology or theological perspective is a way of calling attention, first, to the need for critical and holistic theological thinking and active knowledge-based explorations on the themes of human diversity and intercultural realities; and second, to recognize the value that an intentionally designed intercultural leadership practicum based on outcomes and framed by intercultural attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills could have on doctor of ministry education formation.⁵

Clearly articulated vision and mission statements of institutions of higher education of all theological persuasions and backgrounds (whether

⁵ An attempt to address the need of a theology of intercultural competence is made in the essay, “A Theology of Intercultural Competence: Toward the Reign of God” by Marsha Snulligan Haney in Fernando A. Ortiz and Gerard J. McGlone, S.J., *To Be One in Christ: Intercultural Formation and Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

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formed and shaped from a denominational or ecumenical foundation) do exist. Through the use of religious imagination and metaphors, these institutions articulate a version of the type of student they seek to develop, one with the intercultural competence capable, for example, of educating and nurturing “women and men who commit to and practice a liberating and transforming spirituality; academic discipline; religious, gender, and cultural diversity; and justice and peace.”⁶ So the ITC faculty declares. But is the ITC in fact achieving the goal of educating graduate level theological students who are able to interact effectively as religious and theological leaders with persons from other cultures and in intercultural situations? I suggest that the ITC faculty, like most faculties of theological educational institutions, has much to do to educate interculturally competent theological students who are able to respond faithfully and effectively to complex immigrant, multiethnic, multicultural, and global concerns impacting congregations, ministries and their leaders.

The task of addressing this concern grew out of the recognition that although our knowledge about theological education methodologies necessary for the future is limited, theological educators can be certain that the future will be diverse: multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural. Therefore, it is important and pressing to inquire how the DMin practicum may provide a framework for understanding and fostering the interculturally competent student as an anticipated outcome of DMin education.

Missiology, a theological discipline that developed in the US during the mid-20th century, has been reformed in the academy as Intercultural Studies, and has much to teach us on the subject matter. If theological education is to be perceived as meaningful, relevant, and having integrity, then attention must be given to the formation, development, and assessment of intercultural competent DMin graduates, both ordained and lay leaders, women and men, who constitute an intentional and anticipated outcome of an advanced theological professional education. What might we learn if more attention were given by DMin faculty and administrators to the concept of the interculturally competent graduate? How might we engage a methodology that encourages a holistic, integrated, and multi-disciplinary examination of intercultural competence and the leadership practicum, offering an

⁶ This reference is to the mission statement of the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

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alternative trajectory from which to view the role and relationship of religious leadership, God, and self in a dynamic and constantly challenging and shrinking world?

The Current Multicultural Context and the Practice of Ministry

There are a number of reasons why DMin education should seek to address the need for intercultural competence and incorporate it within its curriculum and other programmatic activities. They include the following:

- the changing social realities of U.S. society as diverse ethnic, social, gender, economic, and cultural groups increase in size and social influence
- newer understandings of the Bible as a book that was written by and for immigrant communities and reflection
- the increase in awareness of the influence of culture and ethnicity on human growth and development, especially related to how effective teaching and learning, both oral and ocular, happen.;
- the changing dynamics between the growing Church of the Global South and the declining Church of the Global North, and the need for congregations and their leaders to respond as partners in God’s mission
- the increase in the number of multicultural ministry possibilities in the local community that religious and ministry leaders must attend to, and
- the opportunities for both denominational and non-denominational leaders to respond to human rights and environmental justice issues that reflect the “*glocal*,” that is, the interconnecting of realities that connect the local to the global in terms of both knowledge to be gained and action to be taken

However, as important as these macro factors are, an equally important and primary reason that DMin education should be concerned about intercultural competence is because of individuals— like Shanika, Daminaitha, and Thomas, Godman, Yasim—and their relationship to

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churches like the new non-traditional The Redeemer Church.⁷ Located in mostly urban and suburban strip malls in most major cities, business owners such as these persons (representing varying attempts to claim a piece of the American dream) and their employees and customers daily must work and live together within a small physical space of no more than two acres of land, crossing boundaries of cultural and ethnic differences. Located in the same strip mall is The Redeemer Church, a small upstart ministry that seeks to minister to youth and deter juvenile delinquency. By commercial real estate contract, The Redeemer Church and the surrounding businesses share the same parking lot and public utility services; and as public citizens they share common concerns about the safety of their families, homes, schools, and the communities in which they work, live, and worship. Yet, as human beings they each embody a distinct worldview, philosophical and/or religious understandings of life and what gives it meaning, as well as a distinct cultural orientations. Although The Redeemer Church may be located in what traditionally has been considered an historic African American neighborhood, now Shanika, who is a second-generation African American owner of a beauty shop; Daminaitha and Thomas, who are from India and own the local print shop, Godman, who is from Nigeria and owns an auto repair shop, and Yasim, the Islamic owner of a local restaurant specializing in Halal foods: all must learn what it means to be neighbors in the new publically acknowledged multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and pluralistic society that has resulted. Like them, The Redeemer Church congregation and its pastoral leadership have discovered that they, too, must learn how to respond to that ancient religious question that has dire social consequences: “Who is my neighbor?”

Given such multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts in which religious leaders are called to demonstrate leadership, how does this question affect the practice of ministry? Or does it? Whether or not they are prepared, today’s religious leaders are expected to engage current religious and societal issues within local multicultural communities, issues

⁷ This church, whose identity has been changed because of its recent profile, represents a growing phenomenon of store front types of churches and ministries across the nation that have been brought to the attention of the public and law, mainly because it attracts mainly urban African American youth.. It is reported that on more than one occasion, businesses have targeted the church and accused it of possibly engaging in dubious activities based primarily on racial profiling.

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that require a moral, ecclesiastical, religious, cultural, and global response. Current DMin students, and the graduates of terminal degree-conferring theological and religious programs, are expected to know how to lead congregations, chaplaincy and hospice programs, social agencies, funeral homes, and other forms of pastoral ministries in crossing cultural barriers of differences, in knowing how to be inclusive, and in broadening their commitment to the full participation of everyone in local and public life. Daily we hear negative reports of instances that illustrate why it is important to provide an education capable of enabling ministry and religious leaders to respond appropriately, intellectually, emotionally, and socially, to issues of cultural and social diversity. The presence of cultural and ethnic conflict and violence, racism, prejudice and discrimination, language differences, and differing worldviews and communication styles are often areas of great concern to our students not only because they are pastors, ministers, and Christian educators, but also because they are concerned citizens living with others in a diverse, multicultural society.

Intercultural Formation for Ministry in a Context of Cultural Disorientation

How DMin education can gain an understanding of its role and responsibility in educating the interculturally competent student as an anticipated outcome of theological education is not an easy question to answer. What are the intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills that theological leaders need to engage effectively persons and organizations of other cultures? As we consider this question of intercultural competence from the perspective of higher education, the research of Darla K. Deardorff is most helpful.⁸ Darla K. Deardorff is currently executive director of the Association of International Education Administrators, a national professional organization based at Duke University, where she is an adjunct Research Scholar in the Program in Education. Deardorff has published widely on topics in international education, global leadership and intercultural learning/assessment.

⁸ See “Internationalization: In Search of Intercultural Competence” by Darla K. Deardorff, in *International Educator*, Spring 2004: 13-15. Also helpful are the SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence, 2009 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE), and the Intercultural Competence Model presented by Deardorff in *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Fall 2006: 10, 241-266.

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Intercultural competence is a term used to describe the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures. It is a lifelong, complex, and broad learning goal and must be broken down into more discrete, measurable learning objectives representing specific knowledge, attitude or skill areas. While her research on intercultural competence does not specifically include theological institutions of higher education, her focus on the graduate student as an analytical outcome of globalization or internationalization has been very helpful, particularly in terms of identifying underdeveloped areas of thinking which, if amplified, could contribute to a more holistic understanding of intercultural competence. Deardorff mentions in particular four areas where DMin education, based on the practice of ministry and the integration of intercultural competence may be helpful in addressing shortcoming: (1) the lack of specificity in defining the concept of intercultural competence, and specific components of it; (2) the lack of a designated method for documenting intercultural competence; (3) the lack of clarity as to what it means to be interculturally competent and how to collect the data on this; and (4) the lack of knowledge related to how to access meaningful outcomes.

In spite of these deficits, Deardorff's research moves us forward by raising the concern for clearly articulated statements of significant external and internal outcomes. The desired external outcome is for effective and appropriate communication, including effective and appropriate behavior in an intercultural situation. Also, the stated desired internal outcome is an informed frame of reference shift that includes traits such as adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view, and empathy. Whether these generic expressions of outcomes, as identified by Deardorff, are applicable and sufficient for theological education is debatable. For instance, the mayor of Atlanta has proclaimed that immigrant children, legal or not, will be welcomed to relocate to the city of Atlanta. His pronouncement was made while congregations and their leaders, and their neighbors are trying to discern if immigrants are a blessing or burden. The vision is that of DMin graduates- pastors, ministers and community and justice advocates- who have the capacity to assess and exhibit intercultural competence by broadening the work of Deardorff and others by incorporating missiological concepts such as intercultural empathy, and African centered spirituality principles based

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on Ubuntu.⁹ Until religious institutions are able to wrestle with and define theologically the concept of intercultural competence, and what it demands of them given their identity and context, authentic learning and teaching will be stymied.

Re-envisioning the Core Leadership Practicum Requirement

As African American theological institutions prepare leaders to engage actively and effectively in cross-cultural and intercultural ministries, it is important that they are able to identify and increase their understanding of those key factors (like experience, sacred scripture, tradition, culture, and social change) that have served to promote the Christian faith as an intelligent inquiry into God consciousness. This is crucial if theological education is to be perceived as useful and necessary by those in the pews and pulpits, as well as by those in the side streets and Wall Street—that is, as a heritage capable of embracing purposeful, creative, holistic, and healing human interactions. Because the contemporary struggle for human dignity and human rights within the USA is profoundly personal and communal, theological education has to take the first step in this suggested engagement, assisting local churches in drawing upon their spiritual, social, and theological resources in ways that ignite their sense of vision, purpose, and mission. Local churches need shepherding (mentoring) to overcome ignorance, hesitations, and the fear of change, and to provide them with a Christian moral compass as they grow in their discovery of who they are and how powerful they can become without the need to demonize either self or others who are different.

A great benefit of African American theological education is its tendency to value experientially based leadership and learning. As Michael Royster has stated, “Religious leadership within the African American context reflects a diverse and complex set of experiences, ideologies, and theological understandings as a group in diaspora. The experientially based leadership formation derives from the struggles for liberation, equality, and reconciling the African heritage with a Euro-based

⁹ Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term from the Southern African region, popularized by President Nelson Mandela which means literally “human-ness: and is roughly translating to “human kindness?”

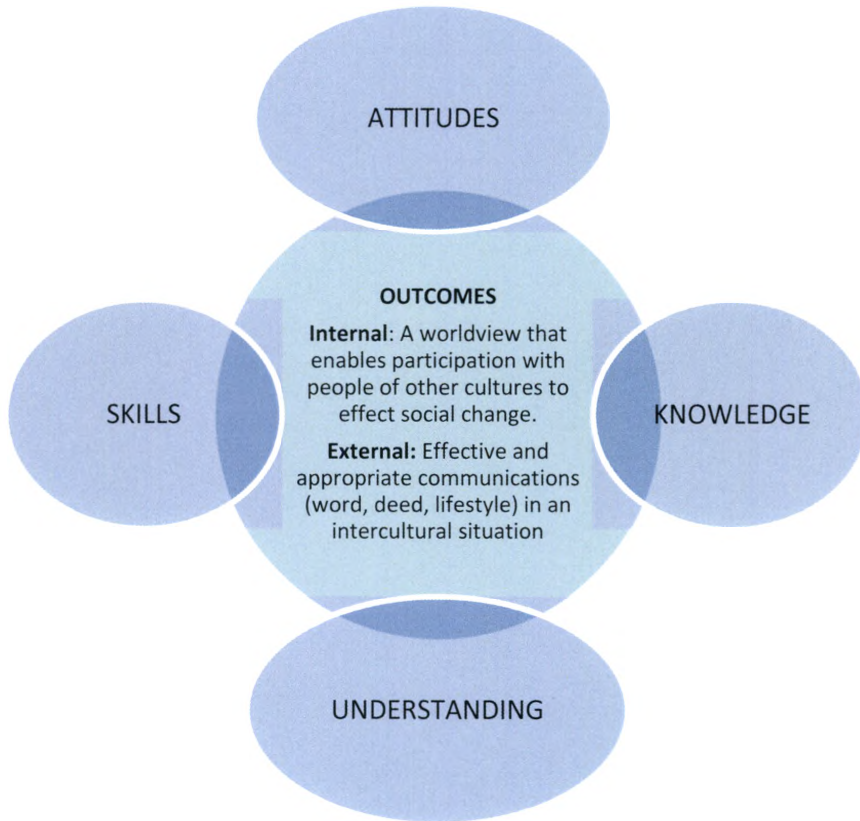
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legacy into a distinct African American institution referred to as the 'black church.'¹⁰ The desired outcome is that by attending to a critical issue related to the practice of ministry within a multicultural or different cultural context as determined by the student, the leadership practicum course can provide both evidence of the importance of multicultural/multiethnic studies as a significant characteristic of theological education and leadership training for such multicultural and multiethnic situations. A dynamic and unique re-visioning and redesigning of the core leadership requirement to encourage intercultural understandings and skill development, such as the one proposed, will greatly assist DMin students in theological institutions to (1) gain empowering notions of selfhood within a multicultural and multi-ethnic contexts that will enable them to engage current ministerial and societal issues within an intercultural framework that explores their moral, ecclesiastical, missiological, and global responsibility; and (2) broaden as well as deepen their commitment to the full participation of everyone in local and public life.

¹⁰ See the chapter, "The African American Context" by Michael D. Royster in Sharon Henderson Callahan, ed., *Volume One: Formal and Informal Religious Leadership in the USA* 2013, (Thousand Oaks, SAGE).

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**Theological Assessment of Intercultural Competence
as a Student Outcome of Theological Education**
Figure 2



While it is beyond this article to present a full analysis of the possible impact that redesigning the leadership practicum might have on the DMin

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educational process, what the above figure seeks to do is highlight the following:

1. **INTERNAL LEARNING OUTCOME:** The DMin student would develop an informed worldview that is capable of embracing people of other cultures and enables the student to participate with people of other ethnicities and cultures in order to work to effect social change in ways that are meaningful.
2. **EXTERNAL LEARNING OUTCOME:** The DMin student would develop the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in word, deed, and lifestyle (holistically) within an intercultural situation in either ministry or public life.
3. **INTERCULTURAL ATTITUDES:** The leadership practicum would begin with awareness training, teaching students how to be attentive to and experience the reality of the here and now as they encounter differing people. The following values would be emphasized: respect, human dignity, and the valuing of others. In addition, an openness to human differences, withholding judgment, compassion, being a risk taker, and assuming the posture of an andragogic (adult) learner, valuing curiosity and discovery would be promoted as key attitudes.
4. **INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE:** The student would acquire knowledge related to: (1) the self, including cultural self-awareness and definitions, human diversity, social location, worldview, and history; (2) others, with an emphasis on understanding another's worldview and how it functions to describe a person's life, and the importance of culture and religious identities; (3) cultural knowledge of how cultures co-exist and conflict; (4) sociolinguistic awareness and plurality, and (4) the need to utilize and affirm multiple intelligences in order to shape a more informed leader.
5. **INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING:** Because intercultural knowledge involves more than simply knowledge of other cultures, and because knowledge does not constitute competency, attention must be given to the student's development of self-understanding in successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds. True comprehension of intercultural teaching and learning comes through active engagement of mission and ministry practices because as learners we learn better through

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what we experience. As we engage in intercultural experiences of didactics such as listening and speaking, giving and receiving, praying and being prayed for, laughing and crying, suffering and healing, we become more proficient in the development of intercultural skills.¹¹

6. **INTERCULTURAL SKILLS:** The ability to engage in human exegesis, human archeology, spiritual geology, and story-linking are skills that can help move us beyond models of paternalism, colonialism, and imperialism, and that are developed over time as leaders learn to value their own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. For instance, equipping oneself with the means to combat disinformation and misinformation is an important leadership skill and contribution to the construction of a culture of peace, and can ensure the development of culturally diverse communities with due regard and respect for their diversity.¹²

Conclusion

Like all U.S. institutions of higher education, DMin programs face many intellectual, social, and cultural challenges as they prepare women and men for relevant ministry in a changing world. Contemporary DMin students, as ministry leaders, often face a hermeneutical dilemma related to intercultural competence due to the current cultural disorientation that exists within theological education, the church, and society at large. In spite of this reality of disorientation, theological institutions of higher education are mandated to educate and prepare DMin graduates with intercultural skills that enable them to function effectively as leaders within a multiethnic and multicultural society.

It has been the intent of the essay to indicated how by re-envisioning and broadening the goals of the leadership practicum as a core practice within the program, students may gain invaluable intercultural competencies for their ministry at various levels: congregational,

¹¹ Sherron Kay George discussed these dyads in *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2004).

¹² Refer to the (Multicultural and Multi-ethnic Societies-Discussion Paper Series-No. 1, Henri Giordan, UNESCO, <http://www.unesco.org/most/giordeng.htm>.

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denominational, societal, and global. The 21st century global and universal view of the world requires that Christian leaders are educated to live in it faithfully. In many aspects of Christian mission and ministry, the global has become local and the local is intricately related to the global. It is no wonder that a growing number of Doctor of Ministry dissertation projects illustrate that the pursuit of action-based knowledge is contextual, multiethnic, multi-faceted, and multicultural. Complex issues such as those related to cross-cultural ministerial appointments; the growing impact of believing immigrant communities; and, the increase in opportunities for active public and/or religious participation in local, national, and worldwide campaigns that matter,

Previously, the DMin practicum was described as a two semester course designed to place the student in a new learning context where the student could design, executive and evaluate an aspect of ministry. Because practicum supervision was not evenly available and supervisory evaluations were disjointed, the learning outcome proved difficulty to measure. The course has been reframed as an intensive one semester course with the emphasis on intercultural dialogue by leaders on leadership issues related to the student's research. The course is now described as intentionally designed intercultural dialogue with three diverse leaders on the research interest. The intentional intercultural or interfaith dialogues are designed by the student and DMin staff in collaboration to develop critical, reflective and investigative skills related to the practice of ministry and the final course project. A digital video is the final summative course outcome, one created by the student to show evidence of genuine new intercultural learning as the result of the leadership intercultural dialogue practicum. By re-imagining how the DMin practicum, as a core leadership course requirement, can be re-envisioned, two major outcomes were addressed. The first is centered on how to teach the student to become an interculturally competent professional who already functions as a religious leader in a variety of leadership contexts, and the second centered on how to increase the value of the dissertation project by utilizing and assessing intercultural knowledge related to an important practice of ministry as defined by the matriculating students. The growing number of DMin leaders and their congregations with memberships and ministries represented throughout the Africa Diaspora and the global community, as well as the number of non-traditional ministries that are addressing multicultural realities and social diverse contexts of ministry, are constant reminders that a mono-culturally based

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education is no longer adequate to address complex issues that DMin students encounter in the practice of ministry today.

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