Learn By Traveling Through AIESEC: The Importance of Studying *and* Experiencing

Intercultural Communication

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Importance

Intercultural communication has a growing importance in the world today. Countries are becoming more intertwined with one another than ever before. Martin Gannon states in his book Paradoxes of Culture and Globalization: "Between 1820 and 1992, world trade increased 540-fold while population rose only 5-fold." He goes on to say, "the expansion of world trade continues unabated, as does the increased movement of goods, services, capital, ideas, and individuals across national boundaries" (194). Companies are rapidly expanding. Technologies allow the world to remain interconnected at all times. Geert Hofstede, a renowned social psychologist and cross-cultural researcher states in his book titled *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* that, "ecological, economical, military, hygienic, and meteorological developments do not stop at national or regional borders. Coping with the threats of nuclear warfare, acid rain, ocean pollution, extinction of animals, AIDS, or a worldwide recession demands cooperation of opinion leaders from many countries. They in their turn need the support of broad groups of followers in order to implement the decisions taken" (3). The world's problems are interconnected, and there is a growing need for competent intercultural communication in order to solve these problems, and in order to live in a sustainable world.

From September to December 2013 I studied abroad in Barcelona, Spain. This was my first time traveling alone and living in a country for an extended period of time. It was my first time truly exploring out of my comfort zone, and the first time that I realized how independent I could be. I traveled to seven different countries, and numerous cities around Western and Central Europe. I lived and studied with a group of students from all over the United States. I had the time of my life and made unforgettable memories. My study abroad trip is one of my defining college experiences.

However, there is one thing I would have done differently if I could do the trip again; I would have studied intercultural communication before departing. I took an intercultural communication class while abroad in Spain, but it was too late at this point because the concepts and theories didn't have enough time to sink in. I was experiencing culture shock before I even knew that "culture shock" existed. I had trouble making local friends. I would go to local bars and restaurants, but never had success in befriending anyone from Spain. When I returned to the United States, I was disappointed that I didn't have any Spanish friends that I could visit if I returned to Spain one day. I knew how to successfully travel around Spain, but I didn't understand the entire Spanish culture because I didn't allow myself to *completely* immerse myself. If I would have studied intercultural communication before departing, I would have been able to integrate myself in the culture more, because I would have understood that cultures all operate differently. America is the only place that operates the way I am used to, and simply knowing this would have helped me open my mind and accept that new way of living.

Despite my one regret on my return home from Spain, I became hooked on traveling. I grew immensely as a person from my Spanish experience, and gained a growing curiosity for the world. I wanted to go abroad again before graduating Cal Poly and I wanted to *fully* immerse myself in the new culture. I wanted to not just travel; I wanted to become a global citizen.

I then found an organization called AIESEC that helped me go abroad and work in Timisoara, Romania for three months in the summer of 2013. AIESEC prepared me for departure by teaching me different aspects of intercultural communication, and forcing integration upon arrival in Romania. I lived and worked with 60 international students from 24 different countries, and I was the only American. I was hosted by Romanians and worked for a Romanian University. When I returned home from this experience, I was confident that I did it

right this time; I fully integrated into the Romanian culture. I came home understanding more about intercultural communication than I could have ever learned out of a textbook. AIESEC has prepared me to be a global leader because I am competent in intercultural communication. The mix of learning about intercultural communication in a book and experiencing it myself is what made me a global citizen.

This paper examines some key intercultural communication concepts that can be learned through AIESEC, intercultural communication courses, and traveling. AIESEC is first described before delving into an analysis of intercultural theories such as Geert Hofstede's cultural value dimensions, culture shock, and Edward Hall's monochronic and polychronic cultures. An interpersonal communication theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, is also discussed. These theories are made more personal by applying it to my specific experiences abroad. I decided to write this paper so I could tie my passion for communication together with my love for travel. It helped synchronize my studies and my experiences, and I hope this project helps other people longing to travel prepare to go abroad. This paper focuses on the importance of both learning about cultures in a classroom *and* experiencing travel in order for the individual to get a clear understanding of intercultural communication and to become a global citizen.

What is AIESEC?

As an overview, AIESEC is the world's largest student run, not-for profit organization. It is present in 124 countries, and impacts the world through providing leadership development experiences by sending students on an exchange to another country. AIESEC creates these exchanges through international internships and volunteer experiences.

AIESEC was originally created to break down cultural barriers that existed after World War II. It has grown from being a small entity present only in Scandinavian countries, to now being active in 124 countries with over 89,000 members. AIESEC has a lofty vision of "peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential" (Who We Are). To work toward this vision, there are six core values that every AIESECer (as they refer to themselves) strives to achieve. The six values are: *activating leadership*, *demonstrating integrity*, *living diversity*, *enjoying participation*, *striving for excellence*, and *acting sustainably* (Who We Are). These values are taken seriously, and are the backbone of the organization. Everything that AIESEC does works toward at least one of these core values.

On a basic level, the way that AIESEC creates international exchanges for students is by having local committees (consisting of students in a specific university or city) make business deals with local entities, or by creating a local community development project. The business deals are deals that allow AIESEC to hire an intern from abroad to work for the company with whom they created the deal. The company pays the intern a salary or provides accommodation, and AIESEC hosts the intern. In a sense, AIESEC is an international talent sourcing company. The global community development projects are generally created by the local committee, and are aimed at bettering the community. The intern does not get paid to do a global community development project, but local AIESECers host the intern. Local committees post internships and volunteer opportunities on the global AIESEC website (www.myaiesec.net) and students are then able to apply for the posted internships. AIESEC does the initial interviewing, and the companies do the final hiring. AIESEC helps interns get any required visas to enter the country, provide housing, and focus on giving the intern an unforgettable exchange experience.

AIESEC fosters intercultural communication. With a global network of 124 countries, AIESECers are in constant communication with people from all corners of the globe. While English is the official language of AIESEC, and most communication is done in English, there are many other cultural barriers that exist when communicating with people from around the world.

After studying in Spain, I realized how much more existed in the world that I have never experienced. I was hungry to learn more and desired to join a global network. I originally heard about AIESEC because a friend of mine went on an exchange to Colombia. I went to an informational session about AIESEC solely to learn how I could go abroad through this organization. However after hearing more about AIESEC's visions, goals, and leadership development, I was hooked. I joined the San Luis Obispo local committee, and this is one of the best decisions I have made in college. Since I joined AIESEC in 2013, I have communicated with people from every inhabited continent. When I was applying for internships, I had Skype interviews with people from Egypt, India, Mauritius, Brazil, Ghana, Malaysia and Romania. On my internship in Romania, I learned how to live and communicate with people from 24 different countries. On a day-to-day basis, while working for AIESEC, I am in contact with people around the globe to help create more exchanges. I have learned a multitude of intercultural communication differences, including, but not limited to, religion, food, individualism vs. collectivism, and even sarcasm.

Through personally experiencing different cultures, I have begun to deeply understand and accept the differences between people. Edward Hall states in his book *Beyond Culture*: "A major and continuing source of frustration exists because the many gifts and talents of women, blacks, Native Americans, Spanish-Americans and others are not only unrecognized, but

frequently denigrated by members of the dominant group. It is the corrosive daily frustration, the inability to communicate or to establish meaningful relationships, that is so soul-shrinking" (7). To reach AIESEC's goal of "peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential," it is essential that people learn intercultural communication. If humans around the globe can all communicate, then meaningful relationships between different groups of people can be made, and there is a chance for peace. We can all begin to understand one another and not see differences as a threat. However, without successful intercultural communication, fundamental human misunderstandings will continue to occur, and peace will only be a distant hope. This is the reason I am so passionate about traveling and learning about intercultural communication.

In addition to fostering intercultural communication, AIESEC also strives to create the global leaders that the world needs. AIESEC focuses on giving each member a fulfilling experience, and helps develop each member into a competent leader.

AIESEC is set up as a democratic organization. AIESEC International is the global board that oversees that AIESEC as a whole is reaching toward its goal of "peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential." Member Committees are the national boards. Each country has a Member Committee that oversees the development of AIESEC in their specific country. Local Committees, as explained briefly above, are based off of a specific city or university. Local Committees, then, create the international exchanges. Each board (global, national and local) has a president, and various vice presidents. For example, AIESEC San Luis Obispo is a Local Committee that has a President, Vice President of Talent Management, Vice President of Business Development, Vice President of Account Delivery, Vice President of Outgoing Exchange, Vice President of Communications, and Vice President of Finance. Each Vice president has a few team leaders that are selected as middle managers, and general members.

The members in the local committee democratically elect Presidents and Vice Presidents every year.

On top of providing the opportunity to be a President, Vice President or team leader, AIESEC has many other leadership opportunities. There are conferences that take place each year. There are local conferences, regional conferences, national conferences, and international conferences that happen all over the world. Conference topics can range from strategy planning to training leaders to chair a conference. There is even a conference called "Leadership Development Seminar" that teaches people how to lead, even if they do not have an official title. To create these conferences, an Organizing Committee is elected. The Organizing Committee is the behind the scenes leading force that makes the conference successful. Any member can apply to be on an Organizing Committee, and this is yet another opportunity to grow as a leader.

There are leadership positions available once you are on an exchange as well. For example, I was the team leader for my marketing internship in Romania where I led a group of five international students through a marketing campaign. There are ample opportunities to take on a leadership position within AIESEC, and each member is encouraged to take on as many as they can so that they can develop themselves into a global leader and reach their full potential. Life is lived completely when one can reach their full potential, and Hall even states, "the most devastating and damaging thing that can happen to someone is to fail to fill his potential" (Beyond Culture 5). AIESEC helps people reach their full potential by allowing students to lead a global organization and become global citizens. Leading and traveling push people out of their comfort zones and help show them what they are capable of.   It helps students discover their potential, and strive to fulfill it. As a global leader, comfort zones are constantly challenged, and AIESEC helps people learn to accept this.

In an article called "The Significance of Leaders in Modern Business," published in the *Business Review, Cambridge*, Dragica and Radovan Tomic state that the skills needed to be a successful leader that are hardest to recruit for are, "combined technical and business expertise, global experience, ability to develop and lead others and creativity and innovativeness" (286). AIESEC provides students with all of these skills. Technical and business expertise is provided because it is solely students running the organization. Students are participating in business-to-business sales to create exchanges and keep AIESEC sustainable. AIESEC provides a global experience by creating a global network of students, and sending students on exchanges. AIESEC gives people the ability to develop and lead others by providing ample leadership opportunities. AIESEC fosters creativity and innovativeness because students have the power to lead AIESEC in new directions. Local committees have the freedom to try new tactics. These skills give students an edge when applying for jobs after graduation because they have real life business and leadership experience, and a global understanding. AIESEC creates the global leaders the world needs.

Established global leaders in the world already recognize the importance of AIESEC in creating future global leaders. In 1996, Nelson Mandela, former President of the Republic of South Africa, wrote a letter to AIESEC at the University of Port Elizabeth and stated, "I commend AIESEC's continuing efforts to develop the future business leadership of our country." In 1990, President George H. W. Bush stated in an official endorsement that, "The insight and training that students gain through AIESEC exchange programs will help them to be more effective business leaders in the future…I commend the members of AIESEC for working to help our country maintain its competitive edge, and I salute your continuing efforts to promote

greater international understanding and cooperation." This recognition from successful leaders

helps showcase the important impact that AIESEC has on the world.

Pre-Departure

Every person who goes on an exchange with AIESEC is required to attend an Outgoing

Preparation Seminar. This seminar is designed to educate exchange participants on what it is

like to travel abroad. Topics include how to get a visa, examples of customs in different cultures,

how to handle unfamiliar situations that may arise while abroad, and culture shock. In San Luis

Obispo, this required seminar lasts for about six hours.

The reason that an Outgoing Preparation Seminar is held is because "without structure,

context, theory, assessment, guided reflection, and so on to aid students in analyzing their

experiences, short-term programs often serve to merely reinforce the view of the world that

students already hold" (Penington and Wildermuth 170).   These authors help make it clear that

simply traveling is not enough to fully understand the experiences. For the experience abroad to

create the most impact, travelers should study and analyze intercultural aspects to gain a deeper

appreciation for new cultures. Travelers can begin to accept differences as normal, therefore

expanding and changing their existing view of the world. AIESEC is designed to break

stereotypes and to open up student's minds to new perspectives. Without any background in

intercultural communication, it would be difficult to understand what the difference in the new

culture was and why it was different. It would be difficult to understand that the American way

is not the only correct way of living. The differences in the cultures would show the untrained

traveler that their stereotypes and preconceptions were correct because the country they are

visiting is "weird" to them. As expressed in the *International Journal of Business and*

Management, "One of the challenges faced by expatriates going abroad for the first time is the peril of being not adequately informed of the host country's culture. Expatriates who are ill-informed about the practices of another culture are likely to fail in their assignments because they fail to appreciate how differences in culture affect the practice of international business" (Rajasekar and Renand 144). These authors express how cultural misunderstandings can lead to more than just personal problems; entire assignments and projects can be ruined simply due to a lack of cultural training. With training however, the traveler will have a better idea of why the differences exist, will be more open to accepting the new lifestyle and come home with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the culture.

The Outgoing Preparation Seminar matched up nicely with the intercultural communication class that I took while in Spain. I was lucky that I got the opportunity to have extensive training in this subject because not only do I love learning about this topic, but it also really helped me get the most out of my AIESEC exchange experience. When I went to Spain, I had never taken an intercultural communication class. This is why I had a difficult time making Spanish friends. However, with a combination of the intercultural communication course and AIESEC's Outgoing Preparation Seminar, I felt much more prepared in Romania. I returned home having made true friendships with people from all over the world.

To begin introducing culture to future travelers, culture must first be defined. Gannon notes, "there are numerous definitions of the term *culture*" (19). Culture affects so much of one's life that coming up with a solid definition for culture seems daunting, if not impossible. Nonetheless, many attempts have been made. In the beginning of the Outgoing Preparation Seminar, participants are asked to come up with their own definition of culture. Generally, students who have not taken an intercultural communication course define culture in terms of

food, art, appearance and language. The seminar then gives several definitions. For example, an

anthropologist named Edward Burnette Tylor defined culture in his book *Primitive Culture* as,

"the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other

capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society" (1).   Clifford Geertz lists eleven

definitions that an anthropologist named Clyde Kluckhohn wrote about in a book titled *Mirror

for Men*. These definitions are:

> (1) 'the total way of life of a people'; (2) 'the social legacy the individual acquires
>
> from his group'; (3) 'a way of thinking, feeling, and believing'; (4) 'an abstraction
>
> from behavior'; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in
>
> which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a 'storehouse of pooled learning'; (7)
>
> 'a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problem'; (8) 'learned behavior';
>
> (9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior; (10) 'a set of
>
> techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men'; (11)
>
> 'a precipitate of history' (Martin and McIntyre 214).

These definitions are all broad and do not concretely and fully explain what exactly culture is.

Culture is a culmination of everything in one's life, and therefore solely learning about culture in

a classroom does not adequately lead to a full understanding of the concept. Presenting these

broad definitions of culture helps the exchange participants understand why going on an

exchange is so important, since it was impossible for anyone in the seminar to present an

adequate definition.

Geert Hofstede studied cultures and attempted to define culture. For his part, he defines

culture as "a catchword for all those patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting…not only those

activities supposed to refine the mind are included…but also the ordinary and menial things in

life: greeting, eating, showing or not showing feelings, keeping a physical distance from others,

making love, or maintaining body hygiene" (Hofstede, "Cultures and Organizations" 5). This

definition explains culture as basically everything that makes up human activity. It is a broad

term to define how people live their life. To quantify culture-based finding and insights, and to

help make cultural differences seem more tangible, Hofstede surveyed people from the

multinational corporation IBM. The reason that IBM employees were studied is because it

helped to reduce outside variables. People who work for IBM tend to be similar types of people,

except for their nationality (Hofstede, "Cultures and Organizations"13). This helped eliminate

some outside variables such as personality type. 116,000 questionnaires, and over 60,000

respondents from 70 different countries were included in his study (Soares, Farhangmehr, and

Shoham 280). From the results of the survey, originally four different dimensions of culture

were discovered, and a fifth dimension was added later. These dimensions are *power distance*,

collectivism versus individualism, *femininity versus masculinity*, *uncertainty avoidance*, and *long

term versus short-term orientation* (Hofstede, "Cultures and Organizations"14). Each nation was

assigned a score for each dimension, indicating what the trend is in the country's specific

cultures. The dimensions were linked with geographic, demographic, economic and political

aspects of the societies in the nation. This information is useful for cross-cultural comparisons

(Soares, Farhangmehr, and Shoham 280).

In Soares' dissertation "The Influence of Culture on Consumers: Exploratory and Risk

Taking Behavior," she defines Hofstede's five dimensions:

> **Individualism-collectivism**: This dimension describes the kind of relationship
>
> individuals have in each culture. In individualistic societies, individuals are
>
> expected to look after themselves and their immediate family only whereas in

collectivistic cultures, individuals are members of groups who are expected to look after them in exchange for loyalty. Examples of individualistic countries are: Australia, Canada, The US, the UK, and Holland, while Latin America countries are extremely collectivistic countries.

Uncertainty avoidance: The extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations. This dimension deals with the need for well-defined rules for prescribed behaviour. Countries that score high on this dimension are Latin countries; Denmark, Great Britain, Hong Kong and Singapore are examples of countries scoring low.

Power distance: This dimension reflects the consequences of inequality in power and authority relations in society. It influences hierarchy and dependence relationships in the context of family and organizations. In Europe, Germany, the UK, Ireland, and Scandinavian countries score low on this dimension.

Masculinity-Femininity: Dominant values in masculine countries are achievement and success and in feminine countries are caring for others and quality of life. The countries that score lower on masculinity are Sweden and Norway and the country that scores higher is Japan.

Long-Term Orientation: Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift...later proposed the long- versus short-term designation as more appropriate for this dimension.

In long-term oriented cultures, frugality and perseverance are preferred virtues and deferred gratification of needs is accepted and encouraged while in short-term

oriented cultures personal steadiness and stability and protecting one's face

prevail. East Asian countries are long-term oriented cultures and Philippines,

Nigeria, and Pakistan display the lowest LTO index values. (57-58).

These dimensions are discussed in the Outgoing Preparation Seminar based on region.

Exchange participants get in groups, depending on the specific region in the world they plan to

travel to, and predict scores of the countries they are going to. Then, each participant researches

the real Hofstede scores of their country and compares it with the United States' scores.

Generally, the website http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html is used to compare the different

countries. This website gives scores to the first four Hofstede dimensions, and then adds two

more dimensions that another researcher published. Since I studied the first four of Hofstede's

dimensions in my intercultural communication course and at Outgoing Preparation Seminar,

those are the examples I will discuss below.

When preparing to go to Romania, I learned what the Hofstede scores were for this

country and compared it to the United States. Each score is based on a scale of 1-100. In the

chart below gray represents Romania, and blue is the United States.

Fig. 1. Romania and US
(The Hofstede Center *Romania)*

Romania has a higher sense of power distance than the United States. This shows that

hierarchies are more prevalent in Romania than in the United States, and that this hierarchy is

accepted. This taught me that when communicating with my boss for my internship, I should outwardly treat him as my superior. It seems as if in the United States, it is becoming more of a norm to flatten the workplace hierarchy. This is not the case in Romania.

Romania has a lower sense of individualism than the United States does. This shows that Romania is a collectivistic culture and values groups over individuals. This was helpful for me to understand before arriving in Romania because it taught me to value my team's results over my own personal successes. If I valued my own success over my team's results, then my boss probably would not have seen me as a good employee because a team is seen as a close-knit group. Also, it taught me that Romanians do not want to offend others because they do not want to experience a loss of face.

Romania has a slightly lower masculinity score than the United States. Although it is not drastically different compared to the other scores, it still shows that the United States values achievement and success more, and Romania values caring for others and quality of life more. This helped me understand why sometimes there was not as much urgency to complete a project in Romania than I am used to in the United States. In Romania, it was common to have a meeting with my boss at a bar where it seemed to be a social hour more than a meeting, whereas in the United States, generally this would not be seen as a productive place.

Romania has a higher uncertainty avoidance score than the United States. This shows that Romanians typically don't like as much ambiguity, and have more defined rules of behavior to follow than the United States. I think that a reason for this could be that the older generation of Romanians lived through the communist period where there was little ambiguity. It also helps explain why many Romanian people are devoutly religious. Religion helps decrease the feeling of uncertainty.

Without this understanding of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, "it is very easy and very natural to look at things from one's own point of view and to read an event as though it were the same all over the world" (Gannon 62). Going abroad with an understanding of these dimensions of culture *before* departure helps the traveller understand and accept the new culture, instead of falling into the common mistake of thinking the culture is wrong. It helps the traveler open up their mind and see events through another perspective. It also helps ease the sense of culture shock that the traveler will feel.

Many travelers experience culture shock, especially when traveling for an extended period of time. "Culture shock refers to the anxiety or stress that is caused by being in a new and foreign environment and the absence of the familiar signs and symbols of the home country. Culture shock may also result because of a person's *ethnocentric* attitude. Ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture" (Rajasekar and Renand 144-145).

Outgoing Preparation Seminar extensively covers culture shock in order to help reduce the amount of culture shock that the AIESEC exchange participants experience. The graph below is a representation of culture shock.
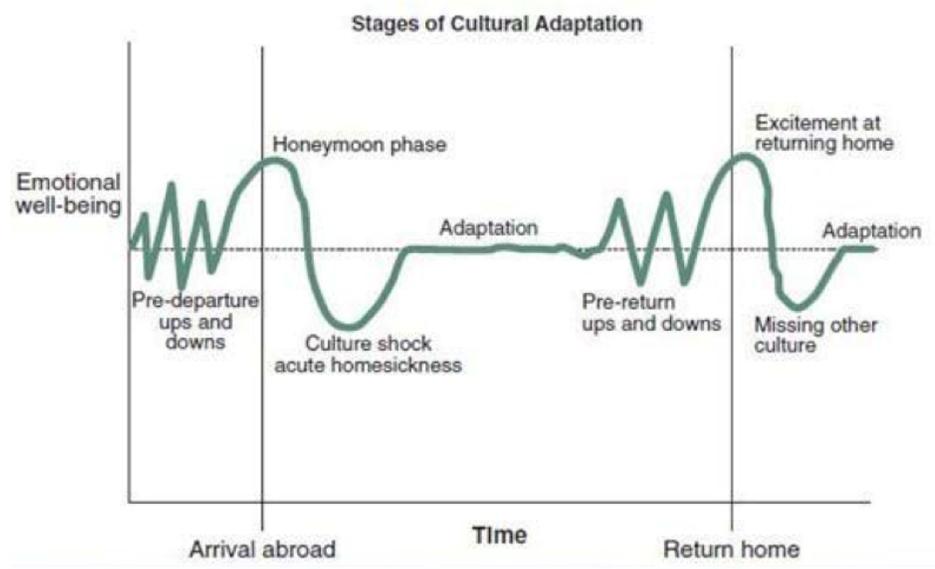

Fig.2 Culture shock curve
(Rajasekar and Renand 144-145)

This graph shows all the stages that one goes through when experiencing culture shock. The first stage happens before arrival in the new culture. While planning and preparing for departure, there are ups and downs, excitement and fear. Once one arrives in the new culture, they move to a new phase and are in the "honeymoon phase," which is pure excitement. Everything is new, wonderful and the traveler is happy to be there. The honeymoon phase unfortunately does not last forever and the traveler generally experiences a plunge. Feelings of homesickness are common, and this is when people begin to reject the new culture they are experiencing. A study abroad program pamphlet in Elizabethtown College calls this the "fright and flight stage", and warns against leaving while in this stage because the traveler may not want to go abroad again ("Culture Shock" 1). Once this stage passes, the traveler begins to adjust and learn the culture with a deeper understanding. Adaptation begins, and feelings are normalized. This stage is when one begins to truly understand a culture and become more fully immersed. Right before it is time to return home, the traveler can again experience ups and downs, excitement and fear. They are excited to return home, but they are also sad and scared to leave the culture they just adapted to. One would think that the culture shock stages would end at the arrival home, however the cycles repeat themselves once the traveler returns. Pure excitement and a sense of the honeymoon stage appear at first arrival home. This is followed by a plunge where the traveler deeply misses the culture they just left. It takes a bit of time for the traveler to adapt back to their home culture, and to have their feelings normalized. This second round of stages is called reverse culture shock. It should be noted that not everyone who goes abroad will experience every stage of culture shock. It depends on the person, their experience, and their training.

AIESEC San Luis Obispo teaches the exchange participants about reverse culture shock. However this concept is not generally understood fully until it is experienced. To combat this, AIESEC San Luis Obispo, and many other local committees around the world, host a "Reintegration Seminar" for all the people they sent abroad. This seminar gives the exchange participants a place to discuss their experiences abroad, and to connect with other people who traveled abroad that are likely experiencing similar emotions. Reintegration Seminar is a feature that helps differentiate AIESEC from many other international exchange programs.

Arrival

After all this training from AIESEC and my intercultural communication course, I was excited and ready to finally arrive in Romania to begin the journey. In hindsight, I can honestly say that without Outgoing Preparation Seminar and my studies in communication, I would have had a totally different experience.

When I initially arrived in Romania, three Romanian "AIESECers" picked me up at the airport. I arrived a few days early, so I stayed with one Romanian named Teo before our dorms were ready to move into. This is where my first new cultural experience happened on this trip. Teo lived with her whole family. Already, I was able to feel that Romania was more collectivistic and family oriented than the United States is. Her grandmother, aunts and cousins lived downstairs, and she lived upstairs with her father. The grandmother made incredible homemade "sarmale," which is stuffed cabbage. The minute she met me, she greeted me with some sarmale, along with a shot of "palinka". Palinka is homemade hard alcohol. It was the middle of the day, I was jet-lagged, and alcohol was the last thing I wanted to drink. However, in Romania, it is considered polite to offer guests food and palinka, and it is considered rude to

refuse it. I accepted the offer, after Teo's urging, and that's how I was welcomed into the country: delicious food and strong drinks.

The first real activity I did in Romania after recovering from jet-lag was to get on a train from Timisoara to Cluj-Nampoca to go to a music festival with interns like myself from Indonesia and Brazil, and Teo. This is where my next cultural experience happened. Trains in Eastern Europe are nothing like Amtrak in the United States, or trains in Western Europe. Firstly, they are very slow. At times, I felt as if I could run faster than them. To go slightly over 130 miles, the train ride was about 5.5 hours long. Secondly, there is no air conditioning and no food car, and the weather was more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. I had to learn very quickly that the United States and Romania had a different sense of time, and some commonplaces in the United States are considered luxuries elsewhere.

In my intercultural communication course and in Outgoing Preparation Seminar, the idea of chronemics was introduced. Martin and Nakayama explain that chronemics is the concept and rules that influence the use of time (278). Edward Hall differentiates between monochronic and polychronic time orientation. These are Hall's additions to cultural dimensions. Monochronic time orientation assumes that [time] is "a commodity; time can be gained, lost, spent, wasted or saved. In this orientation, time is linear, with one event happening at a time" (Martin and Nakayama, 278). Polychronic time orientation "sees [time] as circular and more holistic. Several events can happen at once" (Martin and Nakayama, 278). In Romania, I was able to feel the differences in these time orientations, giving me first hand experience with opposite cultural dimensions.

The United States is strongly monochronic (Raimo 2008). Americans generally value timeliness. Romania is more polychronic than the United States. A long train ride did not faze

many of my Romanian friends. They used the long train rides as ways to catch up with their friends, finish work, and relax. I, by contrast, struggled on the first train ride. I got frustrated at how slow it felt, and I felt that I was wasting valuable time. It was after I reflected about Edward Hall's ideas of monochronic and polychronic cultures in my intercultural communication course that I understood why I felt differently than my Romanian friends. This realization helped me accept the long transportation times, and by the end of my trip, I actually valued the long hours dedicated to relaxing with friends. By the end of my trip, a twelve-hour train ride did not scare me, and many great memories of bonding with my friends happened on these long hauls. I now have a deeper understanding of polychronic cultures. This experience has taught me to be more patient, and I have an easier time valuing each moment for what it is, as opposed to being in a rush to get to a final destination.

It was an incredible experience to live with 60 other interns in the dorms. It enabled me to not only learn Romanian culture, but also to learn about other cultures around the world. My direct roommates were from Indonesia, Poland, Turkey and Portugal. Understanding Hofstede's value dimensions helped me connect with each of my roommates in a way that I would not have been able to without studying it ahead of time. The most prominent dimension that I noticed was individualism and collectivism. My roommate from Turkey was Muslim, and in the Islamic culture, family is of the upmost importance. She Skyped with her family everyday, and got homesick faster than I did. My friends from Pakistan were also Islamic and they found it fascinating that I did not live with my family, and that I have no plans for marriage at this point in my life. In the United States, it is common to move away from home for college, and getting married is optional. In Pakistan, it is common to live at home with family, get married after graduation through an arranged marriage, and continue living with family even after marriage.

One of my Pakistani friends explained that a lot of homes are built with flat roofs so that another floor can be built on top of the house for the son and his wife to live in. Even some of my Romanian friends found it fascinating that I do not live with my family. I began to notice that individuals in collectivistic cultures tend to remain with their families longer than those in individualistic cultures.

As I continued traveling and reflecting on my experiences, I began realizing how thankful I was that I had taken other communication courses along with my intercultural communication course. In an interpersonal communication class, I learned about Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The most basic need that someone has is physical needs. Once this need is met, the need for safety is felt. Once safety is achieved, people have a need for belonging, then self-esteem, and lastly, self-actualization (Wood 11-15). In an abstract way, I noticed that I was experiencing this order abroad. When I first arrived, I was initially concerned with my safety. I was in good physical shape, so physical needs did not concern me. The train ride made me apprehensive because with no air conditioning, no food, and gypsies roaming around, I didn't know if I was safe. After I safely arrived to Cluj-Nampoca and began to figure out some of the little nuances in Romania, I satisfied my need for safety. I then began making friends. I opened up to Teo and the other interns and was so excited to meet new people when I moved into the dorms. This is evidence of my need for belonging. Once I felt like I belonged, I volunteered to be the team leader of my marketing project. I value being a leader, and I always strive to work on my leadership skills. I was able to gain the respect of my team, showing that I was experiencing and conquering the need for self-esteem. Maslow claims that not everyone reaches self-actualization in their lifetimes, however I think that my experiences with AIESEC have helped me realize what potential I have, and I have a growing desire to learn more about myself and the world. I

don't believe that I will ever have a full sense of self-actualization, simply because I feel that people have an infinite potential to keep learning and improving. Traveling has helped me understand Maslow's hierarchy of needs at a deeper level than a textbook can explain, and has helped me value myself, because I realize that I am on the way to reaching my full potential. AIESEC's mission statement of "peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential" goes hand-in-hand with Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Penington and Wildermuth acknowledge that, "cultural awareness relates to acquiring knowledge of oneself and the other culture" (180). Experiencing new cultures is what helps lead to self-discovery because new experiences push people out of their comfort zone. When one is outside of their comfort zone, new aspects of themselves emerge and discoveries are made about what they are truly capable of accomplishing. While traveling in Spain, I learned how resourceful I could be. I had never been in a position before where my everyday products and comforts were unavailable, but I got creative and made life work. I learned to handle challenges and learned to rely on my instinct. While traveling in Romania, I learned how independent I could be. I traveled to Romania alone, only to meet people once I got there, and surprised myself how calm I was when I arrived. Although there were 60 other interns and AIESECers to hang out with, I spent some time alone in Romania, teaching myself that I am capable of figuring out new environments myself. I finally learned that I do not need to rely on other people. I also learned that I am capable of leading a team of international students through a successful marketing campaign. This was proof to myself that I have the capabilities to be a global leader. Traveling helped me not only discover new cultures, but it also helped me discover myself, which in turn, lead me closer to realizing and reaching my full potential.

Home

Coming home is always a bittersweet feeling. It is exciting to reunite with friends and family back at home, but it is also hard to say goodbye to the life you've left behind. Coming home from Spain was the most difficult for me. I experienced intense reverse culture shock. I experienced less reverse culture shock coming home from Romania. As previously mentioned, I hadn't studied intercultural communication until I arrived in Spain, which I feel was too late to allow the lessons to sink in. I believe that this contributes to the reason that I had intense reverse culture shock when coming home from Spain.

I experienced the pre-return up's and down's starting about two weeks before I flew home from Spain. I had moments where I was ecstatic about going home, and moments that in which I dreaded leaving. My roommate left the day before I did, and I was sad the whole last day. However, the moment I stepped onto the airplane, I couldn't contain my excitement. I felt like I was on an emotional roller coaster. This roller coaster was just the beginning of the reverse culture shock.

When I arrived home, things initially felt the same as when I left. My family and friends were excited to see me, I ate my favorite foods that I couldn't eat in Spain, and I felt happy. This happiness, though, only lasted the first week. After the first week, I moved into my apartment at Cal Poly. I began to feel that it was difficult for me to connect with my friends. I had so many experiences that I wanted to share with everyone, and I found myself talking about Spain all the time. I didn't realize that people do not necessarily want to hear about stories all the time, as it gets boring to constantly hear about. I also began to get bored. In Spain, I was constantly stimulated with something new. Every weekend I was traveling to a new city, every day I tried new foods, and every night was a party. Being home didn't have these constant stimulations.

Life was more routined: go to class, do homework, eat dinner with friends, go to sleep, repeat. Even the parties on the weekends seemed boring. In Spain, we went to giant clubs that stayed open until the sun rose. At home, we went to small fraternity parties that ended before 2am. I began to feel depressed. I missed being in Spain so much that I began to Skype my friends I was traveling with more than talking with my local friends. My grades started dropping, and I honestly didn't have much motivation because I just wanted to go back abroad. This was my low point.

Luckily, reverse culture shock doesn't last forever. I began to re-adapt to American life. I was able to overcome my feelings of depression by making an effort to see my friends, trying harder in school, and realizing that even though I have a routine, each day does bring a new adventure. I finally felt happy again, and this happiness has remained.

Coming home from Romania, I didn't experience this same sense of culture shock. I learned about it in classes, and I experienced it myself previously, which, I believe, is the reason I didn't experience reverse culture shock again. I did feel that leaving Romania was bittersweet, but I didn't have trouble assimilating to my life back at home. The hardest part of leaving Romania was just saying goodbye to all the friends around the world I made.

Concluding Remarks

My culture shock experiences make me truly believe that it is important to learn about intercultural communication, and then experience traveling. One without the other does not lead to a full experience of the culture. Penington and Wildermuth acknowledge the importance of traveling and receiving a formal education:

Immersing oneself in another culture provides new opportunities for learning by

doing, virtually twenty-four hours a day…In fact, many international educators

support these short-term programs under the philosophy that *any* exposure to a

foreign environment during one's formal education is better than none because

even a minimal experience has the potential to create more mature, culturally

aware, and sensitive individuals (169).

AIESEC provides a platform for youth to study intercultural communication both out of a book,

and through traveling. "Learn by doing" is Cal Poly's motto, and what better way to become

culturally competent than to learn by traveling yourself? Regarding the combination of studying

intercultural communication and traveling, Penington and Wildermuth express that, "developing

competence requires opportunities to directly engage in intercultural communication with diverse

others. Because study abroad is experiential learning that involves direct interaction with diverse

others, study abroad courses should aid students in gaining intercultural competency" (168).

AIESEC's Outgoing Preparation Seminar combined with experiencing internships abroad tie

nicely together with a Cal Poly "learn by doing" formal Communication Studies education. The

combination of intercultural communication classes and seminars coupled with my experiences

abroad make me confident that I have received the best intercultural communication education

possible. This education has helped me become a competent global citizen.

 In order to achieve the goal of "peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential" people

must become global citizens. Global citizens must be fluent with intercultural communication

skills. AIESEC provides a platform for people across the world to become fluent in

communicating across many cultures. Studying intercultural communication from a book is

important to build a foundation about different cultures. Experiencing travel is important to

learn a culture for oneself. However, studying culture from a book *and* experiencing travel is what creates the fluency.

After my experiences studying intercultural communication and going abroad, I have extreme wanderlust. I am now always thinking ahead to my next trip, and have lofty goals to travel the world. I strive to continue learning and challenging myself through travel, and I feel like a true global citizen.

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