

Editorial

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This special issue of the *Journal of Virtual Exchange* was born out of discussions to broadly disseminate papers presented at the inaugural International Virtual Exchange Conference in 2019. The conference brought together faculty, policymakers, and administrators to discuss the growing impact of Virtual Exchange (VE) opportunities on the intercultural and transnational learning of students. VE offers itself as an opportunity for both online facilitation and internationalization of the curriculum, thereby affording more students an international experience at home. Note, no distinction is made between VE, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), globally networked learning, and telecollaboration in this volume. The contributing authors were able to use the terminology they deemed most appropriate for their content.

Amid preparations for this issue, the world was gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher education scrambled to implement teaching and learning strategies to preserve academic rigors in an era of social distancing, remote learning fatigue, and worldwide travel bans. While the seven articles presented in this volume do not directly address the impact of the pandemic, each does provide the reader with an opportunity to identify strategies for engaging VE amidst the pandemic and to examine the continued value of VE opportunities for global, intercultural, and international skill development.

The volume begins with an article by [Salomão and Viana da Silva](#) which outlines the use of the Global Competence Matrix to aid students, from the United States and Brazil, in the development of a deeper cultural understanding of their exchange experiences. The matrix is used as a guideline for assessing the development of core concepts, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to global competency. Shifting away from competency development to VE design considerations, [Guidry, Leibowitz, and Adeyemi-Bello](#), in the second article of the volume, describe the preparation and

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planning necessary to create virtual exchange experiences for business and education courses. They discuss the similarities of collaboration, negotiation, and reflection that exists for faculty planning courses, as well as for students engaging in the planned courses. The authors share lessons learned from the design process and urge faculty considering VE to be excited, enthusiastic, and committed to intercultural learning processes.

Both the third and fourth articles of this special issue more intently explore linguistic considerations in VEs. The third article presents research by [Nishio, Fujikake, and Osawa](#) that centralizes student voices in investigating language learning motivation. The authors describe how COIL projects can move beyond the institutional objectives of internationalizing the curriculum to providing students with an opportunity for personal, meaningful transformation in their motivation to learn a second language. [Wylie](#), in the volume's fourth article, describes the cultural differences in paralinguistic features used by culturally diverse students in online discussions. Paralinguistic features play a pivotal role in online communication and are culturally specific. The author suggests that instructors incorporate activities that draw students' attention to cultural manifestations in their own communication, including their use of paralinguistic features and incorporate tasks to address this, as an opportunity to facilitate the development of this important facet of digital literacy.

Building intercultural skills is one of the central tenants of a VE project which [Brighton](#), in the fifth article, suggests is often ignored or taken for granted. However, he indicates that faculty are not equipped to ensure this aspect of a VE project and goes on to describe an online professional development program for all instructors on the fundamentals of intercultural communication. The final article of the volume, by [Curtindale, Krylova, and Minyurova](#), discusses the use of Interdependent Intercultural Tasks (ITT) as a pedagogical approach to VE. ITT seeks to create cognitive dissonance as a motivator for learning about another's culture and centers international interactions as the primary means for facilitating learning in the classroom.

With the onset of the pandemic, higher education institutions are having to rethink their approaches to internationalization. For many years, study abroad has been the *de facto* means by which institutions seek to internationalize and how students develop global, intercultural, and international competencies ([De Wit, 2018](#); [Soria & Troisi, 2014](#)). However, there is increasing awareness among higher education administrators of the importance of internationalization-at-home strategies, such as virtual exchanges, for creating more wide-spread and lasting internationalization strategies ([Garcia, 2020](#); [Soria & Troisi, 2014](#)). The contributions in this special issue of the *Journal of Virtual Exchange* are timely and cover several key areas of consideration – curriculum planning/design, assessment, student perspectives of exchange experiences, and language learning/structure – for long-term institutional internationalization strategies that can have a far reaching impact.

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