ROCKET Outreach Conference 2026 // Proposal for presentation
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Title of the presentation

Building intercultural competence through educational role-playing games.

Abstract

Intercultural competence is important for successful and appropriate communication and collaboration within and across a range of cultural groups of people. It comprises a set of curiosity and openness, a non-judgmental approach to new and unfamiliar situations, knowledge acquisition, and skill building (Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009). When participating in courses offered by the Intercultural Learning Lab at Goettingen University, students from all faculties can build intercultural competence and practice intercultural communication skills for their respective personal, academic, or professional contexts. Course learning goals include cultural awareness raising, shifting frames of reference and building empathy, among others and course design aims at creating transformational learning experiences, which can lead to a state of change and personal growth (Bowman 2022). Methods are driven by experiential learning activities and educational role-play and games, accompanied by guided reflection models (University of Edinburgh n.d.), through which students can analyze and reflect upon their experiences in the classroom.

Educational role-play has emerged as a powerful means to raise motivation for and identify with topics for intercultural learning (Schreiber 2022). The current PhD project pursued by the author researches the connections and impact between educational role-playing games and building intercultural competence for students in higher education. In the experiment, two courses for cultural awareness raising are examined: One that uses educational role-play and games and another that uses experiential learning activities. Both courses are accompanied by anonymous pre-, and post-surveys and guided interviews with participants.

This presentation introduces the preliminary findings of the 2025 pilot courses and the overall concepts and theories that inform this study. It discusses the challenges and benefits of role-playing games within the context of intercultural learning and invites the interested audience to connect with the topic from their own perspectives.

Disclosure: This research was approved by the University of Goettingen ethics committee on January 31, 2025.

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Sources

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Bio

Alexandra Schreiber is a lecturer for intercultural competence at Goettingen University in Germany, and a PhD student at its department of Intercultural German Studies. She is also a member of the ROCKET Erasmus+ consortium and oversees the Intercultural Learning Lab at Goettingen University. Schreiber obtained a master´s degree in intercultural studies at Danube University Krems in Austria and completed the certificate program "Transformative Game Design" at Uppsala University in Sweden in 2023. In her courses, she creates structures for intercultural learning experiences to promote cultural understanding and build intercultural competence. She includes educational role-play and games into her course design to facilitate learning experiences that have a potential for transformation and positive change. Her courses are open to students of all faculties who can choose from a range of topics and learning formats. In her PhD research, Alexandra Schreiber examines the connections between educational role-playing games and intercultural learning.