

International Learning for EdD Learners: Short Study Trips and Virtual Exchange

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the potential of short international study trips and virtual exchanges to foster EdD learner engagement with new ideas, practices, and peoples in other parts of the world. To frame the discussion, I consider alignment of frequently articulated goals for international learning with CPED (2022) Guiding Principles for Program Design, and related EdD preparation needs in three areas: culture and communication, global views, and professional expertise. I draw on research literature and my own work to discuss goals, curricular activities, and reported evidence associated with both approaches. I identify strengths and challenges for each approach. The essay concludes with recommendations for designing and leading short study trips and virtual exchanges for EdD learners.

KEYWORDS

international, short study abroad, virtual exchange

Educators and leaders in PK-12 and higher education need a culturally responsive mindset, expertise in their field, and an understanding of the larger global context within which their students will one day work and live. International study trips and virtual exchanges hold ingredients for impactful experiential learning as education doctorate (EdD) learners visit new places; encounter different practices, problems, and solutions; and engage with individuals from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. As professionals, EdD learners possess a career, specialized training, established expectations for teaching and learning, and a peer group that shares beliefs and values about the profession (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). A well-designed international study trip or virtual exchange may offer the type of learning experience that supports an EdD learner's deep exploration of established and new beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and practices.

Study abroad and virtual exchange are core activities in the international education field (e.g., Deardorff & Jones, 2022; Pasquarelli, 2018; Stevens Initiative, 2024), yet there are limited resources available specific to designing this type of programming for EdD learners. (This essay defines short study trips as those with a duration of several days up to a few weeks.) Short study trips for EdD learners are a periodic presentation topic at the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) annual convening and other professional conferences. Virtual exchange—an approach that uses technology for interaction between geographically disparate learners—is expanding rapidly in higher education, but not yet in the EdD field.

While these experiences hold exciting possibilities, they are typically resource-intensive, requiring time to design and implement—and, perhaps most challenging, financial costs when travel is involved. An international learning experience can range from interesting interludes to transformative shifts in beliefs,

and knowledge. For those EdD faculty who believe international learning is worth the time and effort, the question becomes how to design an experience that maximizes learning.

This essay offers a framework for exploring what short faculty-led international study trips and virtual exchanges might offer EdD preparation. The essay considers alignment of frequently articulated goals for international learning with the CPED (2022) Guiding Principles for Program Design and preparation needs of EdD learners. Goals, curricular activities, and reported evidence are examined. The essay then compares dimensions of these two models to consider their strengths and challenges. The essay concludes with recommendations for designing and leading short study trips and virtual exchanges for EdD learners.

BACKGROUND

This essay stems from my exploration of how to embed international learning into a small EdD in Educational Leadership program. Having personally experienced the transformative power of travel and listened to accounts from my EdD learners, I wanted to better understand what occurs during an international encounter, how to enhance this experience, and what impacts on professional practice are possible. In 2018, I began collaborating with colleagues to develop and lead short study trips, Collaborative Online International Exchange (COIL) virtual exchanges, and combinations of these two approaches. Study trips have included destinations in Australia, Finland, and Scotland. COILs have been conducted with faculty in Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Scotland.

In tandem, I turned to the peer-reviewed literature. My search of EBSCO databases and Google Scholar yielded nine accounts of U.S. faculty-led short study trips for EdD and other graduate learners in



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educational leadership and administration. Several of these sources noted the seeming scarcity of short study trips designed for educational leadership and administration learners (e.g., Richardson et al., 2014; Richardson et al., 2020). Unable to find peer-reviewed accounts of virtual exchanges for graduate learners in educational leadership, I conducted a formal literature review of graduate-level virtual exchange using modified systematic procedures to identify 16 English-language sources (Shiffman, 2023). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) provided guidance for searching and reporting results. I conducted systematic searches of ERIC and EBSCO academic databases and the *Journal of Virtual Exchange*. I systematically reviewed abstracts in the UNICollaboration's Virtual Exchange and Telecollaboration Zotero Group. In addition, I reviewed four sources that I had previously identified in Google Scholar. The 16 sources described course-based graduate-to-graduate exchanges occurring in a range of fields and disciplines. These courses were identified as 'graduate,' 'master's,' or 'doctoral' level. No EdD courses were identified. For the review, I analyzed characteristics, learning goals, structures, activities, reported outcomes, and adult learning principles.

GOALS OF INTERNATIONAL LEARNING AND THE EDD

The stated aims of international learning are often lofty. Goals may be multiple and intertwined. Three types of learning goals hold particular relevance for EdD learners. These goals target knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the cultural and communicative arena, global views for citizenship and workforce development, and professional expertise.

Culture and Communication

Cultural goals are a major focus of international learning, either playing a central or supporting role (Pasquarelli, 2018; Stevens Initiative, 2024). These may appear in a variety of forms (e.g., cultural, intercultural, cross-cultural, multicultural), undergirded by particular orientations, assumptions, and emphases. For example, 'cross-cultural' emphasizes comparisons, while 'intercultural' foregrounds interaction.

Cultural goals align with the CPED (2022) Guiding Principles for Program Design and priorities in the education and educational leadership fields. CPED's third design principle—"develop[ing] and demonstrat[ing] collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities" (The CPED Framework, para. 9)—can be supported by international learning that fosters cultural awareness and intercultural engagement. These goals also align with culturally responsive tenets that emphasize understanding one's values, beliefs, and dispositions, leading preparing and supporting teachers/faculty and staff to be culturally responsive, creating inclusive environments, and engaging with students, families, and communities (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Global Views

Another thematic cluster of goals takes a global view. It is broad, encompassing different orientations and imperatives yet sharing a vision of the world that is deeply interconnected and interdependent. Global learning focuses individuals' awareness of and relationship to the larger world. In undergraduate education, this involves "critical

analysis of and engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability" (American Association of Colleges & Universities, 2009, Global Learning VALUE Rubric, p.1). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are a popular tool for framing a global learning experience (United Nations, n.d.). Twenty-first century workforce development goals are also global, focusing on building learners' knowledge and skills to participate in a world economy and with international colleagues.

Study trips and virtual exchanges with global-oriented goals can prepare EdD learners to both model and prioritize this orientation in the schools and higher education institutions where they work and lead. Global learning goals connect to CPED's (2022) first and second design principles. The first principle emphasizes questioning and generating solutions that address "equity, ethics, and social justice" (The CPED Framework section, para. 7). The second focuses on preparing leaders who can "construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities" (The CPED Framework section, para. 8). A global view also aligns with a variety of education policy efforts. Many American states have articulated a 'profile' or 'portrait' of a high school graduate who possesses the types of knowledge and skills (e.g., critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity) expected to position students for success in careers and life (Stanford, 2023). As noted above, these emphases are also evident in undergraduate education (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2009).

Professional Expertise

Another thematic cluster concentrates on deeper insight into a discipline or field by encountering different perspectives and challenging dominant paradigms. This aligns with CPED (2022) fourth, fifth and sixth principles for program design: 4) providing field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and using multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions; 5) developing a professional knowledge base; and 6) "emphasiz[ing] the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice" (The CPED Framework section, paras. 10, 11, 12). In the context of educational leadership preparation, international learning experiences are opportunities to examine and reflect on the cultural contexts and underexamined paradigms of leadership (Danzig & Jing, 2007). Without evaluating these frameworks or recognizing the role of context, efforts to borrow ideas and practices from other countries and communities are likely to fail or—at a minimum—not meet desired results.

EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

While higher education institutions have invested heavily in and enthusiastically touted a range of student outcomes—personal, professional, and societal—the evidence is less well-understood (Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2022). Historically, ambiguous goals, methodological issues, and a focus on outputs (e.g., number of students participating in the international experience) rather than learning outcomes characterized the evidence. However, this is changing. Evidence may be drawn from a range of sources—pre/post assessments of change using instructor-created or validated instruments, student assignments and reflections, student feedback



from interviews or surveys, curricular materials, and other faculty-generated artifacts. For designers of EdD international experiences, an essential question concerns how such learning is applied to professional practice. Evidence is easier to collect before, during, and/or soon after the experience but this may yield more information about intentions than how insights are actually incorporated into professional practice.

SHORT INTERNATIONAL STUDY TRIPS

Study abroad is far less prevalent in graduate education generally and the education fields, specifically. A 2019 survey found only 3.4% of graduate students at U.S. institutions participated in overseas learning (Sanger & Mason, 2019). Graduate students in the education fields accounted for just 5% of this 3.4%. Participation was typically voluntary and of short duration (eight weeks or less).

Goals

Goals for short study trips in educational leadership and related programs have focused on cultural understanding, global issues in education, and international comparisons. Cultural goals are often prominent and reflect the variation in terminology and theoretical foundations found in the broader international education field. For example, a study trip to London for EdD learners focused on developing culturally-responsive leadership (Richardson et al., 2020), while a trip to Qatar for graduate students in higher education administration focused on building intercultural competence (Haber & Getz, 2011). Goals related to building professional expertise and global orientations have taken a comparative stance. EdD learners have compared educational systems, contexts, and practices; and global issues impacting education, such as discrimination, immigration, language, and testing (Danzig & Jing, 2007; Richardson et al., 2014, Richardson et al., 2020). My colleagues and I have designed short study trips focused on comparing professional practices, the sociocultural context of education, and its relationship to professional practice.

Curriculum

Pasquarelli (2018) outlined “academically sound, culturally relevant design principles” (p. 38) that should guide all aspects of the short faculty-led study trip. To be academically sound, learning should be experiential and constructivist, with an emphasis on learners’ meaning-making. To be culturally relevant, the experience should match the chosen site and “integrate intercultural awareness” (p. 38). Guided reflection and outcomes-based assessment are core practices throughout the three phases that can be achieved using multiple methods (e.g., journals, critical incident reporting).

Short study trips have a three-phase structure: pre-departure, in-country, and post-travel (Pasquarelli, 2018). Pre-departure might be a course, and/or activities (e.g., research, readings, lectures, discussions, and reflections). Preparations for graduate educational leadership trips have focused on professional, research, and personal intentions for the trip, and country- and context-specific cultural, linguistic, and educational issues (Danzig & Jing, 2007; Haber & Getz, 2011; Richardson et al, 2020). Once in country, learners have visited schools and/or universities, met with various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, leaders, students, university faculty, governmental officials), attended lectures and debriefings, and

visited cultural sites. Some trips have incorporated further engagement with local peers by completing joint projects (Haber & Getz, 2011) and interacting one-on-one when shadowing school leaders (Richardson et al., 2014). Post-trip activities have included reflections, presentations, and/or papers.

Evidence

Study trips lend themselves to outcomes centered on learner awareness and understanding of self, one’s professional practice, and local context. Self-oriented learning is one component of intercultural/cultural competence models and culturally responsive teaching and leadership (e.g., Deardorff & Jones, 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). Haber and Getz (2011) concluded their master’s and doctoral learners studying higher education leadership increased “intercultural awareness, knowledge, sensitivity, and competence” (p. 476). Richardson and colleagues (2020) found significant improvement in cultural competence for EdD learners using Gozu et al.’s 2007 Self-Assessment of Cultural Competence. However, an earlier study found inconsistent cultural learning outcomes from student interviews conducted at the end of the experience and results of Miville’s 1992 Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale administered several months after the trip (Richardson et al., 2014). Such findings point to the complexity, individuality, and developmental nature of cultural learning.

Less is known about how EdD learners may apply learning from an international study trip to their practice. Danzig and Jing (2007) reported global learning outcomes assisted EdD learners to recognize contextual dimensions when adapting a policy or practice from another country. These learners “sought opportunities to apply and extend new knowledge to their own professional practice” (p. 88). In another study, EdD learners reported behavioral changes centered on policy implementation, and instructional support for diverse learners (Richardson et al., 2020). Students reported “seeking out diversity” (p. 552) and “advocating for policy changes when working with diverse students and teachers” (p. 552).

VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

Three prominent virtual exchange models hold particular relevance for EdD virtual exchange design: COIL, telecollaboration, and global virtual teams. These three models share the premise that technology can be harnessed to facilitate interaction, idea exchange, and collaboration between students and faculty around the world (Stevens Initiative, 2021). COIL is a deliberately flexible model that can be aligned with existing course objectives in an EdD program. COILs typically employ intercultural group work and project-based learning. The telecollaboration approach from the language and language pedagogy fields offer insights for designing and facilitating intercultural and interlinguistic communication between individuals and within groups. Global virtual teams approaches offer EdD faculty additional resources focused on intercultural group or team development in a virtual environment.

Graduate-to-graduate exchanges conducted in multiple fields and disciplines offer insights for designing EdD virtual exchanges. In my recent literature review (Shiffman, 2023), the majority of sources described exchanges between courses in the same or closely related fields. Educator preparation—in particular—preparation to teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)—courses were prominently represented. Other fields and disciplines represented included



business, health, social sciences, and humanities. Among these 16 sources, 20 countries were represented with U.S.-based courses appearing in nine of the exchanges.

Goals

At the graduate level, virtual exchange goals tend to reflect priorities of the profession or field (Shiffman, 2023). Consistent with all education levels, cultural—and specifically intercultural—goals are prominent and tied to perceived needs of the profession. In the education field, rationales for the intercultural/cultural dimension of a virtual exchange have been tied to such goals as building the culturally-responsive knowledge and skills needed to work in diverse education contexts (Chen, 2020/2021) and developing language pedagogy knowledge and skills (Hauck, et al. 2020). In all fields, professional goals have centered on preparing learners for globally interdependent professional environments, working in diverse teams, and using communication technologies (Chen, 2020/2021; Hauck et al., 2020; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2017). Virtual exchanges for EdD learners might take a comparative exploration of the profession. In one COIL, my EdD learners along with Australian peers examined how the two countries were addressing Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, n.d.). In another COIL, my EdD learners collaborated with Bosnian learners to compare educational leadership preparation and roles.

Curriculum

Common features of COILs, telecollaboration, and global virtual teams are relationship-building activities, intercultural groups or teams of students, reflection, and activities to foster interaction, typically in the form of collaborative task(s) (Stevens Initiative, 2021). Interactions can be synchronous, asynchronous, or some combination. Interactions may occur in whole class settings or small groups via a variety of technology tools. Exchanges often occur over several weeks.

Virtual exchange activities for graduate learners reflect the knowledge and skill needs of the profession (Shiffman, 2023). Graduate learners have collaborated in intercultural groups to analyze theoretical frameworks, research, and business case studies; and to design tools for their profession such as informational websites or learning tasks. In the COILs I have co-designed for my EdD learners, the intercultural learner teams have collected and analyzed a variety of data (e.g., educator interviews, standards, and best practice documents) to make comparisons between the two cultural contexts and created video presentations of their findings.

Evidence

Virtual exchange is a developing model of international learning. Researchers typically cite multiple types of evidence with a heavy emphasis on qualitative sources and case studies (Shiffman, 2023). Reported outcomes for graduate-level exchanges have centered on intercultural learning, insight into the field or discipline and, in some cases, communication technology skill development. Virtual exchange research has focused heavily on intercultural dimensions of the experience—characteristics of intercultural teams (e.g., trust and leadership), instructional and curricular supports for intercultural teamwork, and common challenges associated with language,

experience, resource, and other power differentials (Chen, 2020/2021; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2017).

COMPARING APPROACHES

Both international short study trips and virtual exchanges hold potential for acquiring new knowledge, skills, and opportunities for reflection that can support preparing culturally responsive, globally-minded EdD graduates with deepened insight into their field. This learning does not happen automatically. Design is essential. Study trips and virtual exchanges differ along four dimensions that illuminate the models' strengths and challenges for EdD programs.

Immersion

International study trips engage all one's senses, particularly when that context is radically unfamiliar. The sojourner also experiences, in some cases for the first time, what it is like to be an outsider who must observe and learn to navigate basics of everyday life. Such experiences can remain vivid memories for decades. Here, short study trips are positioned to stimulate the kinds of self-reflection about one's own beliefs, attitudes, practices, and education system that form one essential component of culturally-responsive, globally-minded leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). Given the short duration, however, the understanding of others and their contexts will necessarily be superficial. In contrast, virtual exchanges are not a multisensory experience. Participants continue in their daily lives and routines with the exception of the virtual exchange activities. However, these virtual encounters with peers can prompt self-reflection when accompanied by intentionally designed prompts.

Access

Access has two dimensions: who participates and with whom. Participation in international travel has been dominated by those with the resources and motivation to participate. This is a major concern in the study abroad field. For EdD learners juggling many responsibilities, international travel may not take precedence. Here, virtual exchange offers an advantage. The exchange can be embedded into existing coursework. Learners do not leave home and do not incur additional financial costs. For working professionals who are not able or have never considered travelling, this offers participation in an authentic international experience.

Destinations are also a question of access. When voluntary, learners self-select to participate and the destination is likely to be a motivating factor. In contrast, virtual exchanges are not limited by geography, motivation, or cost. EdD learners can engage and learn with peers irrespective of initial interest, distance, or even geopolitical events. For example, when EdD learners work in schools, colleges, or universities that serve particular immigrant or international communities, a virtual exchange with peers in those countries of origin may provide an opportunity to learn about the culture and former educational contexts of those they serve.

Intercultural Engagement and Relationships

Intercultural engagement and relationship building is a third dimension along which the two approaches differ. Given the limited duration, a short study trip on its own offers fewer opportunities to engage deeply with citizens of the destination country. In contrast,



COILs, telecollaboration, and global virtual teams are designed for learners to engage with one another over several weeks while collaborating on assignments. They must create ways to communicate and collaborate to complete the shared work. Virtual exchanges offer varied possibilities for communicating across language difference. To support a range of language needs, communication can occur via multiple modalities (synchronous, asynchronous), forms (verbal, written, visual), groupings (pairs, small groups, full class), and technology tools (e.g., messaging applications, email, online documents, discussion boards, social media platforms). To illustrate, asynchronous and written forms allow time and space for nonnative speakers to interpret and respond, and—if needed—use supports such as online translation. When native speakers and language learners are in a group, the collaboration creates authentic spaces for language learners to practice their language skills and for native speakers to deepen awareness of language needs and practice communication strategies that facilitate equitable participation. Theoretically, the communication methods to complete the shared tasks could lay the groundwork for continued engagement after the virtual exchange has concluded.

There is potential to integrate these two models to strengthen intercultural engagement and relationships. Haber and Getz (2011) illustrated how virtual collaboration coupled with an in-person conference might deepen the learning. My colleagues and I designed a combined short study trip with a COIL component that required learners to collaborate in person and virtually over a semester. In one instance, this resulted in an American-Australian learner team researching best practices to support students with special needs who identify as LGBTQIA+. The team developed a website of resources and presented this work at a virtual international conference after the COIL ended.

Resources and Practical Considerations

Both study trips and virtual exchanges are accompanied by resource and practical requirements. Study trips incur financial costs. Designing and leading a study trip is labor-intensive with many logistical considerations to navigate. Depending on the institutional support available, faculty may assume additional, nonconventional roles—travel agent, health care monitor, and/or cultural coach. For a cost, organizations can be contracted to design and handle curriculum, site visits, historical tours, and travel logistics. In contrast, virtual exchanges pose primarily logistical and faculty time demands. Common practical challenges must be navigated—different time zones, schedules, language, technologies, and data security. Finding an international faculty partner willing and able to collaborate to design and implement the exchange also presents a challenge. Collaborating with a faculty peer requires time and adds another layer of complexity to teaching. However, this can be an enriching source of professional learning, networking, and scholarship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are several recommendations for faculty considering a short study trip or virtual exchange for EdD learners. These serve as a starting point. The recommendations also provide considerations for designing a short study trip and/or virtual exchange that aligns with the goals of the EdD program or course.

Be Clear about the Goals for the International Learning Experience

Understanding the learning goals and which will take priority can help clarify the appropriate type of experience and resulting design. If the priority is to foster cultural self-awareness, a short study trip is a powerful mechanism for prompting introspection. If the priority is to expand access to more EdD learners and to encounters with individuals in less accessible geographic locations, a virtual exchange is a promising route. The nature of the interaction differs. On a short study trip, the primary interaction will be with fellow travelers who share a cultural frame of reference. If the goal is practicing intercultural communication or sharing ideas about professional practice with international peers, there may be more sustained opportunities to do that in a virtual exchange. In both cases, intercultural communication and collaboration require design support to ensure that the engagement is a productive and ultimately positive learning experience.

Prioritize Reflection

Individual and group reflection will help EdD learners process what they are experiencing and explore emerging questions and insights. Reflection can focus on processes and academic/professional content. These can be formal or informal. They can be individual or group reflections. On a study trip, reflection might focus on the individual's processing of what is seen and heard, questions raised, and connections to professional practice. In a virtual exchange, reflection on the intercultural group processes may support both the collaboration and activate learners' attention to such aspects of intercultural communication as cultural expectations and power dynamics.

Focus on Application to Professional Practice

As scholarly practitioners, EdD learners should be able to connect an international learning experience to their professional practice. Reflection activities—both individual and group—throughout the experience can spur learners to think about implications for their professional practice. At the conclusion of the experience, learners may describe lofty intentions for how they will apply lessons and insights. Over time, the daily realities may undermine such intentions. Planning how to support learners as they integrate new learning into their work over time can enhance the impact on professional practice.

Assess and Plan for Practical Challenges

Designing and leading international learning experiences involve multiple moving parts and players. Faculty members work with some degree of ambiguity. They must be flexible and creative to both troubleshoot and capitalize on unexpected learning opportunities. In the case of short study trips, the university's international education office can help identify internal and external supports for some or all aspects of the curriculum and trip. In the case of virtual exchanges, EdD faculty and programs can turn to their institution's international education office as well as organizations with expertise addressing common challenges associated with differences in language, time, experience, technology, and data security. The Stevens Initiative at the Aspen Institute, UNICollaboration, and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) offer an array of virtual exchange resources, examples, research, and best practices. Several



university centers provide resources and trainings and/or assistance identifying partners beyond their own institution. A non-exhaustive list includes the State University of New York (SUNY) COIL Center, Florida International University's FIU Global, DePaul University's Office of Global Engagement, and Shenandoah University's Barzinji Institute for Global Virtual Learning. A major hurdle is finding a faculty partner who is committed to the exchange and has a group of learners who are a good match for EdD learners. A network for EdD-level programs such as CPED could facilitate connecting interested faculty. Designers of virtual exchanges should also turn to the virtual exchange literature to identify strategies that can address common challenges associated with differences in language, time, experience, and technology.

CONCLUSION

The CPED (2022) framework captures a vision of EdD graduates as scholarly practitioners who are culturally responsive, apply their knowledge and skills to address complex problems of practice in their organizations, and will lead the profession into the future. International learning experiences can support this vision by creating opportunities for EdD learners to participate in novel, authentic experiences that prompt engagement with new ideas, practices, and peoples in other parts of the world. Careful focus on defining goals and aligning these with the design can enhance the depth of the learning that occurs. Given the investment of time, money, and other resources, it makes sense to design an experience that moves EdD learners beyond an interesting interlude to a transformative shift in beliefs, behaviors, and knowledge.

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