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PUBLICATION INFORMATION

The Global Impact Exchange

A Publication of Diversity Abroad

The Global Impact Exchange publication serves to advance domestic and international conversations around diversity, inclusion, and equity in global education with respect to the thematic focus identified in each edition.

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Summer 2024 Edition:

Empowering Inclusive Virtual Learning & Professional Development

Published September 2024

As the landscape of education evolves, virtual exchange and online global learning have become integral components of making global learning more accessible. To ensure the success of these initiatives, it is imperative that educators, staff, and others who administer or facilitate virtual exchanges and online global learning opportunities engage in continuous professional development, receive targeted training, and access relevant resources. The Summer 2024 Global Impact Exchange is open to submissions of abstracts that explore the essential aspects of professional development, training, and resources necessary for fostering inclusive and accessible learning environments for diverse learners participating in online global programs and virtual exchange programs.

INTRODUCTION



By **CHRISTINE SHIAU**

Executive Director,
The Stevens Initiative at
the Aspen Institute



By **ANDREW GORDON**

CEO & Founder,
Diversity Abroad

We are pleased to present the Summer 2024 edition of the Global Impact Exchange, a collaborative effort between Diversity Abroad and the Stevens Initiative. This issue delves into the critical domain of professional development, training, and resources essential for cultivating inclusive and accessible online global learning and virtual exchange programs.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, virtual exchange and online global learning have emerged as powerful tools for expanding access to global experiences. They offer effective, accessible, and meaningful ways to learn about other cultures, gain workforce skills, and feel connected to the world. We are grateful to learn about virtual exchange's impacts from the educators, staff, and facilitators who design and implement these programs. One facilitator recently shared, "Through [virtual exchange], we've significantly enriched the diversity and depth of our students' learning experiences, fostering a deep-seated understanding of global challenges." Another described virtual exchange as "an incredible opportunity for educators to collaborate and embrace pedagogy grounded in global citizenship."

Educators, staff, and facilitators play a critical role in reaching and inspiring our future leaders. To ensure that all learners, regardless

of their backgrounds or abilities, receive these opportunities to thrive, we must empower and equip virtual exchange leaders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources.

This edition of the Global Impact Exchange represents a continuation of Diversity Abroad's partnership with the Stevens Initiative, building upon the foundation laid by our Spring 2023 issue, which explored virtual exchange as a tool for advancing access and inclusion. The Stevens Initiative is focused on generating the next wave of global leaders to build peace and prosperity. We believe that by fostering dialogue, sharing best practices, and highlighting innovative approaches, we can collectively advance this vision while enhancing the impact of virtual exchange and online global learning for diverse learners worldwide.

The articles featured in this issue address a wide range of topics, including inclusive pedagogies, technology integration, cultural competence, assessment and evaluation, and more. They are designed to be invaluable resources for the entire virtual exchange field to explore ways to scale inclusive, accessible virtual exchange programs and chart a course for the future.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editorial team who have dedicated their time and expertise to making this issue possible. We also thank our readers for their continued support of the Global Impact Exchange.

We invite you to explore the articles within this issue, engage with the ideas presented, and join us in our ongoing efforts to promote inclusive excellence in international education. Together, we can build a future where all learners have the opportunity to benefit from the transformative power of global learning.

Co-constructing a Cross-Cultural Student Virtual Exchange Through a School-University Educator Community of Practice (CoP)

MARIE P. HIMES	Director of the New Literacies Collaborative at NC State University's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation
DR. SARAH B. BAUSELL	Research Scholar at NC State University's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation
MICHAEL ANGELO EHILLA BAIÑO	Biology and Cross-Cultural Virtual Exchange Teacher at Suzhou North America High School
XIAOHONG LIN	Asian Languages and Cultures Teacher at Coastal High School

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has gained momentum for fostering global competence and internationalizing curricula, offering a more accessible alternative to traditional study abroad programs (Hackett et al., 2023). In the K-12 space, COIL provides younger students and teachers the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural communication when physical travel across time, space, and cultures is difficult due to students' minor status and other structural barriers, e.g., cost, school calendars, and local instructional requirements (Hinshaw et al., 2022).

Virtual Exchange (VE) is a broader term that encompasses COIL and other online instructional approaches focusing on cross-cultural teaching and learning (O'Dowd, 2018). VE connects youth participants in "a more neutral third space" mediated through online technologies, as compared to traditional cultural exchanges when one group travels to another country (Stevens Initiative, 2024, n.p.). This shared space is co-constructed by adult facilitators, who "help students enter into the realm of collaborative inquiry and construction of knowledge, viewing their expanding repertoire of identities and communication strategies as resources in the process" (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 21).

This article describes a school-university partnership and how educators collaborated in a Community of Practice (CoP) to create a cross-

cultural VE between secondary students in China and the United States.

Background on the School-University Partnership

For nearly a decade, educational researchers at North Carolina State University's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation (Friday Institute) have facilitated collaborative learning opportunities between Suzhou North America High School (SNA), a private international secondary school in Suzhou, Jiangsu, China, and partner schools in the United States (Spires et al., 2018a). Through facilitating these cross-cultural school partnerships, the Friday Institute team has explored students' engagement in Border-Crossing Discourse (Spires et al., 2023) and teachers' and students' evolving cosmopolitan literacies and participation in cross-cultural inquiry (Spires et al., 2018b; 2019a; 2019b).

In spring 2022, Xiaohong Lin, an Asian languages and cultures teacher at Coastal High School (CHS), a public charter secondary school in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, USA, reached out to Marie Himes and Sarah Bausell at the Friday Institute seeking a connection with a partner school in China. Ms. Lin wanted to enhance her students' understandings of Chinese culture and language through a collaborative learning experience with similarly aged peers living in China.

Ms. Lin believed that a VE between her U.S. students and students in China would be an opportunity to “create a learning community beyond the classroom” and cultivate her students’ “open-mindedness and global competence.” As an international teacher from China living and working in the US, Ms. Lin was keenly aware of rising political tensions between China and the US. These tensions motivated Ms. Lin to seek cross-cultural student connections, seeing the possibilities for “learning from each other so they [students] can see the potential for collaboration in the future and have a different source of information on China and the US than just social media and the news.”

After an introductory conversation with Ms. Lin, Ms. Himes reached out to SNA contacts to gauge interest and capacity for a VE. As an international school, SNA aims to provide students with an educational environment in which they can “develop an international perspective” through internationalized curricula, extracurricular activities, and international exchange opportunities (SNA, n.d., n.p.). Thus, SNA Assistant Principal, Carolyn Gao, was eager to speak with the school’s faculty and find a teacher from the SNA side to lead this VE.

Michael Angelo Ehillia Baiño, an international teacher at SNA from the Philippines, was selected by Ms. Gao for the teacher leadership role. Mr. Baiño’s motivation for partnering in this VE was twofold: (1) “wanting students to learn more about

other cultures” and (2) supporting students in “realizing how cross-cultural interactions can build mutual respect and understanding.” As a biology teacher at SNA, Mr. Baiño recognized that he and his students would be engaging in the VE in an extracurricular fashion, which provided some added logistical and curricular flexibility; however, it also presented some drawbacks in terms of SNA student recruitment, available time investment, and academic alignment.

In the summer of 2022, Ms. Lin, Mr. Baiño, Ms. Himes, and Dr. Bausell held an organizational meeting prior to the beginning of the 2022-23 academic year, marking the beginning of our school-university Community of Practice (CoP).

Co-Constructing a School-University Educator Community of Practice

Hinshaw et al. (2022) highlighted teachers’ professional development through the facilitation of VE as it “directly and indirectly exposes teachers to cross-cultural perspectives” (p. 2). In addition to the professional growth experienced by educators via cross-cultural interactions in designing and implementing VE, facilitators also navigate challenging contextual factors, including time differences, restricted and uneven access to technology, and local instructional requirements, e.g., instructional standards, curricular sequences, and standardized assessments (Baroni et al., 2019; O’Dowd, 2018).

Co-constructing a Community of Practice (CoP), as originally conceptualized by Wenger (1998), with the school- and university-based educators facilitating this cross-cultural student VE offered a professional learning orientation toward enhancing educators’ relevant skills and knowledge in VE while also strengthening our collegial network through collaborative problem-solving. Moreover, with the goal of cultivating understanding and community among students in the VE across

cultural contexts, a CoP provided educator participants with opportunities to experientially mirror students' explorations of "interaction, mutual dependence, and identification with a group" (Westheimer & Kahne, 1993, p. 325).

As educators and experts on their school community contexts and students, Mr. Baiño and Ms. Lin brought to bear insider knowledge in our CoP alongside Ms. Himes and Dr. Bausell's expertise as university-based educators in connecting educators and students across time, space, and cultures to create a shared vision for student learning in the VE. Four principles have guided our CoP:

1. Cultivating students' global competence is the core function of our VE.

Given VE student participants' differing instructional contexts, e.g., VE as an extracurricular activity at SNA and integrated into an elective Asian literature and cultures course at CHS, Mr. Baiño, Ms. Lin, Ms. Himes, and Dr. Bausell had to first co-create a shared vision for the purpose of the VE. To co-create this shared vision, CoP members asked themselves in what way participation in a VE could bring value to both schools' student communities. This shared vision acted as a guidepost for subsequent decisions made in the CoP.

2. Decisions are consensus driven.

Since members of the CoP were participating based on their roles with differing organizations, it was particularly important to establish this norm early on in community formation. Ms. Himes and Dr. Bausell were particularly cognizant of how their positions within an institution of higher education and as the connecting parties between the two school-based educators could be perceived and/or leveraged to disproportionately influence the decision-making process within the CoP; however,

all parties recognized the value in the insider and outsider perspectives that each member brought to the CoP and, therefore, understood the importance of community co-construction through consensus-making.

3. Active participation in regular synchronous communication is expected.

Communication is an integral part of dynamic communities. Thus, to effectively carry out the core function of the cross-cultural student VE through consensus-driven decisions, Ms. Lin, Mr. Baiño, Ms. Himes, and Dr. Bausell needed to co-construct a schedule for regular synchronous communication. CoP members developed a communication plan that included opportunities to connect synchronously and virtually before, during, and after each student VE session. CoP virtual meetings that took place before each student VE session offered opportunities for members to co-design the student sessions; group chats during each student VE session afforded CoP members with opportunities to check in and make in-the-moment adjustments to instructional implementation; and post-VE session virtual meetings provided opportunities for reflection and revision among CoP members moving forward. The co-constructed communication plan contributed to creating a rhythm for the CoP and VE.

4. Roles and responsibilities of CoP members may differ and evolve overtime.

While co-construction and consensus-making are hallmarks of a CoP, so too is the understanding that CoPs invite different levels and styles of participation. In this CoP, Ms. Himes served primarily as the coordinator to organize synchronous CoP and student VE session activities. Mr. Baiño and Ms. Lin took on leadership roles in terms of instructional implementation with students before, during, and after VE sessions and

provided important and necessary feedback during CoP reflection sessions. During year one of our CoP, Dr. Bausell attended synchronous meetings and supported Ms. Himes, Ms. Lin, and Mr. Baiño in creating instructional materials for the VE and in acting as a thought partner. In year two, her role shifted to being an asynchronous thought partner and to documenting the CoP and cross-cultural student VE for research purposes. As the cross-cultural student VE between SNA and CHS enters its third year, CoP membership and members' roles and responsibilities will continue to evolve.

Conclusion

In collaboratively developing a cross-cultural student VE, school- and university-based educators have co-constructed and operated within a CoP to iteratively address VE design and implementation. The CoP approach has afforded participants with opportunities that mirror what their students are experiencing through VE to engage in and reflect on how their professional and personal identities shape and are shaped by engagement in cross-cultural dialogue. To view a short video from the 2022-23 cross-cultural student VE, please visit https://go.ncsu.edu/ccsve_snachs22-23.

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The Impact of Virtual Exchange on the concept of Global Citizenship

JAWHAR BEN SLAMA

Facilitator and Coach, Soliya Virtual Exchange Program

“My daughter tried to take her own life several times and I am not sure how to approach the situation.” This was what Laura said in one of the virtual exchange programs I was facilitating. The group consisted of 10 participants from different regions of the world. They connected on Zoom each week to share their perspectives and experiences around a specific topic. The topic that week was about social media and its impacts on our mental health.

The group didn't know how to respond to what Laura shared and hoped someone could take the mic and break the silence. After a few seconds of silence, I asked Laura, “Would you like to elaborate more if you are comfortable with that?”

Participants may bring up sensitive topics like personal traumas, religion, or politics during virtual exchanges. The key is not to shy away from these discussions but to engage with them fully. As virtual exchange facilitators, we are equipped with various tools and techniques to spot learning opportunities and capitalize on them. One of the tools we use is asking follow-up questions. This not only lets participants elaborate on their feelings and thoughts but also model questions that we encourage participants to ask.

Laura shared that her teenage daughter was dealing with depression and other mental health issues. She had several suicide attempts and had to go through therapy and counseling sessions. Laura expressed that her daughter's situation was confusing for her especially because she is providing her with everything she needs.

I gave Laura the space to share and neutralize her emotions. This could build a safer space for authentic and fruitful discussions. Other techniques

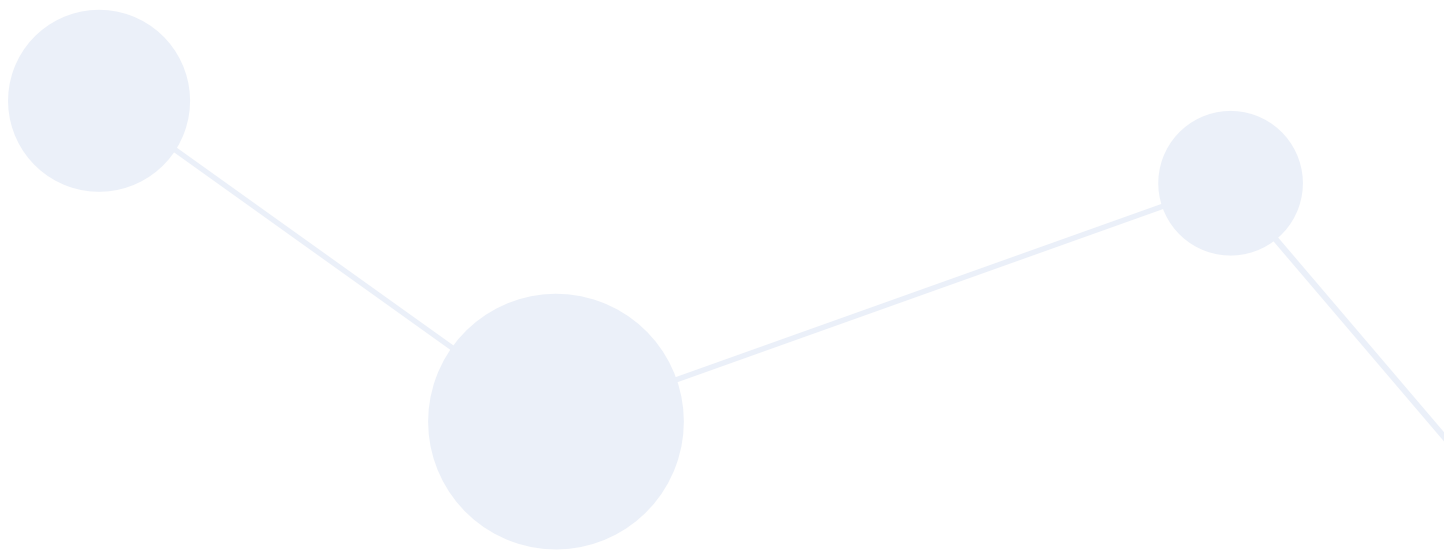
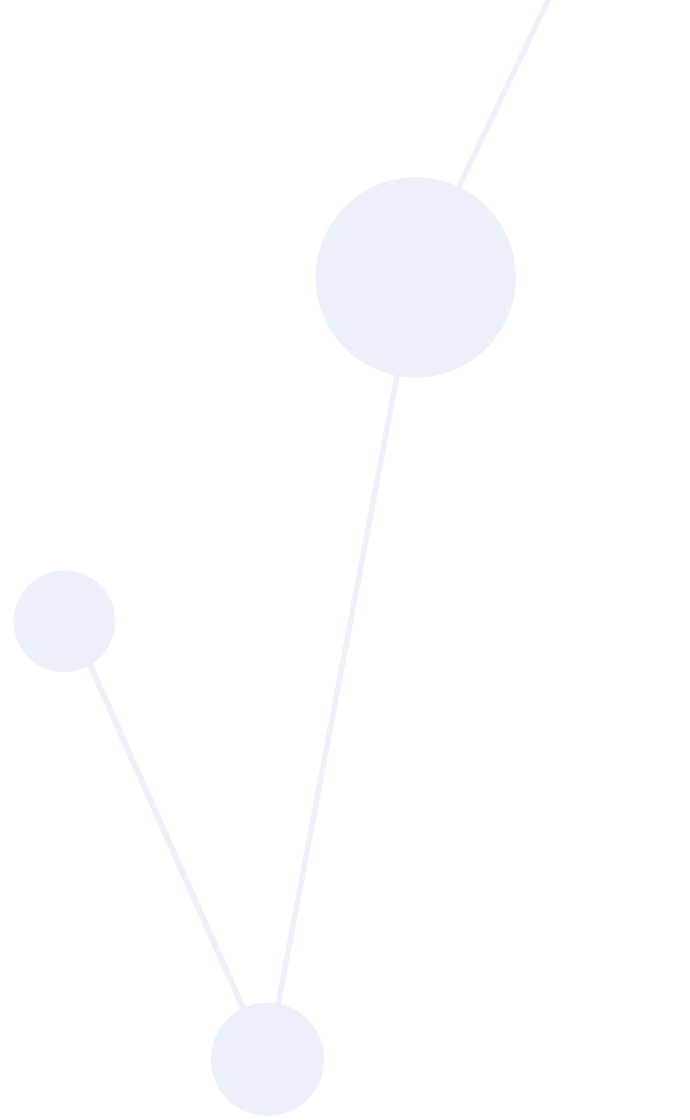
that we can use include having meta discussions, which are discussions about how the discussions are going so far, reflections on assumptions, and emphasis on being open-minded when approaching these types of conversations.

And at the end of each week, we give space to participants to share their concerns, feedback, and any recommendations which would give us insights to plan for the next session.

The group was able to give Laura words of support and encouragement. One of the participants shared his experience with depression and how he started the journey to healing. Many of the stories shared enabled Laura to understand her daughter's struggles more, and at the end of the program she reflected on the program by writing: “I got emotional listening to a young man telling the group about his struggles, which were the exact same struggles my immediate family was experiencing. Through him I began to have a better understanding of the issues my family members are going through. Their experiences were so much alike. I am so grateful I got the opportunity to LISTEN to him. My family member tells me you don't understand. This young man has helped me tremendously!!”

Being a part of these conversations made me realize the importance of the tools we apply to foster engaging, authentic, and constructive discussions. From asking critical thinking questions to conducting meta discussions, we aim as facilitators to create an environment in which participants feel heard and seen even in a virtual setting.

Through this process, we realize that while we are all different, we are also equal—there is no superior or inferior human being. Our differences stem from our unique stories, traditions, cultures, and beliefs. In Virtual Exchange, our goal is to embrace these differences and explore why we think the way we do. For instance, was there an encounter or experience that shaped our political views? Or an event or person that influenced how we perceive mental health issues? Answering these questions fosters a proactive environment where participants learn with and from each other. By the end of the experience, participants come to understand that stories like Laura’s are happening all around us. We just need to approach one another with greater empathy and compassion to build resilience in the face of challenges.



First-generation Students Bring a Curious and Open Mindset to Online Community-based Global Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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I. Background and methods

In order to better understand the potential of online community-based learning for fostering global citizenship capacities in an increasingly interconnected and digitized world, the study examined data from three institutions in the United States who moved their in-person community-based global learning programs to the fully online modality during COVID school closures. College students in the sample worked with a range of community partners, for example a non-profit working with migrants in Mexico and a healthcare clinic in Ghana. And common projects included activities like organizing virtual conferences, creating digital archives, and applying for grants.

The study utilized data from the [Global Engagement Survey](#) (GES) (n = 187) collected primarily during the summer of 2020. The GES is a pre-/post mixed-methods tool which assesses student global learning related to three components: cultural humility, global citizenship, and critical reflection (Hartman et al., 2015). Zoom interviews with alumni (n = 23) were conducted during the summer of 2023, which was one to three years after program completion. More details about this study can be found in the full [dissertation](#).

II. Findings and analysis:

As a purpose-driven study, the aim of this research was to produce results and recommendations for effective and inclusive teaching and learning practices. Thus, analysis included disaggregating data by key demographic factors including first-generation to college status. And mixed-methods analysis found that first-generation students participating in an online community-based global learning program reported greater gains in learning than their non-first-generation peers.

Quantitative analysis

Independent-sample t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference in mean pre- and post-survey scores where $p \leq .039$ between first-generation students (n = 40) and non-first-generation students (n = 140) on 7 of the 8 survey scales. The chart below details mean change scores (mean pre-survey score subtracted from mean post-survey score), standard deviations, and p-values for the 8 survey scales.

Non-First Gen and First Gen independent t-test results on the 8 scales

	Openness to Diversity	Cultural Adaptability	Civic Efficacy	Political Voice	Conscious Consumption	Global Civic Responsibility	Human Rights Beliefs	Critical Reflection
Non-First Gen Mean Change Score	.14	.08	.25	.25	.20	.19	.0018	.12
Non-First Gen SD	.365	.361	.452	.620	.340	.478	.355	.313
First Gen Mean Change Score	.38	.29	.59	.48	.36	.42	.08	.29
First Gen SD	.389	.381	.461	.593	.406	.511	.198	.386
p	≤.001	=.002	≤.001	=.039	=.013	=.010	=.214	=.003

Created with Datawrapper

Thus, quantitative analysis found that after participating in an online community-based learning program, first-generation students reported greater learning gains compared to their non-first-generation peers.

Student demographics

Qualitative analysis of survey and interview data sheds light on the quantitative findings above. Qualitative analysis suggests that first-generation students who are more likely to be non-White, born outside of the United States, and low-income than non-first-generation students in the sample brought attitudes and lived experiences—openness to an unfamiliar learning environment, intrinsic motivation for experiential learning, intercultural collaboration, and experience with resisting systems of oppression—which facilitated their learning. An overview of student demographics is presented in the table below.

First-gen and non first-gen key demographics

	Non First-Gen		First-Gen	
	n=140	%	n=40	%
Age				
Trad. college age (≤23)	113	81%	32	80%
Not trad. college age (≥24)	27	19%	8	20%
Gender identity				
Female	114	81%	31	78%
Male	26	19%	8	20%
Other gender identity	0	0%	1	3%
Race/ethnic identity				
African American/Black	14	10%	4	10%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	1	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	37	26%	11	28%
Hispanic/Latino	5	4%	9	23%
White	59	42%	9	23%
Other racial/ethnic identity (includes bi or multi-racial)	25	18%	6	15%
Non-White	81	58%	31	78%
Country of birth				
Born in the US	114	81%	30	75%
Not born in the US	26	19%	10	25%
Combined parent income				
<\$25,000-\$49,999	19	14%	19	48%
\$50,000-\$99,000	25	18%	8	20%
\$100,000-\$199,000	48	34%	7	18%
≥\$200,000	27	19%	1	8%
Missing	21		5	

Qualitative analysis

This article focuses on how one particular attitude—a strong sense of openness and curiosity—may have been a way that first-generation students sustained motivation despite uncertainty and barriers that came with participating in an unfamiliar learning environment in the middle of a global pandemic.

Non-first-generation students: Online as an ok alternative to the “real” experience

Many non-first-generation students said that they saw the online program as preparation for future in-person learning experiences like study abroad, internships, volunteerism, or community-based learning. These students viewed the in-person experience as “real” and the online as an *ok alternative* given the circumstances of not being able to travel or have in-person contact during the pandemic. It was common for non-first-generation students to state things like, “If this was an *actual* program, I would have probably been traveling around India and the survey that I ended-up creating would have gone out far earlier.” It is possible that non-first-generation students had fixed ideas from their family and friends about what their college experience was supposed to look like—internship sophomore year, study abroad junior year, apply to graduate school in their senior year. In fact, one non-first-generation student said the only reason they participated in the online program was that the competitive summer internships in their field of Architecture did not happen during the pandemic.

First-generation: Online as a great opportunity

What is most revealing is that no first-generation students in the interview sample expressed the view that the online program was an *ok alternative* to the “real” experience. Instead interview data revealed that first-generation students overwhelmingly viewed the online program as a *great opportunity*, such as the student who said, “I pray that such opportunities could be available for other people because it was beneficial for me. I would love to do more of this, and it exposed me to a lot of knowledge and skills.” It seems that first-generation students were less stuck in ideas about “how things are supposed to be” than their non-first-generation peers, and more willing to engage open-mindedly in a learning experience that was not what they expected.

Research in the field of positive psychology shows that people who display mindsets such as openness and curiosity are better able to explore, take risks, and trust others; therefore, openness and curiosity are agents of personal growth and learning (Neff et al., 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, approaching the unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable experience of online community-based learning with an open and curious mindset may have spurred greater learning for first-generation students compared to their non-first-generation peers.

III. Recommendation: Guide students to sustain uncertainty

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with rapidly developing technology like artificial intelligence and virtual reality, *all* students need to be able to sustain uncertainty both inside and outside of the classroom. Below, I provide two recommendations and resources for global educators.

a. Guide students to reflect on their strengths

This analysis suggests that first-generation students came into the online global learning experience with attitudes and lived experiences that helped them to thrive; however, students may not be consciously aware of how their lived experiences can be strengths. This can be especially true for students who are traditionally marginalized in higher education, like first-generation students, who have been told their whole lives that their background (e.g., not having family to guide them in the college process or not speaking English as their first language) is solely a challenge to overcome rather than also an asset. I suggest that educators provide concrete language and a framework for students to think about how their lived experiences are strengths, such as Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth, which could be useful for all students but especially for those who are traditionally marginalized. Further, educators should provide a way for students to reflect on their strengths through writing and discussion; an example is Worcester Polytechnic Institute's evidence-based [asset mapping exercise](#).

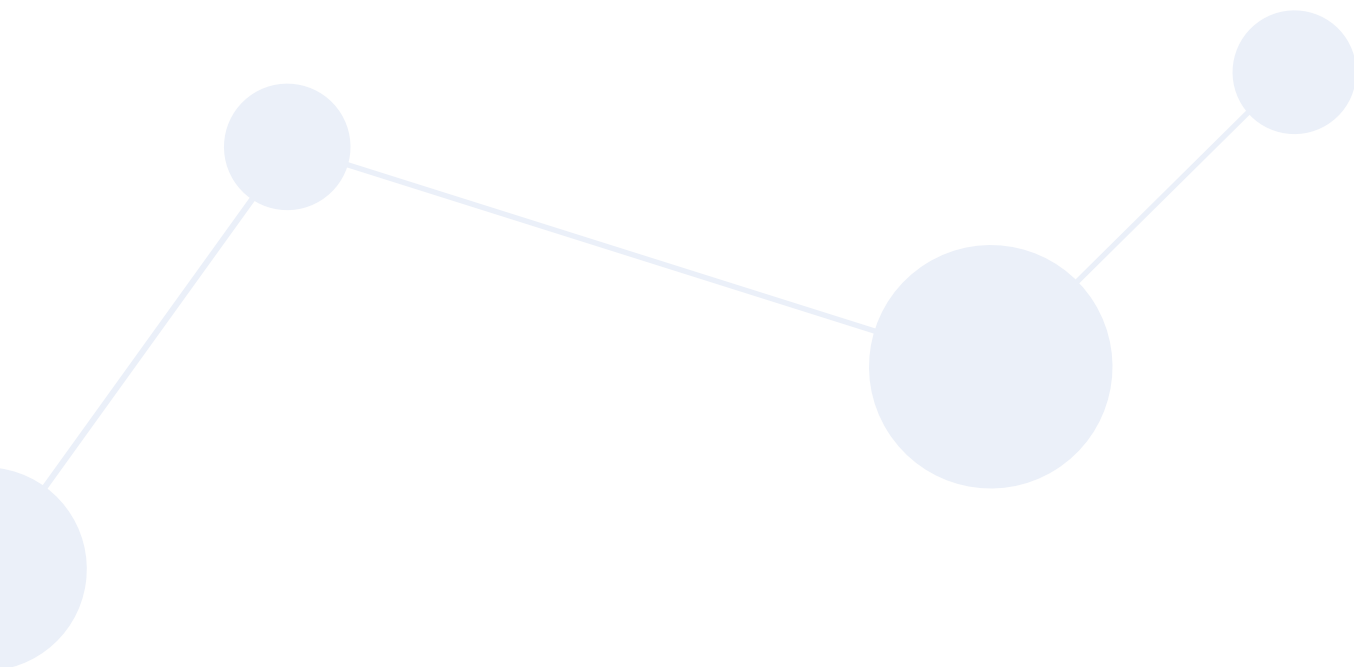
b. Introduce mindfulness

This study found that an open and curious mindset in first-generation students fostered greater learning gains while engaging with the uncertain experience of online community-based learning during a global pandemic. Research supports that practicing mindfulness exercises, such as meditation or walking in nature, can help individuals feel a sense of calm and safety that allows them to be open to new experiences as well as recognize joy amidst uncertainty (Fredrickson, 2009; Neff, 2011). Thus, I suggest that introducing students to mindfulness exercises may help cultivate an open and curious mindset and identify joy in educational and life experiences that are new and uncertain. Motivated by my study findings, I have developed a resource for global educators interested in teaching mindfulness in their own classrooms: [Mindfulness exercises to prepare for community based global learning](#).



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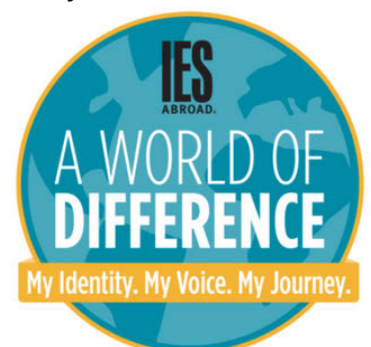
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Macro-principles for Virtual Exchange: Pedagogical Intentionality, Criticality, and Plurality

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Maximizing the potential of virtual exchanges to decolonize virtual mobility through the intercultural co-construction of knowledge is a compelling idea. Virtual exchanges can be powerful learning experiences that enable learners to collaborate across geographical boundaries and approach a task or project by leveraging students’ diverse identities, disciplinary knowledge, and worldviews. The literature on virtual exchanges has expanded in recent years, highlighting the learning benefits for students and the challenges of implementing collaborative projects mediated by technology across cultures (Mittelmeier, Rienties, Gunter, & Raghuram, 2021; Gutiérrez, Gilmäng, Sauro & O’Dowd, 2022, Huang & Landford, 2024; Hamada & Iwasaki, 2024). A clear gap in the literature, however, is understanding the conditions and dispositions that best support educators in designing virtual exchange projects that yield robust and equitable learning benefits.

With this aim, researchers from Monash University and The Pennsylvania State University have been collaborating since mid-2023 to co-create and collate a suite of resources to support educators in designing and implementing equitable and mutually beneficial virtual exchange projects. After a critical review of existing virtual exchange toolkits and websites, we identified current gaps in available faculty support from project inception through research and dissemination of results. Further, our multidisciplinary team of global educators have reflected on our experiences in virtual mobility, as administrators, instructional designers, and educators to map out the major milestones that would support other educators in designing virtual exchange programs (i.e.,

forming partnerships, designing projects and activities, preparing students, implementing COIL projects and activities, assessing outcomes, and conducting research). To achieve this, an iterative process incorporating peer feedback and collective decision-making has been implemented, aligning with the core principles of online collaboration in education. Our negotiations and collaborations have highlighted the need for clear foundational principles that support and guide educators in designing and implementing inclusive, equitable, and pedagogically sound virtual exchange programs within their institutions.

Based on this work, we propose three macro-level guiding principles that can guide educators

in developing meaningful and equitable virtual exchange projects: (1) pedagogical intentionality, (2) criticality, and (3) plurality. These macro-level principles prompt educators to reflexively consider how virtual mobility initiatives can be developed and positioned so that they result in a meaningful co-construction of knowledge(s).

Pedagogical intentionality

Pedagogical intentionality involves deliberate planning and execution of teaching practices to achieve specific educational outcomes. This concept emphasizes decision-making processes where educators thoughtfully consider the purpose of introducing virtual exchanges at classroom, institutional, and cross-institutional levels. It involves blending pedagogy and subject content, understanding what is to be taught, learned, and assessed, how learners learn, ways to facilitate effective learning, and scaffolding learning through content and pedagogy (Jones & Moreland, 2015). By emphasizing pedagogical intentionality as a macro-principle, we highlight the agency of educators in purposefully designing learning exchanges; this stands in contrast to creating virtual exchange projects that fall into the “let’s just see what happens” approach. Pedagogical intentionality underscores the need for reasoned and structured approaches to fostering intercultural learning instead of assuming that intercultural learning will occur as a natural by-product of virtual exchange (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

Criticality

For virtual exchanges to foster intercultural co-construction of knowledge(s) across geographical boundaries, criticality is fundamental. Criticality encompasses being attuned to wider socio-historical dimensions that shape physical and virtual mobilities (of ideas and practices) and grounding virtual exchange practices in continuous

self-reflection. Decoloniality can support educators in actualizing criticality. Decoloniality can be understood as “first and foremost liberation of knowledge, [...] of understanding and affirming subjectivities that have been devalued by narratives of modernity that are constitutive of the control matrix of power” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 146). Adopting a decolonial approach in virtual exchanges means embracing difference as constitutive of educational relationships and designing projects that challenge dominant global narratives perpetuated by modernity.

Another important corollary of criticality is ensuring both equality of opportunities and outcomes in virtual exchange. Equity and inclusion help educators consider all stakeholders, design projects to address disadvantages, and foster a sense of belonging. Equity focuses on achieving equality of outcomes, not just opportunities. This means, for example, designing projects that can leverage learners’ multilingual repertoires instead of framing knowledge of languages other than English as a “deficit” that needs to be compensated for (Robbins, 2023; Pineda & Bosso, 2023).

Plurality

Virtual exchange offers a third space, described as an interruptive and interrogative space, where multiple discourses can be woven together without sacrificing or dismissing the importance of their speakers’ experiences and ways of knowing the world (Bhabha, 1994; Wimpenny et al., 2022). This plurality of third spaces can act as a powerful counterbalance to scenarios where virtual exchange is implemented expressly for some groups of students, usually from the Global North, to become more interculturally competent through interactions with “other” groups, usually from the Global South. Challenging and breaking down these North-South power dynamics is imperative for engendering non-hegemonic approaches to

virtual exchange pedagogies (Breaden et al., 2023). Intercultural plurality, then, is especially important in virtual exchange as it “suggests a permanent and active process of negotiation and interrelation in which difference does not disappear. Sociocultural, ancestral, political, epistemic, linguistic, and existence-based difference is affirmed in collective and community-based terms and understood as contributive to the creation of new comprehensions, coexistences, solidarities, and collaborations” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 59). Plurality supports a true shift in knowledge production and uptake, recognizing and incorporating multiple languages, perspectives, and knowledge in virtual exchange projects.

Conclusion

These three macro-level principles—pedagogical intentionality, criticality, and plurality—work together to establish a dispositional space that can guide educators in designing and implementing effective and equitable virtual exchange projects. By embracing these guiding principles, educators can harness the full potential of virtual exchanges to create inclusive, decolonial, and sustainable educational experiences that prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world. Future research should focus on evaluating the impact of these principles on virtual exchange outcomes and student learning.

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