



Short-term Study Abroad in Psychology: Effects of a Cultural Scavenger Hunt on the Development of Intercultural Competence

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Introduction

As cultural diversity in America expands, employers have grown more concerned with developing an atmosphere conducive to diversity in a globalized work environment (Moran, Youngdahl, & Moran, 2009). In order to increase their marketability, college students must be prepared to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). Defined broadly, intercultural competence is a “learning process in which one builds authentic relationships by observing, listening, and asking those who are from different backgrounds to teach, to share, to enter into dialogue together about relevant needs and issues” (Deardoff, 2009, pg. xiii). Study abroad programs for psychology students have not only been found to improve intercultural competence, but also improve emotional resilience, perceptual acuity, and perceptual autonomy, characteristics that are also imperative for practitioners of psychology (Earnest, Rosenbuch, Wallace-Williams, & Keim, 2016).

Research suggests that intercultural competence is most positively influenced when students are actively engaged with elements of the culture rather than just being exposed to a culturally diverse setting (Pederson, 2009; Wesp & Baumann, 2012). Previously published studies have examined the use of a cultural scavenger hunt during study abroad programs in psychology (e.g. Wesp & Baumann, 2012) and business (e.g. Doyle, Helms, & Westrup, 2004). Both studies found the cultural scavenger hunt to be successful; however, the authors are limited in discussing the effects of the scavenger hunt on promoting intercultural competence growth in the student participants as they only reported anecdotal student feedback. The current study, utilized the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale Short Form [M-GUDS-S] (Fuentes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, and Gretchen, 2000) to assess the impact of a cultural scavenger hunt on the development of intercultural competence in undergraduate psychology students during a short-term study abroad program.

Method

Participants

- Participants were recruited from students participating in a short-term (16 days) psychology study abroad program to Europe (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) focusing on the history of psychology.
- A total of 10 students ($N = 10$) participated in the study
 - 2 male & 8 female; mean age was 21 years
 - 100% Caucasian; 80% had never traveled outside of the United States

Materials

- 35-question cultural scavenger that focused on several topic areas (education, communication, work, emergency services, entertainment, recreation, media, food, religion, and history) specific to the city and country
- Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale Short Form [M-GUDS-S] (Fuentes et al., 2000) to assess the impact of the cultural scavenger hunt on the development of intercultural competence
 - Composed of 3 subscales: (a) diversity of contact, (b) relativistic appreciation, and (c) comfort with difference
 - Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree)

Procedure

- Three days after arrival in Germany, students participated in a welcome dinner
 - Students met local university students (who served as scavenger hunt facilitators)
- Students were divided into groups of 4-5, with at least one facilitator
- Teams given approximately 3 hours to complete the 35-question cultural scavenger hunt
- Following the allotted time, students met back at the local university for discussion of answers and cultural differences
- Participants then completed the M-GUDS-S using a retrospective post-then-pre evaluation method in order to limit response shift bias

Research Support

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Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and test results on the pre-post-comparison in the M-GUDS-S

Scale	N	M _{Pre}	SD _{Pre}	M _{Post}	SD _{Post}	M _{Diff}	SD _{Diff}	t	p	d
Diversity of Contact	10	3.84	0.71	4.92	0.56	1.08	0.56	6.11	.000	1.65
Relativistic Appreciation	10	4.68	0.34	5.74	0.23	1.06	0.25	13.39	.000	3.37
Comfort With Differences	10	4.80	0.33	5.48	0.29	0.68	0.17	12.75	.000	2.16

- The data were analyzed using a 2x3 repeated measures design with the two within person factors time (pre vs. post) and scale (subscales of the M-GUDS-S). Both main effects time, $F(1, 9) = 177.3, p = .000, \eta^2 = .95$, as well as scale, $F(2, 18) = 22.50, p = .000, \eta^2 = .71$ were significant, indicating a strong difference between pre and post values and between the different scales.
 - While the scales *diversity of contact* and *relativistic appreciation* showed a parallel increase, *comfort with differences* increased to a slightly less extent.
- Subsequent dependent t tests on the changes in each scale revealed large positive effects, with the highest effect sizes in *relativistic appreciation*.
- The age of the participants was not associated with difference values for *diversity of contact* and *relativistic appreciation*. There was a high positive correlation of $r = .73$ between the pre-post difference of *comfort with differences* and age.

Discussion

The retrospective M-GUDS-S self-assessment revealed a tremendous impact on the attitudes of the participants in all scales. According to their self-report, the students' interest in participating in social and cultural activities, (e.g., joining intercultural organizations; meeting people from other cultures), increased because of the intercultural contact. The students felt more comfortable when interacting with people from other ethnicities and reported being less irritable. The students expressed the largest effect size in the scale on *relativistic appreciation*, which shows that students learned to appreciate diversity as a source for self-understanding and personal growth.

Although these results are promising – suggesting that the scavenger hunt and study abroad program contributed to the positive developments in students' intercultural competence – they should be interpreted cautiously. Given the nature of the questions, it is possible that social desirability may have influenced student responding or that students may have experienced cognitive dissonance regarding the expense of the trip and desired outcomes.

Additional research using a larger and more diverse sample is necessary. Future research may also examine the impacts of cultural scavenger hunts on the development of intercultural competence in international students studying in the United States. Further studies may also examine the use of scavenger hunts during domestic excursions and how they may influence students' intercultural competence.

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