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Personal Ethnography as Applied Learning: A Qualitative Explorative Ethnographic

Observational Study of Social Comparison

TriDereka Hall

Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Psychology

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discuss and evaluate the experience of studying abroad for college students as a participant observer as well as their perceptions of the experience. In Spring 2018, as a part of my studies and as an observational ethnography, I participated in the study abroad program through AIFS at Veritas University. In the study, I will provide my own transformative experience of studying abroad in San Jose, Costa Rica, as well as perspectives of other students who have studied abroad in different locations throughout Costa Rica, and an advisor with experience of assisting study abroad students. Four separate interviews were conducted in all with three students and one advisor. Throughout the interviews the common themes were addressed: the competitive culture of U.S. compared with “Pura Vida” concept, a difference of teaching styles abroad versus the U.S., and host families. The study seeks to connect the taxonomy of Benjamin Bloom of educational higher learning to the study abroad experience and concept of global learning and exposure. An ethnographic study was conducted to provide evidence for an individual’s progression through Bloom’s taxonomy, resulting in higher learning and evaluation of their culture. From the research, one can establish an acceleration of learning and accomplishment through connections to Bloom’s taxonomy when considering a study abroad experience.

Keywords: study abroad, taxonomy, global learning, ethnographic

Introduction

In study abroad programs, a student's experience can be very transformative. Students, while abroad, may face culture shock, new classroom environments, and different living situations such as a host family. These experiences are allowing them to gain global awareness, be more open-minded about cultures and new ideas (Hadis, 2005). In recent years there has been an increase in students that are beginning to study abroad. During the 2015-2016 school year, 325,332 students in the United States studied abroad. That number is 3.8% increase from the previous year. About 10% of graduates from universities in the United States have had a study abroad experience (NAFSA, 2016). By studying abroad, students who are gaining more global awareness and having more exposure to cultures other than their own, and can achieve higher educational learning (Bloom, 1966; Anderson, Krathwohl, Bloom, 2001).

This study utilizes the narratives of students to gain more knowledge about the experiences each student encounters out of the country. It also discusses the effects that those experiences have on the lives as colleges students (Hartlen, 2011). Students are additionally learning more about themselves and identities. Within diverse groups of students now studying abroad, they can better understand their own identities. Interculturally, students can engage their learning through their identities from studying abroad to benefit others. They can utilize their discoveries to help students in study abroad programs at their school as well as also other students around the world (Cressy, n.d).

While students are experience culture differences away from the United States, they are developing global awareness and gain higher learning as a product of their experience. Students take advantage of the courses they take to enhance their open-mindedness, for example, courses

such as cultural psychology or in learning the country's official language when overseas. They discover the value of the new information they receive not only academically, but with their personal development as well (Hadis, 2005). The benefits of studying abroad are developing more through various research methods, and researchers are questioning if those who travel abroad are better students when they return. Hadis notes that instructors whose students travel abroad show many other positive outcomes such as concern for international affairs, appreciation for other cultures, maturation, self-awareness, and independence (Hadis, 2005).

The present study is designed to connect the experience of studying abroad, for example, learning and global awareness as interpreted through the levels of Bloom's taxonomy (a common learning theory) in which he lays out the order of educational higher learning and synthesis. With applying Bloom's Taxonomy, it can be argued that by studying abroad, forces the student to adapt to their environment. Through having experiences in settings such as classrooms, host families, and traveling, where there's a new cultural context, students are pushed beyond simply the knowledge through application levels of the taxonomy. For a student studying abroad, they will not have the opportunity to obtain full knowledge and comprehension of the cultural norms before going abroad. Once the student is abroad, there is an immediate analysis of their current situations and experiences allow them to navigate the country geographically, culturally, and academically (Bloom, 1956).

Literature Review

Studying Abroad & It's Possible Outcomes

In the past few years, studies indicate that students who study abroad are graduating at higher rates than other students. Studying abroad is providing these students with many concepts

for applying global awareness and providing a gained interest in learning about other cultures around the world (Barclay Hamir, 2011). In the duration of studying abroad, the student has encounters with the concept of culture shock, host families, unique experiences in the classroom. Culture shock involves the adjustment of one's new experience in a foreign place, host families are a student's "caregiver" abroad and unique experiences they encounter are followed with a mix of classes connected to their major or learning a new skill like a foreign language. Students want to get new cultural experiences because they know little about other locations, where the United States has a significant impact on the world. Before studying abroad, some students do not know the country that they are going to but are willing to learn more about that culture and take that knowledge back with them to their home country. Many students base their decisions to study abroad on coursework offered, the popularity of the location, cost, or general interest. By studying abroad, the student is receiving direct contact with locals and the integration of unaccustomed identities (Hartlen, 2005).

With that integration, many students that study abroad experience different forms of culture shock. According to Adler (1975) (as cited in Zapf, 1991), culture shock is defined as:

"A primary set of emotional reaction to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences."

The student is suddenly placed in unfamiliar territory and is faced with the challenge of adapting to their environment. The consequences of culture shock involve frustration, homesickness, feelings of loneliness, confusion, etc. These effects usually happen in phases while adjusting to the new culture, being that the impact of culture shock sometime after arrival and once the

excitement of being in of traveling to a new place has faded. They then may have a decreased sense of well-being, and as they settle in, will have an increase in a stage of recovery. The stages or duration of culture shock vary from person to person (Zapf, 1991).

The experience of discomfort related to studying abroad may also include having a host family or homestay in their location. During a homestay, a student is provided a family in their location where they stay, are usually provided with meals, and an immediate interactive and meaningful resource for them as well. Homestay is utilized as a shelter but also a support system for the student. Many students expect to develop intimate relationships with their host families just as they ideally would with their family at home by taking part in family activities, conversations, meals, etc. Additionally, if the student is in a country where they speak another language from their home country, living with a host family provides a one-on-one practice and meaningful interactions each day. Students overall have the opportunity to develop close, beneficial relationships with their host families, but some students don't have pleasant experiences with them in contrast (Rodriguez & Chornet-Roses, 2013). In a study by Rodriguez & Chornet-Roses (2013), some students reported that they did not feel a genuine connection to their host family and it felt more like a tenant-landlord relationship, rather than one that displays family-like characteristics indicating that these experiences may not be as advertised or promoted. Therefore it could be that some host family experiences have different outcomes as opposed to those where the family embraces the student.

Petzold & Peter (2014) discuss the development of norms for studying abroad. By using the theory of planned behavior, they state that:

“The more positive an attitude to study abroad is, and the stronger the norm to study abroad and the stronger the perceived behavioral control are, the stronger the intention to study abroad.”

With the many positive impacts that studying abroad has a student, it can eventually be seen as a norm among college students. The numbers of students that are deciding to study abroad are increasing with more students expressing potential interest in the program (Petzold & Peter, 2014).

Global awareness. After students study abroad, they come back with a variety of new experience as well as reflective cognition related to their own culture. Students, with a newfound global awareness or global mindedness; they are more open to global issues and the aspect of learning about new cultures. Hadis defined global mindedness as “having a concern for issues and processes that affect the world, as well that local issues are connected to the global ones.” (2005) In the study by Hadis (2005), students that studied abroad answered a questionnaire addressing their degree of interest in international news before studying abroad on a scale of 1(low) to ten(high). The mean before studying abroad was a 3.74 and increased to 4.22 when asked about it following their experience. Students, by experiencing a new culture are more interested in learning about global issues as well as having an understanding of them.

Reverse culture shock. When returning to their home country, students experience this concept of reverse culture shock. Some students study abroad sometimes as long as a year and are fully immersed in another culture. Students returning see their home differently, they have changed, and because they’ve adapted to a new culture, they must now readapt their home culture. (U.S Department of State, 2018) They are faced with the clashing of the global

awareness that they experienced and the environment of their home country. According to Handis, in reverse culture shock, a student discards their preconceptions about the world, clichés or truths about their home country, and they are “languishing for the active experience abroad one has just come back from.” (2005)

According to the U.S. Department of State, a returned student faces the following challenges: diminishment of excitement, challenges to return to American cultural norms, myths & misconceptions about the U.S. and new attitudes & values of sojourners. Generally, the student misses being abroad upon return. The excitement of waking up in a new country quickly is gone. While abroad, a student stands out as they receive a “celebrity status” of being an American and can receive special treatment from others due to their differences. That excitement then translates to stories they want to tell once they are home again. When the student comes back with many stories, people are not as excited about hearing about the foreign experience as they are telling them about it. It also happens vice versa; the student is not as excited about hearing what has happened at home. The student may lose interest in American culture (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

Some of the challenges taken for granted by students is that American culture is materialistic or wasteful, have a high-speed pace of life, and their values/attitudes. Compared to other places, Americans can spend money on things that appear to be “material” to other cultures. The United States also has an abundance of food choices or products. As noted, and compared to some other countries, Americans live a more fast-paced life. By being in a more laid-back culture, dependent upon where the student went, it takes time to adjust to the fast-paced culture of the United States. Students that study abroad will particularly be concerned with

different ways of living compared to the U.S. (U.S Department of State, 2018) The ideas they have about the U.S. are also connected to the myths or misconceptions they have. They can believe that everything in the U.S. is better, their relationships will be easily resumed, or they can easily adapt to their own culture again which may not be the case (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

Because by studying abroad, they gain a new global awareness, they develop new attitudes and values as compared before they left. One perspective is to view this transformation of student perception as meta-cognitive strategy. Some the examples of this can be: they think about how American norms are not always the “right” or “best” way, place more value on relationships now, or see that Americans, in general, are frequently stressed and driven, so they aren’t able to fully relax in their lives (U.S Department of State, 2018). Additionally in a blog on one of the major study abroad companies sites, apart of UTC’s programs, they explain some ways to deal with reverse culture shock. It addresses also that students come back from their locations and being hyper-critical about their home cultures and recommends that students make pros and cons about each location or just know these are normal feelings. (International Student Exchange Program, 2015)

By experiencing these challenges, the effects are the following: criticality, marginality, overexertion/exhaustion, and resistance/withdrawal/self-doubt/depression. Criticality, the student after returning home may also be more critical of their home country. This idea can lead to a lot of frustration and can be displaced onto others around them. By comparing their study abroad experience to the United States, it can lead to missing their previous location. With marginality, a student faces the clash of their new identity and their previous one so they may feel as an alien in

both contexts. By constantly dealing with the stress of a newfound identity, it can become physically exhausting and cognitively taxing. One is focused on dealing with the ways of the American culture with being away for some time; and when those pressures build up, they result in resistance of one's home culture (U.S. Department of State, 2018).

Minorities Studying Abroad, are the Experiences Similar?

In many study abroad programs, groups of minority students are underrepresented, but it is becoming more available for students of color to have the opportunity (Hartlen, 2011). Of the students that studied abroad during 2015-2016, 28.4% of those students were minorities. And there was an even smaller amount of African American or Black students studying abroad at roughly 5.9%. The majority of students studying abroad are Caucasian, which made up 71.6% of the students that studied abroad during that same time period (NAFSA, 2016). Historically, the typical study abroad student would be a middle to upper class European American female, but that is changing over time. (Cressy, 2005) At an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), just 3.4% at the university will study abroad compared to other universities where 10.4% of the students will have the chance to have a study abroad experience (Redden, 2018).

In the article titled, *A Long-term Vision for Diversity in Education Abroad*, Cressy (2005) lists some the opportunities and challenges at the intra and intergroup level that the United States faces. At the intra-group level, diverse groups on US American students share a unique experience when they are outside of the country because while in the US one is identified by factors such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. In contrast, outside of the US, they are more identified by their nationality. This aspect forces the student to learn more about the awareness of being an American. Cressy also explains how as a student studying abroad, they

unavoidably start to focus on deeper questions about themselves in this way as well as more realization of who they are. By doing this, they are forced into a different stage of awareness of identity development. With more topics of identity introduced, a student of an underrepresented group may not have their educational aspirations represented.

At the inter-group level and with educators in the study abroad programs, with the number of minorities increasing. These program should be more focused on helping these students see their impact of the world. Being culturally diverse can provide many advantages because of their outlook on the world and meeting others while studying abroad. Cressy (2005) believes that students will be able to educate each other about their diverse backgrounds surrounding their races, gender, sexual orientation and abilities in regards to their development as a minority further it gives students a place to reevaluate their identity within the American context upon their return.

Additionally, specifically for minorities, the percentage of students that are having the opportunity too has increased. Schools such as HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) have more students that are seeking to study abroad and go beyond their educational learning environments. Many students, or more specifically minorities, believe that they have many barriers with the opportunity to study abroad, for example, the knowledge about programs, fear of experiencing racism abroad, and also the financial aspect. (Redden, 2018) To combat some of the concerns that students have in those areas, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga has students participate in study abroad courses that are available to groups of students that address the following themes: study abroad programs at UTC, financial concerns (financial aid, scholarships, academics), the process of pre-departure, and also preparation for

return of students after studying abroad. All of these sections all separated into meetings on campus for students who are interested in studying abroad or officially planning their trips and need help and advice.

Collectivism vs. individualism in Latin America

Hofstede (1994) defines individualism as the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of a group. He further refers to collectivism as being the opposite of individualism and relates both concepts to the upbringing of a child. As a child being raised in a collectivist society, they would care about being a part of their group or family. As a member of their group, they are loyal to and respect their group and stay together throughout their lives. In contrast, a child raised to be individualistic learns to center their concern at the self and then out to their larger group. They are expected to one day stand on their own feet and not be protected by their group for life. In this case, they don't need strong loyalty towards people in their group (Hofstede, 1994, p.6).

Collectivism is common in countries such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia. And individualism is mainly observed in the cultures from North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. With Latin America being of a collectivist nature, people in their culture define themselves as being a part of a group such as family. Most of their behaviors stem from the norms and roles of high salient groups rather than being focused all on themselves. Latin Americans prefer their relationships in groups even when the costs of staying in these relationships exceed the advantages of remaining (Triandis, 2015).

A previous study by Valente (2016) studied the working hours and life satisfaction of individuals. She notes that studies have had determinants of happiness, but work has not been a

primary factor. The results found that culture was a determinant of how happy one was because of the individualism versus collectivism factor. They found that Latin American men would be happier working less because they could spend more time with their families, in comparison to the US, where working more means making more money and increasing their individual happiness or at least in providing for the needs of their family. This research provides an excellent insight into Latin America culture as a whole, and for this study I want to focus on a specific location, Costa Rica (Valente, 2016) Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2011) The article compares the lives of Europeans to Americans comparing their work hours affect on how satisfied they are with their lives. Given the relational aspects of their research, the authors suggests that Americans are more happy working more hours because of the association of working hard with individual success. This study points out the various differences among Americans particularly by region. Based on this literature, it appears that study abroad is not only an excellent method for raising awareness of diversity but has the potential to increase studiousness, as well as self-reflective meaningfulness generated by interpersonal and intercultural contact.

Bloom's Taxonomy

In the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* by Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956), higher learning was classified in certain categories in a step process describing the cognitive domain and benefits of each in learning. In the original theory of Bloom's taxonomy, it included the following categories: *knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation*. Bloom's taxonomy is a developmental model as progression implies that if one wants to move along in the process, and achieve higher learning, they must adapt learning from one category and then move up to another. (Agarwal, 2018) Each

category in the taxonomy also consists of subcategories except “application.” (Krathwohl, 2002) In the handbook, Bloom lays out these categories with examples or demonstrations of how they would be applied as well.

Knowledge. In the knowledge category, it involves behaviors that emphasize remembering, recognition or recall of ideas, material or phenomena. During this phase, one identifies, remembers and learns certain information and is expected to keep that information. The knowledge category also has subcategories that consist of knowledge of specific facts, knowledge of ways and means dealing with specifics, and knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field. The knowledge of specifics involves a student remembering or recalling terminology or specific facts such as technical terms or knowledge about a location or culture. It also would include specific major facts about a culture. In the ways of means and dealing with specifics, it includes knowledge of conventions, trends and sequences, classifications and categories, criteria, and methodology. These are distinctive from just the facts and involve more processes and organization. Example of use in this subcategory would be developing knowledge of acceptable forms of language or the knowledge of scientific methods for evaluating health concepts. Lastly, under the knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field, it includes knowledge of principles and generalizations and theories and structures. These are usually used to study phenomena or solve problems. Examples of these would be to know the major principles involved in learning or recalling theories about a particular culture. (Bloom et al., 1956, p.68-78)

Comprehension. In the comprehension category, the student is responsible for using their information and be able to make sense of it and display an understanding of it. They will be able to do these actions verbally or written. Bloom used the term “comprehension” to include

objectives, behaviors, and responses a part of the understanding that one has. It includes the following subcategories: translation, interpretation, and exploration. In translation, the student can put communication into a language or another form of communication. For example, the ability to translate a problem given in a technical term make it less abstract or “state it in your own words.” For the student to be able to interpret their knowledge, they must be able to take the translated material and understand the relationships between many different parts and relate it to their own experiences or ideas. Lastly, in extrapolation, it consists of translating and interpreting the information one has, as well as applying it to unknown situations. For example, dealing with conclusions of works and recognize its limitations and forming accurate inferences. (Bloom et al., 1956, p.89-96)

Application. At the application level, it is known that to apply something you have to have a comprehension of it first. For this level, the student should be able to apply an appropriate abstraction without having to be prompted like in the comprehension level. For example, a student would be able to apply certain scientific principles or theorems to new situations or applying a principle of psychology in identifying the characteristics of a new social situation. The application level in the only category that does not have subcategories. (Bloom et al., 1956, p.120-124)

Analysis. For analysis, the categories of comprehension and application are both involved. In the analysis, there is an emphasis on the breakdown of information and discovering its relationships with each other and how they are organized. The subcategories of analysis are the following: elements, relationships, and extrapolation. For the analysis of elements, there should be an understanding of the classification of elements of communication. In this

subcategory, for example, a student would be able to distinguish facts from a hypothesis. With relationships and analysis, a student will begin to determine the major relationships among elements and parts of communication. For example, within research, a student should be able to connect the relationship of their hypothesis to the evidence that was found for it and the relationships between the parts of that evidence. Another example may include detecting logical fallacies in an argument. And lastly, in the analysis of organizational principles, it involves the arrangement and structure of the communication. When someone creates a piece of work or communication, they don't usually point out the organizational principles they have utilized, like their point of view. At this level, for example, a student would be able to recognize the point of view or bias of a writer in a historical account. (Bloom et al., 1956, p.145-149)

Synthesis. In synthesis, the student is responsible for putting together the elements and parts to form a complete work. They will utilize their abilities and materials to reconstruct an idea. They are compiling many elements from sources and connecting it to a new form. Synthesis level involves the following subcategories: production of a unique communication, production of a plan, or proposed set of operations, and derivation of set abstract relations. The subcategories are all different ways to see the product of synthesis. As a product of communication, the student is trying to express the product through a form of communication for a certain purpose such as to inform, entertain, persuade, etc. As production of a plan or proposed set of operations, it will be set up as the plan, process and then the outcome. For example, by setting up an experiment, you'll plan it, carry it out, then collect the experimental findings. And lastly, the product can be seen as a derivation of a set abstract of relations. In other words, it is a

concept that could be applied to further studies or a hypothesis that would be tested stemming from the previous information collected. (Bloom et al., 1956, p.)

Evaluation. Bloom defines this as “the making of judgments about the value, for some purpose, of ideas, works, solutions, methods, methods, etc.” During the evaluation, there is a combination of all the other categories of the taxonomy, and he added the aspect of “values” to it. In other words, at this level, the students should be able to form their views or opinions based on evidence. In the subcategories, the category consists of evaluation regarding internal evidence and judgment regarding external criteria. With using internal evidence, the student will use information like the accuracy of other tests or information to form an argument. And with external criteria, the student would make a judgment of what information to use based on what they know about other studies or remembered criteria. For example, they form an argument based on the highest standards or major theories in a certain field (Bloom et al., 1956, p.185-192).

From, Bloom’s Taxonomy one can examine the levels and learning outcomes from each. Through each level, Bloom, highlights educational objectives and how there are explicit formulations of the educative process. People, specifically students, have the ability to change the of thinking (Bloom, et al., 1956, p.27). While studying abroad, the student naturally adapts to a quick educational process because of the introduction of new environment. A student who studies abroad begins with the poranalysis

Research Question: Therefore, based on the Bloom’s taxonomy, how does a student’s study abroad experience effectively accelerate them through the model of high educational learning

shifting from *knowledge* to *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation* and applying their knowledge for newfound global learning?

Methods

Materials

For this qualitative study, I used field notes that were collected as a study abroad student in Costa Rica that included my observations and experiences with the locals, my experience in the classroom, host family, and traveling in different areas of Costa Rica. I also submitted research questions and participant consent forms for IRB approval that were used to interview participants. (Appendix A-C) Additionally, for the interviews, voice recording was utilized with the approval of the University IRB.

Participants

First, as an autoethnography, I used my field notes regarding my experiences to inform my experiences as an Ethnography of my role as a participant observer (Sangasubana, 2011). As a statement of reflexivity, I am a minority and a psychology undergraduate. Further, I also conducted a series of interviews upon my return from Costa Rica. My interviews consisted of four different points of view. I interviewed a student in the same program as me, two students that also visited Costa Rica in the study abroad but at a different time, and the study abroad adviser in Costa Rica. I picked the student that went to Costa Rica at the same time as me because I want to see how another student's experience was in the same environment, and be able to compare and contrast it to my own. She was a student that went on similar trips and classes with me but lived with a separate host family and some other locations in Costa Rica. I decided to have interviews from two other students in the study abroad program who went to

Costa Rica would provide interesting perspectives. Each of the students from my school in the study abroad program studied in separate areas of Costa Rica. And lastly, I want to provide the perspective of my study abroad advisor in Costa Rica, because she has worked with study abroad students for 11 years. She has had extensive experience with working with students from all over the world who come to Costa Rica to study at Veritas University. By having her perspective, it will provide the study with a contrasting view to those of my fellow study abroad students as well as myself as a participant observer.

Design

In Spring 2018, through the study abroad program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, I traveled to San, Jose, Costa Rica. I was enrolled at Veritas University and took four different courses on campus. Before choosing a study abroad program in connection with my thesis, I wanted to focus on a collectivist culture that I believed would have a different perspective on ideology, language, and lifestyles. The original project for the thesis included a cross-cultural study of Costa Rica and the United States, studying the topic of work and happiness in college students. Although an interesting topic, I decided to broaden the scope and focus on the transformative study abroad experience as a whole for students particularly minorities. The topic of work, academics, and happiness are filtered in this study as aspects of the study abroad experience and comparison of the two cultures of Costa Rica and the United States.

Procedure

For the interviews, proposals were submitted to the IRB for approval. After approval, times were set up for each interview. One interview was conducted in person, and the other three

interviews were conducted through the online application, Skype. During the interviews, I distributed the participant consent form electronically and confirmed participant consent and informed the participant that they would be audio recorded before the start of the interview questions. The participants were asked to elaborate as little or as much as desired. I stated each question one by one and allowed the participants to respond. At the end of the interview, I asked if there were any additional comments that they wanted to add. In the interview, for the students, fourteen questions were addressed and seven for my adviser. (Appendix A) After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed for further investigation of common themes.

Results

Observations

While in Costa Rica, I made daily observations of my experience living in a host family, my everyday academic experience, traveling throughout Costa Rica, interactions with locals, and the challenges that I faced while being in another culture. I was in the country for approximately three months, from January 6th to April 6th. During my time in Costa Rica, I resided in a homestay about a ten to fifteen-minute walk away from my university, Veritas University. Veritas is a private university in Costa Rica and has approximately 1,850 Costa Rican student and about 320 students that are a part of an international studies program.

Homestay. My host family consisted of my “mama tica” (the mother), “papa tica” (the father), their daughter and another student apart of another study abroad program. On arrival, my host family was very welcoming. On the first day, I was given instructions to the homestay and directed to the house in a neighborhood called Zapote. After arriving to the house, my mama tica greeted me with open arms of affection, as well as the husband. My parents also were with me

when I arrived at the homestay because they traveled with me to ensure my safe arrival. To my surprise, I was not aware that the family spoke Spanish and very little to no English at all but I was able to use past knowledge and applications on my phone to help. My mama tica also greeted me with a gift and made dinner for the family and inviting my parents to stay as well. Over time, that same hospitality and openness were given to me. I was able to ask my host family questions about the country, neighborhoods, and other locations within the country. My mama tica was the main source for any issues that I had, and I mainly saw her each day, in contrast to the other members who I did not have frequent interactions. She made the meals (breakfast & dinner), did my laundry, and cleaned my room. These actions were mandatory through my study abroad program.

In regards to challenges with my host family, I was under the assumption that I would be living with a family that spoke both languages. So, the biggest challenge that I faced was the language barrier. Although I was having trouble communicating with my host family, they were usually open to helping me. The other student in the homestay spoke Spanish and English, so she was able to assist me as well. I believe there was a little frustration between my mama tica and me related to learning the language towards the end of the program because she felt I should have learned more in my duration there.

Kinds of students/locals. With students at the university, I didn't find them to be very interactive at all. Most of the time when I interacted with locals, it was in the downtown area, communication with my teachers, and when traveling to the other locations in Costa Rica such as Monteverde, Limon, Santa Teresa, and Guanacaste. The locals that I did have a chance to interact with were very friendly and open to conversation when I was practicing Spanish.

At my university, I also spent extensive time with students that were from the United States as well and were in my study abroad program, AIFS (American Institute for Foreign Study). Most of the students that I spent my time with were African American students from Howard University. We took some of the same courses, specifically Health and Cultural Psychology, together and traveled together on weekend trips throughout Costa Rica. I found that they had a lot of similar experiences to me during the time we studied abroad which led to my inclusion of interviewees later in this study. They were very open in conversation and welcoming with friendship. They are still people I continue my contact with following my study abroad program.

Classroom environment. At the university I took courses. The courses I took were the following: Spanish (Level 1), Health Psychology, Cultural Psychology, and Art Fundamentals: Theories and Practice. During classes of the first week, I was prepared to take books, paper, and all the materials that I would need for a normal class, but I quickly found out that there weren't many textbooks, nor book assignments in the classes at all. The only class that required a book was cultural psychology, and it was used for research. All of these classes indicated an experiential learning strategy in instruction.

In regards to the grading system, it was similar to the US, but for evaluation, the classes did not include tests. Evaluations for the course followed a similar grading system to the US, but testing was excluded. Evaluation of the course was in the form of oral presentations. And for my art course, we did not turn in a final project. He seemed to be grading more by effort and passion, rather than objective ability which caused me to believe Central Americans prefer engagement to objective performance (reflecting collective educational styles). There were times that I asked

the professor what exactly he would be grading for, but I felt that I never received a straightforward answer or explanation. I felt that the teachers, in general, had a laid-back nature, especially my art professor. In my other courses, the teachers were straightforward about what assignments were due and what information they expected, but I felt that the execution of our assignments had a much more creative opportunity.

When communicating with the professors, I also experienced a more or less easy-going nature when it came to grading in the courses. I would constantly ask about grading and how could I earn an A on an assignment, but they didn't appear to be concerned about with grades as I was.

Challenges upon return. Particularly in Costa Rica, students gain global awareness about the culture of their people and the concept of the term “Pura Vida.” Pura Vida is a term used by the locals of Costa Rica and translates as “pure life” or “simple life.” It is used as a greeting but also used to describe their way of life. Costa Ricans, explained to me that this means that they are more relaxed about situations, take life slower, and exhibit little stress as indicated by their social interactions and body language. Their people, in general, seemed to be much happier with their lives. I found this concept, although beneficial while I was there, a challenge when I came back to the US. During my academic experience, while studying abroad, I evolved into a more stress-free mindset as a student. This mindset caused me to have difficulty adapting to the old workload, deadlines, and pressure that I faced in the United States.

Overall, I believe that I also experienced the consequences of reverse culture shock such as reverse homesickness, American culture challenges, and overexertion/exhaustion (U.S Department of State, 2018). When I returned to the states, I found myself trying to fill the void of

not traveling to a different location as I did in Costa Rica, by going to three different trips within the United States. I also noticed that even now I bring up going back to Costa Rica a lot and feeling void of the relationships that I made there. I have also developed a difficulty in dealing with the high paced lifestyle of the United States. Adapting has caused me to experience exhaustion from getting back into my old routine of constant studies and high-stress lifestyle.

Common Themes of Interviewees

Throughout the interviews, I compiled a list of common themes. The themes were discovered through thematic coding of the interview transcripts (Sangasubana, 2011). The students in my interview shared their experiences while studying abroad and also the commonalities of the interviews included: the competitive culture of the United States, a difference of teaching styles between professors of the United States and Costa Rica, as well as the host family environment. The competitive culture of the United States was the biggest theme found throughout the interviews and included subtopics such as the decreased stress of academics, affect of “Pura Vida” mindset, and the reverse culture shock the students experienced.

Competitive culture of US as compared with “Pura Vida.” In each of the interview, the students expressed that the culture of Costa Rica is drastically different from the United States because the culture of the United States is extremely fast pace in contrast to Costa Rican culture. In the interview with my study abroad adviser, she addresses, she states:

“...you are a very much more competitive culture. In contrast to Costa Rica, you have a lot of papers, a lot of homework many things to do....you forget to enjoy your life because you just have to go to work. And you have to be the best....American students

forget to indulge themselves, and they feel guilty about in the indulging themselves and enjoying some part of life.”

One of the students also addressed this same concept when I questioned them about the overarching concept of “Pura Vida” and its affected on their mindset.:

“I love that concept just because I feel like a lot of the times, particularly in the US, we’re too focused on achieving and intensely doing the best that we can and just always pushing for more but “Pura Vida” is way more relaxed and enjoying the smaller moments, enjoying life and what you have and I definitely appreciated that a lot more, especially living with my host family.”

Lastly, one student who had already visited the location prior did not feel like was completely affecting by the term and saw it more like a “tourist term.”

The difference in teaching styles. My study abroad adviser explained the frustration that some students have with the teaching styles of Costa Ricans because they prefer an American style academic environment. She found that it is difficult for an American student to adapt because professors are not very straightforward in their teaching styles.

“I liked how interactive my professors made our classes in Costa Rica so even if I don't have a classes as interactive of that Howard I was still like I could still like present information as I would at Howard as I would in Costa Rica...”

One of the students, while studying abroad had the opportunity to see teaching styles directly from both cultures the United States and Costa Rica. In the interview she describes the drastic differences in their teaching styles stating:

“...one that was from here was super focused on efficiency he wanted it to get done quickly be done right. He constantly was giving us things to do that are really relevant to his projects he was having us do the work that needed in the community as we have less work to do which makes sense a little frustrated sometimes. Then our other professor had a heavier emphasis on giving us breaks, making sure that he kept in mind the attention span of a human so that we can solve the most amount of information but still enjoy ourselves here much slower speaking pace.”

Host families. While studying abroad, all of the students had experiences with a host family; only two had extensive experience with living in a homestay. One of the students who were in the same program as I spent her entire duration of studying abroad in a homestay with a large family of six Costa Rican and three other students in programs at Veritas University. She described her overall experience of living with a host family:

“My initial experience with my family was very good. It was they were definitely inviting. I was always included. We went out and do things together as a family, like my host brother was a referee for volleyball, volleyball games and a local community. So with my house mom, we went to the game and supported so we always was laughing and talking at dinner. So initially it was very good and they helped me with my Spanish to tremendously...”

The other student also spent her whole time studying abroad. She describes the nature of her homestay:

“...they live in Montevideo, which was a really, really small town. They pretty much only had like one small little area where there were any restaurants or anything like that. And

you literally just walk five minutes. So just seeing how they walked everywhere. They left the door unlocked, all the dogs were free.”

Although residing in the homestay for the extended period, she did not receive the experience she wanted, she expressed that she had gained the benefit of practicing her Spanish skills each day, but felt that there was not a strong bond between her host family and her like she originally expected to upon her arrival to Costa Rica. She spent a lot of her time studying and being in her room, rather than taking time to engulf herself into their lives. The last student in the study explained that she only spent a little time with a host family at the beginning of her program because she stayed with a group of students of 20-30, traveling around Costa Rica.

Discussion

In the experiences of students that study abroad, there can be a connection made to the taxonomy that Benjamin Bloom created. In Bloom’s Taxonomy, he describes the categories and levels of educational higher learning. By applying the taxonomy to the experiences of the study abroad students, and my own, we can establish that with experiences that the students encounter, they are pushed beyond the beginning categories of *knowledge*, *comprehension*, and *application*. (Bloom et al., 1956) The student effectively and quickly develops the shift beyond knowledge, and the experience of studying abroad forces them to advance to the categories of *analysis* and *synthesis* to adapt. A student remaining at the beginning levels of the taxonomy would cause issues for the student, and the level of cognitive processing would be difficult to obtain.

A student is pushed beyond the first three levels as it requires a student to learn information quickly regarding the culture through immersion, which may be difficult. This would be difficult because learning a whole new cultural concept requires language skills,

previous global knowledge, knowledge about its local people, etc. In the categories of comprehension and application, to previously know all of that information, demonstrate an understanding of the cultural context and apply it to their new situations and experiences arriving abroad. A student has to actively and immediately be involved in their surrounds as soon as they are in the new country or location.

In the category of “analysis,” both comprehension and application are involved. For analysis, the student can separate or breakdown information they have received and use it to support a particular view or generalizations about the culture. There are common themes in my own experience as well from students in the interviews. From the interviews, and my autoethnographic perspective, there is a displayed process of analysis in the following encounters: application of the “Pura Vida” concept within the culture, comparing and contrasting teaching methods of both cultures, and the issue of idealizing Costa Rica from a preconceived notion. With the application of the “Pura Vida” concept, a student is unintentionally encouraged to form this similar course of thought while in Costa Rica. Each day they are faced with situations where they had to consider it and quickly adapt accordingly. In the interview with one student, she describes a situation where Costa Ricans would display their laid-back nature. She states:

“...living in Latin America like anything can happen like you could be on a six-hour bus ride with the six-hour bus ride can turn into non for like a numerous amount of reasons but you really can't control it... like if a bus driver in Costa Rica decided to like stop the his cousin's house to talk for a little bit and get a bottle of water and it took like 90 minutes, it just happened and nobody was upset”

She was forced to adapt to that way of performing each day whether it was trips or interactions in the classroom. The process of application encouraged her to take the concept and support her view that Costa Ricans are simpler people. This is also the case of making a comparison of the cultures of teaching styles for both cultures. A student in the interview found that she further saw the demeanors of Costa Ricans in interactions with her teacher. Compared to professors in the US, professors in Costa Rica were more open and willing to take into consideration her needs and she found that was the case for other professors she had while studying abroad.

Additionally, in the interview with my adviser, she explained that sometimes students get frustrated with the teaching styles of Costa Ricans because they are non-confrontational and not very straightforward regarding requirements. This situation also is an application and support for the generalization that one makes about Costa Ricans overall. Lastly, in the analysis, some students found that their knowledge of their location found them to idealize Costa Rica and make the generalization that Costa Rica is a place of beaches and luxury. In the interview with my adviser, she explained that many students while in Costa Rica believe they can travel to a beach down the street from being in downtown San Jose. By studying abroad and being immersed into the culture, they quickly have the realization that Costa Rica has different areas and parts to it, one being the tourist areas and one being a concentration of locals. By seeing this factor, they can break down the different elements of the country and see it from alternative perspectives.

In the category of “synthesis,” it involved putting together elements and an individual forming an idea from those elements presented. There is a process of putting together the parts and apply them to a new pattern that was not presented before. In the interviews and knowledge of my own experience, synthesis was displayed in the following encounter: taking the patterns of

Costa Rican culture and applying them but to new situations in the US in adapting to new stimuli. In synthesis, the student can produce a plan of action or set of operations to create alternative solutions to new problems. For example, when returning the US, one student during the interview explained that they found themselves telling others around them to “tranquila, tranquila,” meaning to calm down. They took the concept of “Pura Vida” and experience of being told by locals and changed their thought processes of dealing with the fast-paced American culture and potential stressors. During the interview, another student also expressed to me that she was positively influenced by her host family in the sense that they exemplify the concept of “Pura Vida” by stating:

“They were always just, you know, out in the living room together and would let me join with them and just talking making jokes not not worrying too much. I felt like that would be a much better lifestyle for us to lead if we could just, you know, not worry about all these tests or whatever we have or work and just embrace what you do have.”

After return to the US, she also began to relax more and appreciate the smaller moments in life. By taking into account the experience of living with the host, she can make changes in her course of action each day. Also, from my perspective with synthesis, I found that using the concept of “Pura Vida” could be used to combat the negative outcomes related to my mental health and adapting to the stress of school. I was able to take that pattern of behavior from Costa Rica and calm myself in situations of high stress giving myself greater psychological adaptability. I found the culture of the US creates that competitive environment and allow students, specifically myself, do not think you are ever doing enough towards a directed goal.

For the last category of the taxonomy, evaluation causes the learner making a judgment about elements and justifying their view with certain criteria. Evaluation mainly is connected to the effects of reverse culture shock such as having a critical eye or judgment of one's own culture, as well as being resistant to one's own culture. The student begins to make a judgment based on evidence and experience of being abroad. In the evaluation, the student has already gone through other stages of higher learning as proposed by Bloom, and this is the end of the process. In the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy, Anderson and Karthoworthol (2001) address the additional stage of "creation" In this stage, it consists of generating, planning, and producing an original product taking into consideration knowledge that one has gained through the previous stages of Bloom. For example, a student, after now developing their own judgments based upon their experiences in both cultures, may choose to create a program in the future that teaches students how to deal with culture shock and reverse shock specifically for students studying abroad too and from Costa Rica. A student could benefit from being prepared for additional patterns that may affect their course of thought. They could benefit from learning about its people's "Pura Vida" mindset with the country and how it may affect their own lifestyles while abroad and cause them to think critically about their lives once returning to their home country depending on their home country's pace of life.

From the results, the reader can establish the transformative effect of study abroad programs. Applying Bloom's taxonomy, particularly with that immediate analysis, it demonstrates how quickly the cognitive domain can adapt to new social situations. In many educational environments, educators may lack the ability to help students achieve the various processes or levels of the taxonomy, but by seeing the results of the study abroad experience, we

can infer that the student can effectively be moved through the taxonomy under immersive conditions. By reaching the evaluation level of educational higher learning, there is deeper processing of their global learning. Not only is a student being provided knowledge of a different culture but experiencing it each day and then eventually bringing back new identity and viewpoint for themselves.

Limitations & Further Research

In this study, it involved research specifically in Costa Rica, in connection with students that resided in the United States as their home country. With the information and due to the qualitative nature of the study, it is difficult to determine additional inferences for students that have studied abroad in Costa Rica in different programs or from different universities. Because of this, the scope of questions is limited to that context, being that the students did visit different locations in Costa Rica and Costa Rica is also one location that a student may take an interest in choosing for a study abroad program. The students in the interviews visited different locations such as Monteverde there may be a difference in cultural experiences or context. The length of the time to complete the study is also a limitation. The original purpose and design of the study were changed after the semester of studying abroad. The original plan of action was to conduct surveys with interviews for evidence in a cross-cultural study of the United States and Costa dealing with the connection of work and happiness of college students, but at my university, there was a very small percentage of students. Considering the smaller number of participants to evaluate, a qualitative, ethnographic study was more appropriate.

In further research, one may consider the effect of study programs in other locations similar to the American culture and perspectives of students in connection with Bloom's

taxonomy. By studying additional locations, there may be evidence that the student has additional knowledge of the cultural context. For example, does a student that studies in another individualistic culture, experience the same pattern of shifts in the taxonomy. The study does take account of students that study abroad to locations that they have previously visited at some time in the past. With this consideration, future studies may find that the student advances even further into the taxonomy because of prior knowledge and cultural exposure. Further, how do such experiences change a student's meta-cognitive awareness of their learning styles in college? Also, minority students could benefit if they knew the opportunities and resources to study abroad, allowing them to use their advantage of being a minority to inform others globally of their outlook from a minority's perspective.

Conclusion

Through the study abroad program, students develop a deeper connection of global exploration. While studying abroad, the student finds that they are faced with a multitude of issues and considerations to the cultures such as their way of life and operation of daily activities. By use of my study abroad experience and interviews to gain the perspectives of other students who have studied abroad, we can establish a self-reported connection of global learning and cognitive domains of learning.

In the study, it is argued that a student will advance through the phases of Bloom's Taxonomy because of the unique circumstances that studying abroad provides. A student is transitioned from the comfort of their home country to an awareness of other ways of thinking and studying. Through Bloom's taxonomy as a theoretical template, we can connect the experiences of the study abroad student to the educational higher learning model that consists of

knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The student transitions from the basis of knowledge, immediately to the stages of analysis, synthesis, and eventually, evaluation in their arrival back to the states. The study provides evidence that a student is capable of a quick acceleration of learning if forced to do so an adapt from international learning.

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APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Ethnography as Applied Learning, a Qualitative Explorative Ethnographic
Observational Study of Social Comparison.

Interview Questions

Students

1. Demographics:
 - a. Name, Age, School Classification
2. What location did you visit and how long?
3. How would describe your experience with talking to locals in your school and also when you went to different locations in the country?
4. Compared to your experience in your home university, how was Costa Rica's academic setting different?
5. How would you describe your stress levels while studying abroad, compared to your home university?
6. Did you ever notice anything significantly different about the school setting?
7. Do you have an on-campus or off-campus job? If so, describe if effect on your school performance.
8. Did you have a job while you were studying abroad?
9. Do you think having a job versus not having one affected your school performance?
10. How was your experience in the classroom as far as structure and grading versus your home university?
11. Did you stay with a host family? If so, what was your experience in living with them in a new culture?
12. What did you learn about the "pura vida" lifestyle and were you affected by the overarching concept?
13. How long do you think it took you to adjust the culture and what aspects did you find to be the most challenging?
14. In your overall study abroad experience, what advice would you give to another student in regards to international traveling?

Adviser

1. Demographics:
 - a. Name, Age, Job Description
2. How long have you been assisting students at the university?
3. Do students from Costa Rica usually work on campus or have an off-campus job?
4. Comparing students from Costa Rica and study abroad students, would you say there's a difference in the academic performance? For example, how concerned are the students about grades and structure?
5. How would you describe the overall stress levels of students in the study abroad program?
6. Do you believe that the students take on the "pura vida" mindset while living in Costa Rica? If so, how does it affect their actions or performance?
7. In your overall study abroad experience, what advice would you give to another student in regards to international traveling?

APPENDIX B- IRB APPROVAL

**Institutional Review Board**

Dept 4915
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TO: TriDereka Hall **IRB # 18-114**
 Dr. Christopher F Silver

FROM: Lindsay Pardue, Director of Research Integrity
 Dr. Amy Doolittle, IRB Committee Chair

DATE: 10/10/18

SUBJECT: IRB #18-114: Personal Ethnography as Applied Learning; a Qualitative Explorative Ethnographic Observational Study of Social Comparison

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Institutional Review Board. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the federal regulations that govern the protection of human subjects.

Specifically, 45 CFR 46.101(b) identifies studies that are exempt from IRB oversight. The UTC IRB Chairperson or his/her designee has determined that your proposed project falls within the category described in the following subsection of this policy:

46.101(b)(2): Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Even though your project is exempt from further IRB review, the research must be conducted according to the proposal submitted to the UTC IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an Application for Changes, Annual Review, or Project Termination/Completion form to the UTC IRB. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the UTC IRB.

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a comprehensive, community-engaged campus of the University of Tennessee System. 

APPENDIX C- PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

IRB Approval #: _____

Participant Consent Form

Title of study: Personal Ethnography as Applied Learning, a Qualitative Explorative Ethnographic Observational Study of Social Comparison.

Principal Investigators: faculty advisor Dr. Christopher F Silver and Student TriDereka Hall

School: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

INTRODUCTION:

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating the experiences of college student experiences in a study abroad program. For the portion you are about to participate in, researchers would like to explore how these experiences contribute to your current worldview. This will be accomplished by an interview with you and will examine, in depth, your life as a student or teacher. The results of this study will be made available to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY:

You have been chosen based on your experience with a study abroad program.

PROCEDURES:

In this study, we will ask you to participate in a short interview related to experiences with study abroad and your experiences in learning and adapting by students in the program. We will either interview you face to face or via an online program like Zoom or Skype. This interview will be recorded and stored in a secure location. We will then transcribe the interview and will remove any identifying information destroying the original audio file for your protection.

This interview will last between thirty minutes and one and a half hours depending on the length of your responses. Many people find interviews interesting and fun as they get to express opinions and ideas. Following your participation, you will be debriefed fully on the purpose of the survey. Your interview will be audio-recorded with your interview transcribed to ensure your responses are accurate in the final paper.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR BENEFITS:

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits involved in this study, and you will not be compensated for your time. However, the results of the study will be made available to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. While this interview will be audio-recorded, the data will be stored in a secure computer in the psychology office at UTC, accessible to our research team. Your name will not be given in the paper or shared with anyone else. Once your interview has been transcribed, we will remove information that could identify you. Your contact information for a potential follow up interview will be securely stored in a password protected encrypted hard drive only accessed by the student and Dr. Christopher Silver. Once the interview is completed, we will transcribe the interview and remove any personal identifying information such as your name, location, etc. Simply, identifying information about you will be removed, will not be used or distributed for future research.

RIGHT OF REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE AND WITHDRAWAL:

You are free to choose to participate or not participate in the study. You will not be penalized in any way, should you refuse to participate. You may also withdraw at any time from the study and may also

IRB Approval #: _____

refuse to answer some or all of the questions. If you choose to withdraw, the study will retain only the information it has already collected from you and you will not be contacted further by the study after withdrawing.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION OR REGISTER A CONCERN:

If you have any further questions you may contact Dr. Christopher Silver at 423-425-2185 or Christopher-Silver@utc.edu or to register a concern or file a complaint related to this research you can contact the supervising professor (and IRB Chair) Dr. Amy Doolittle at (423) 425-5563. This research study has been approved by UTC's Institutional Review Board.

AUTHORIZATION:

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. I understand that I will be audio recorded by the researcher. These audio recordings will be kept by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these tapes and that they will be destroyed by January 1, 2019. Interviews may be recording using audio recording to assist with the accuracy of your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording.

Please select one of the following options:

I consent to video/audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

I understand that I will be video or audio recorded by the researcher. These tapes will be kept by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these tapes and that they will destroyed by January 10, 2019.

Participant's Name (Printed or Typed):

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Signature of the person conducting the Informed Consent discussion:

Date:
