Intercultural Immersion: Teaching Cultural Diversity Beyond Classroom
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Cultural diversity is largely a new discipline and it has been revealed that cultural influences penetrate various disciplines and shape how people’s minds operate.

It is important for students to explore and learn about the role of culture across many disciplines both within and outside psychology to develop the knowledge, skills, and motivation that enable them to adapt effectively to a multicultural world. Especially in the U.S., one’s social life and career pursuit will likely be conducted in a multicultural environment.

Service learning is a powerful pedagogical method that offers students immediate opportunity to apply classroom learning to real life situations, particularly through their engagement with and service for the local agencies or communities. However, service learning has not yet implemented in teaching culture and philosophy.

The intercultural immersion program leads students to learn about cultural diversity and global connectedness through active engagement with a different cultural/racial community. This program also helps cultivate and foster a passion in students for learning, service, and self-development in a multicultural environment.

Program Activities (Selected):
- Students immersed themselves in the Chinese community in Flushing, Queens for seven full days:
  - Taught English to elderly people and learning Chinese from them at the community center
  - Interviewed Chinese-Americans about how they adapt to the American culture while maintaining their ethnic identity
  - Experienced traditional Chinese arts and sports, such as Tai-chi, calligraphy, and painting

Assessment Plans:
- Students logged travel journals (photos, written reflections, internet blogs) about daily activities
- All members discussed their experiences and reflections at the end of each day
- Each student created a final project. Formats of the final project varied from reflective papers to photo gallery, blog, power-point presentation, self-recorded presentation.
- Students were invited to the cultural psychology class in the following semester to talk about their inter-cultural experiences in a panel discussion

Cultural Shocks:
- “I found it so hard to believe we were still in NY. It felt like another world; all of the ads were Chinese and even the people that were in them were all Asian. Until then I had never realized how advertising all around me was geared toward a white demographic.”
- “The amount of restaurants and food was overwhelming. It took me a second to realize that how I was feeling at that exact moment must be how a person from another culture must feel when they go to a food court in the mall that I typically go to.”
- “Art is pretty universal and can be explained visually even with a language barrier. This was a big part of the cultural experience for me because I relate to art and it gave me a universal language to communicate with, I am very thankful for the experience.”
- “Tai Chi class proved to be much harder than I had anticipated. Contrary to my belief, it was about strength, grace, balance and power all at once. I never saw myself as the type to enjoy tai chi but after taking this class.”

Cultural Learning:
- “The trip to Mahayana Temple was refreshing to walk into a place of worship that was different from the Catholic church I have at home. They story of Buddha made it easy to appreciate the culture even if you did not fully understand all that it had to offer.”
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Cultural Challenges:
- “As a realistic painter, I found myself becoming frustrated trying to paint a lotus plant, when I had no reference to paint from. I had never seen a lotus plant, and in the absence of fact, my brain was making up fiction. I was timid to step out of my comfort zone with my artwork. But I soon realized that I am already out of my comfort zone in this whole experience, and I might as well introduce Chinese culture to the most intimate aspect of my life: my artwork.”
- “Regardless of our culture, background, or current residence, we are quite similar in many aspects. We can join together in joy singing a silly Disney song. This made me realize that overall, though there are some major differences in their culture, kids are kids.”

The Present Course

The intercultural immersion program in teaching cultural diversity aims to cultivate and foster a passion in students for service, learning, and self-development in a multicultural environment.

1) This project allows students to explore socio-cultural and psychological components of human in a real world via direct interactions with community members and organizations.
2) The project fosters a deeper understanding of another culture by comparing it with one's own culture, examining its strengths and weaknesses, and reflecting upon the educational and practical implications of cultural diversity and globalization issues.
3) Students have the opportunity to develop cross-cultural competence that helps them succeed in their future career and social life, which are likely conducted in a multicultural world.

Learn and Fun

Participants & Location:
Ten college students from SUNY Oneonta
Flushing, Queens; Manhattan, NY

Community Partners:
Chinese Community Center of Flushing
Museum of Chinese in America

Narrative Examples

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Methods