

Intercontinental collaboration of research and education: Experiences of the research project “Group Training Outcomes Measurement Study”

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Introduction

Global partnerships in research & education can expand resources. Internet technologies allow new forms of collaboration. To what extent is a long distance project useful? What are limitations? This poster describes a Swiss & American university research project in occupational therapy education.

Objectives

What are experiences of students, teachers & researchers in an intercontinental research project? In this project, Swiss students could pilot use of group leader self-assessments GLSA¹ & FGM-LAC².

Method

Subjects: 59 Swiss students in two different cohorts learning group leadership via Group Leader Reasoning Workshop training & practicum related to the Functional Group Model (1). Training: readings, 3 hour workshop (presentation, video case example, interactive learning workbook & discussion). Institutional Board Review (IRB) approval through Tufts University. Preliminary quantitative & qualitative data analysis in aggregate form to highlight learning progress: unpaired t-testing (GLSA¹ item scores), per-cent agreement (FGM-LAC² item scores), content analysis of open ended GLSA items & focus group responses (2).

Results

GLSA¹: Students showed progress in several aspects of group leading, but different areas across cohorts (1st cohort: challenging; encourage expression of differences; explaining; interceding; help set productive norms, rules and goals; praise; protection; providing cognitive framework for change; modelling personal risk taking; optimal structure; suggest procedures. 2nd cohort: genuineness; interpreting; pacing; draw out quiet members; stopping; suggest procedures; warmth).

FGM-LAC²: Students showed improved awareness of important aspects of group leadership (adjust activity demands, group structure allows member to evaluate progress in here & now).

Student experiences with international collaboration: Students experienced increased interest by practicum clinical supervisors in their group work during this project including initiating new therapeutic groups. However, practice examples from workshop did not readily apply to some of the student's clinical circumstances. Language barrier during the training challenged students' understanding of leader assessments and group theory. Culture of communication differences between both countries led to misunderstandings, i.e. completing assessment tools correctly on time. Study attrition was high (overall: 26 dropouts, majority in cohort 1). Interactive reflective journals gave foreign instructors



opportunity to support students learning process. Students reported appreciating this feedback strongly.

Teaching: Teaching required adaption of material to different knowledge level of students & addressing language barrier through translation or simplifying content. Project required managing & moderating academic visitors as well as technical support for distance learning. Students needed more frequent communication to follow project protocols/timelines.

Researchers: Researchers needed to meet each other personally to be able to build trust for sharing knowledge/ expertise, & explaining different procedures in working process. Therefore, additional financial resources were required. Technical software was necessary for digital storage, virtual meetings, data analysis, and e-mail-conversation. Planning workload needed space/time for unexpected procedures or problems. General presentation about the project to staff, students & practitioners was necessary.

Discussion

The research project was a good opportunity to include new theory into existing curriculum & test current research tools with international data. Students valued opportunity to be part of an international research-project & to help model applying FGM in clinical practice. There was a perfect exchange: Tufts placed at our disposal FGM training, assessments & experiences & ZHAW integrated data collection within different contexts. The project was a useful opportunity to build collaboration between both universities.

Conclusion

Realisation of an international research project with students is a benefit for all involved parties. Transfer of knowledge is possible in this way. Openness and good collaboration are required and were given from all parties at every time point. Nevertheless, conducting international research needs an open & flexible mind as well as financial & technical resources.

References

1. Schwartzberg S, Barnes M. Functional Group Model: An Occupational Therapy Approach. The Israeli Journal of Occupational Therapy; 2014.
2. Mayring P. Die Praxis der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse. Weinheim: Beltz; 2008.

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