

Poster Session I  
#8

***Developing Cultural Competency through a Short Term International Immersion Experience***

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**Purpose:** To explore the immediate and long term impact of an immersion international experience on cultural sensitivity.

**Conceptual Framework:** Transformative Learning

**Background:** Cultural understanding and respect are essential when attempting to enact improvements that are intended to enhance the health and welfare of society's citizens. The need for nurses to incorporate a deep understanding of cultural differences in their care is well documented. The means to this end, however, is less clear. Education, through standard routes of reading and discussion, may help inform about cultural differences. In addition, direct exposure can greatly enhance one's worldview. People with international experience, for example, report a growth in substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, personal growth, and global perspective that they are able to share with others (Cross, 1998). Indeed, cultural immersion may result in a transformative learning process by which people can "transform their taken for granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive," which can in turn "guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). This study tested one form of international experience, guided cultural immersion. The hypothesis tested is as follows: a guided preparatory course followed by a short-term (2 week) international immersion experience will have immediate and long term impacts on self-perceived cultural awareness, comfort, sensitivity, and understanding in adult learners.

**Methods:** A convenience sample of 19 graduate students was used in this mixed method pilot study. Specifically, the design utilized a 1) one group before after design and 2) qualitative semi-structured interview. Data were gathered at three distinct points in time: pre-preparatory course/immersion, 30 days post preparatory course/immersion, and four years post course/immersion

**Results:** Three major themes, stable over time, emerged: Realizing Goals and Resolving Conflicts; Growing through Interactions; and Exploring Perceived Influences.

**Conclusion and Implications:** The study adds to the growing body of knowledge that short term immersion experiences may influence adult learners in transformative ways, thereby offering a powerful alternative to longer term study abroad immersion experiences. Implications for nursing education are detailed.