



Nottingham Trent University

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Exploring the impact of international exchange on the learning of Social Work students

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Introduction

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and The University of Applied Sciences Potsdam (FHP) have facilitated exchange trips for social work students for several years. This study, conducted after a 2024 trip to Potsdam, explores the impact of these trips on student learning. Influenced by transformative learning theory, it hypothesises that "disorienting" experiences, like international travel, can positively shift students' worldviews and internal frames of reference (Jones et al., 2017).

Findings

Development of Professional Knowledge:

- Enhanced understanding of supporting people with mental health difficulties.
- Emphasis on strengths-based perspectives in social work interventions.

Knowledge Exchange:

- Opportunity to compare approaches between two countries.
- Supported critical reflection and highlighted the importance of exploring different perspectives.
- Developed a sense of shared objectives with international colleagues (Lopez Palaez, 2020).

Transformative Learning:

- Experience encouraged reflection on underlying beliefs and assumptions about social work practice.

Criticism of the trip:

- Preference for a longer stay in Germany for more learning and socialising opportunities!

Methods

Phenomenological Approach:

- Focus on understanding the lived experiences of NTU students.
- Investigates experiential concepts like "being-in-the-world" and "being-with-others" (Pascal et al., 2010).

Data Collection:

- Electronic questionnaires sent to participants.
- Eight questions focused on different elements of the exchange trip.
- Total of six student participants.

Data Analysis:

- Thematic analysis using an abductive approach (Thompson, 2022).
- Familiarization with data, followed by coding.

Ethical Approval:

- Granted on 09/07/2024 by NTU's Research Ethics Centre.

Conclusions & Future Plans

Key Findings:

- Professional Skills Development:** International exchange opportunities for social work students foster essential skills such as political knowledge, inter-cultural communication, and awareness of diverse perspectives in addressing social issues.
- Positive Impact on Learning:** The exchange significantly benefits student learning, making it a valuable component of social work education.
- Personal Growth:** Participants reported increased resilience and pride in representing NTU overseas.

Study Limitations:

- Small sample size (six students) limits the generalisability of results.

Future Plans:

- Expanding the study in 2025 to include students from partner universities.
- Enhancing methodology with semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis for richer data.

Call to Action:

- Social work educators are encouraged to collaborate with us on future international exchange opportunities!

"It was an amazing experience, and I am grateful to have been provided with this opportunity." Student A

"Our German counterparts were amazing, so welcoming and accommodating." Student B

"For all the up-and-coming social work students, if you are thinking of signing up for this trip, I would 100% recommend you do so!" Student C

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References

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