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A Qualitative Inquiry Into Travel Study Abroad: Experiences of Baccalaureate Nursing Students

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Purpose: The purpose of this presentation is to report the results of an IRB approved qualitative descriptive research study exploring the experiences of nursing students who completed a short-term faculty-led study abroad experience, designed as a cultural immersion experience associated with a nursing course entitled *Cultural Paradigms*. The purpose of this study was to explore nursing students' perceptions of one's cultural awareness following a short-term faculty-led study abroad experience.

Methods:

The following qualitative research question is investigated in this presentation: What is the student perception of one's cultural awareness and knowledge following a short-term faculty-led study abroad experience? The study site is a public university in the U.S. with an undergraduate nursing program. Sampling was purposive, derived from a group of 18 nursing students traveling to Italy for a short-term faculty-led study abroad program. In total, 10 travelers consented to participate in the study. Study participants were between 24 and 29 years of age. All reported previously traveling outside the U.S. However, only one participant identified previous engagement in a travel study abroad experience.

A qualitative descriptive approach was utilized, integrating three qualitative data collection methods: reflective journals, reflexive photography, and focus groups. For the purposes of this study, reflective journaling was conceptually defined as personal writing to make meaning of life experiences (Diekelmann, 2003; Billings, 2006). Participants were provided with a writing journal for use during the travel study abroad along with open-ended guiding questions and writing prompts to aid in developing journal entries and encouraging reflection. Journals were collected by one of the researchers upon returning to the U.S. Reflexive photography, an innovative qualitative research approach, allows the participant to focus on their personal experiences and capture photographic images which are reflective of their perceptions and understandings (Harrington & Shibick, 2003). Reflexive photography is identified as a qualitative research method known to "expand and enhance knowledge and data gained from other forms of qualitative inquiry such as journals and focus groups" (Amerson & Livingston, 2014, p. 204). Participants were asked to submit a minimum of three photographs deemed as important to the individual traveler within a few weeks of their return accompanied by a brief narrative describing the significance of the selected photographic image to the participant. The third data source was a focus group with participants about six weeks after returning to the U.S., with the intent of having time to reflect on the experience after the cultural immersion. A series of open-ended guiding questions were utilized to facilitate the focus group discussion. This combination of qualitative data collection methods facilitates and supports not only the potential varying abilities, learning styles, and personal preferences of students, but seeks to provide a private forum for individual evidence of personal knowledge through journaling and reflexive photography and clarifies group understandings through focus groups.

Rigor of data analysis process, was maintained utilizing the framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985). This framework incorporates methods to address rigor through the review of data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A thematic analysis of journal entries and photographs were analyzed by the researchers independently. Following individual analysis, researchers collaboratively engaged in a comparison of themes. The focus group was conducted by both researchers, with one serving as facilitator and one serving in the role of recorder. Transcripts were analyzed together as the final step in data analysis. Data was coded using participants' words; coding among the three sources of data were similar for each researcher, easily aligning into themes. Throughout data analysis, researchers were

mindful of trustworthiness and integrity. Rigor was established by the triangulation of data sources which were constantly reviewed by the researchers throughout data analysis and themes presented to the study participants and a group of peers who validated findings.

Results:

Analysis of the three data sources revealed seven major themes related to short-term study abroad: 1. , Being in the “in-between place, 2. Being “in-place”, 3. Feeling “out of place”, 4. Togetherness, 5. Looking at *Self* in a mirror, 6. Moving through time, and 7. Journeying with the *Other*. These themes were evidenced not only in the reflective journals, but also through the focus group and photographs submitted by the participants, demonstrating congruence among the findings. Triangulation of data enhanced richness, depth of inquiry and consequent understanding of travel study abroad as an evidence-based educational strategy.

Conclusion:

With growing emphasis on globalization and the ever-diversifying U.S. population, awareness of *Self* and *Other* becomes critically important for nurses. Nursing education needs to be at the forefront in preparing nurses to enter practice with an understanding one’s personal values to foster understanding and appreciation of differences with the *Other*. This study adds to the body of knowledge related to study abroad in nursing programs, as suggested by Edmonds (2012). This study supports the idea that study abroad need not be lengthy to positively influence the process of cultural competence. This short-term study abroad experience also supported the idea that peers and faculty relationships can be enhanced through collaboration and communication, a mutual process of self-discovery and reflective practice. Experiences of being together outside the classroom constructively changed relationships with peers and faculty, potentially facilitating more emancipatory models of curriculum, founded upon mutual respect and a decline in power dichotomies within the classroom setting, promoting caring models of communication. Facilitation of models of collegial communication promotes enhanced interdisciplinary communication patterns, ultimately benefiting patients, staff and administrators. Further, short-term study abroad has been described in this study as a positive life changing experience where participants were consciously making efforts to share in and see the world from the view of the *Other*, sometimes with a profound impact on how they viewed themselves as individuals in society. Congruent with this ability to authentically “see” the *Other* is the development of the *Self* through holistic integration of personal and professional facets of identity, necessitating the integration of all facets of knowing in nursing as described by Chinn & Kramer (2010). Foundationally, this emerges as critical to understanding the perceptions and values of the *Other* when seeking care, opening to venues of increased compassion, empathy and advocacy. Perhaps through life-changing experiences such as short-term study abroad, *Self* can begin to appreciate the *Other*, creating opportunities for unity, peace and hope for the betterment of humankind.

Title:

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Keywords:

cultural competence, nursing students and study abroad

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Abstract Summary:

This research explored nursing students' perceptions of cultural awareness following short-term study abroad. A qualitative descriptive design integrated three data sources; purposive sampling identified participants. Analysis revealed seven major themes demonstrating short-term travel study is a life-changing experience that positively influences the process of cultural competence.

Content Outline:

1. Introduction
2. Body
 - Introduction to the Problem
 - Review of Literature
 - Gaps in the literature
 - Research Question
 - Design
 - Data collection and Analysis
 - Findings and Implications for Practice
3. Conclusion

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