

## **Enhancing Cross-cultural and Global Perspectives among Educational Leaders**

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### **Introduction**

As our society becomes more and more ethnically and culturally diverse, and globally interconnected, a growing call resonates for education to adequately equip students with the understanding of cross-cultural and global issues. For this awareness to occur in education, school leaders, as the key agents for leading the initiatives of effecting institute change, should be able to step up and answer the call, and school leadership programs should be held accountable for making it happen. In this light, the Executive Ed.D. in Professional Leadership program in College of Education at a university in Southwestern US decided to offer an international experience to its students each year and require all students to participate as an indispensable component of completing the degree.

Since the summer of 2010, this international experience has been launched each year with China as the host country, and has involved approximately 80 Executive Ed.D. students, all school leaders in K-12 of local districts or aspiring to take leadership positions in the future. Each experience lasted 15 days, and included both traditional tourist offerings and education-related events. This paper aims to examine how such an overseas experience has impacted its participants in terms of their global and cross-cultural perspectives, and what school leadership programs can do to render this undertaking more productive.

### **Literature Review**

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“Over the last two decades there has been an increasing concern that American schools are not preparing young people to participate effectively in a world characterized by human diversity, cross-cultural interaction, dynamic change, and global interdependence” (Merryfield, 1995, p. 1). Realizing the importance and urgency of global education in American public schools, an increasing number of educational organizations have responded to this task. For example, the Asia Society has led the campaign along with several other organizations, sponsored conferences for state policymakers, education officials, and teachers, and given grants for model programs that go beyond the superficial lessons on flags, festivals, and fashions of the world that dominate international coverage in most schools (Manzo, 2005). In addition, global perspectives have been included in many educational institutions in their mission statements and strategic plans, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002). Moreover, some initiatives of internationalizing teacher education have been exemplified by the institutions such as Ohio State University and Stanford University (Roberts, 2007).

However, despite the increasing voice for a stronger focus on global knowledge and dispositions from educators, its effects on the preparation of school leaders are far from transparent, as Manzo (2005) noted “the theme is still a hard sell” in the US. There is a growing concern that school leaders are not well prepared as culturally literate and globally competent educational leaders. Growe, Schmersahl, Perry, and Henry (2001, p. 13) indicated “the dilemma in administrator training programs is that multicultural education in the preparation of administrators is not integrated in a consistent manner.” Huang (2002) noted that with the emphasis being placed on student achievement in tests scores, school leaders are more concerned with improvements that need to be made in the core curriculum, and teachers feel a lack of support

from the school leaders to advocate cultural pluralism while ensuring social justice and equity for all students.

Without informed school leaders being knowledgeable of, responsive and adaptable to the changing circumstances and requirements of the increasing global connections and multiculturalism, it would be difficult to expect teachers to integrate themes in regard to these issues into their classrooms. School leaders not only influence teachers but also staff members in the ways they engage in the actions and discourses on the global and cross-cultural issues facing the world today. Moreover, they also play a critical role in serving as strong liaisons with community groups and organizations to initiate the networks in order to provide more resources to students. Therefore, if schools are to create a positive atmosphere in which students are encouraged to “develop the habit of thinking of global ramifications” (Merryfield & Wilson, 2005), school leaders, first of all, need to improve their knowledge, skills and dispositions for educating through global and cross-cultural perspectives. It is hence the responsibility of school leadership programs to train school leaders in constructing “an empowering school culture” by “creating a learning environment in which students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social groups believe that they are heard and are valued and experience respect, belonging, and encouragement” (Parks, 1999, p. 4) and they can impact the world positively.

However, the existing research studies regarding the preparation of school leaders seem to fall short, compared with a large amount of literature concerning the preparation of teachers for a cross-cultural and global perspective. Growe, Schmersahl, Perry, and Henry (2001) investigated the necessity of multicultural training in school leadership programs, and how school leaders are able to assure that classroom teachers utilize instructionally appropriate approaches in working with culturally different students. Gardiner and Enomoto (2004)

examined and contrasted four administrative preparation programs at different state institutions to see how school leaders are being prepared for multicultural leadership in school leader preparation programs, and assessed whether they are receiving the adequate preparation to succeed as leaders of culturally pluralistic schools. Despite the consensus that diversity training for school leaders can have an impact upon every aspect of a school's operation: staffing, curriculum, tracking, testing, pedagogy, disciplinary policies, student involvement, and parent and community involvement (Nieto, 2000), not much literature has addressed how to reach this end on the part of school leadership programs.

In teacher education, many different approaches have been acknowledged as the ways of motivating teachers to build cross-cultural knowledge and teach from a global perspective, such as the opening of specific courses, study tours, student and faculty exchanges, overseas experience, working with international students in American universities and schools, and student teaching in other countries or within different cultures in the U.S., etc. Among these approaches, the positive impact of international experiences has been demonstrated by a strong body of research (Lane, 2003; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Sleeter, 2007). In comparison, more work needs to be done in the preparation of school leaders. This paper aims to delve into the influence of overseas experiences on them in particular in terms of global and cross-cultural perspectives.

### **China Experiences**

China was chosen as the overseas destination for this study-abroad project due to the recent college projects with China and to the current globalization focus on China. Each trip was planned out thoughtfully covering all stages of the trip, from the pre-departure preparation, to the

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in-country day-to-day itinerary and after-trip reflection, with a view of making the most out of each stage while forming an organic whole.

A course “Issues in Urban and Comparative Education” was offered before, throughout, and after the China trip, linking local to global education issues. As primarily an online course, most communication was facilitated through a course website on Moodle, a university sponsored electronic data system. Students reflected upon the related themes, assigned readings and videos on Moodle, and discussed extensively prior to the China experience and for the week following. The pre-departure discussion served as a theoretical and intellectual preparation for the China experience while the after-trip discussion provided each other with a forum to exchange their reflections. During the 15-day trip in China, the program students and faculty traveled to three major cities —Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi’an, visited four universities and one middle school, attended a series of lectures on China’s educational system, teacher education, school leader preparation and professional development, and dialogued with faculty and students in different places. Hong Kong was added the following years with one day less in Shanghai and Beijing.

During the experience, students were asked to keep a daily reflective journal focusing on the social, cultural, and educational issues of China and the US. In addition, an informal debriefing session was held at the end of each day, allowing students an opportunity to revisit the themes that emerged in the pre-departure stage, and capture the things that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. After returning home, students were required to turn in a synthesis project establishing a holistic and profound understanding of their new learning and experience. They were also asked to engage in debriefing and follow-up online discussions. Moreover, a culminating presentation was made by all the students attended by all the program faculty members, in which they presented and shared how this cross-cultural experience impacted not

only their philosophies and practices as educational leaders, but also their doctoral research and personal life.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

To better reflect the multiple realities of the outcome of the China experience, describe and interpret different perspectives of the participants, and understand the complexities of their issues and concerns, all the following questions are formulated as a guide to the study.

- How has this overseas experience impacted the participants in terms of their perceptions of different educational systems, global education, and cross-cultural issues?
- What have the participants gained from this overseas experience?
- How do the participants perceive this overseas experience?
- What can be done to improve the international trip, so that future participants can benefit more from it?
- What useful information can be provided to the future participants regarding the yearly overseas experience so that they can gain more from it?

Qualitative method was employed, because we believe that featuring discovering the depth of human experience and perspectives, it has the greatest potential to help us understand the research questions.

### **Data Collection**

The data collected include participants' online postings, journal entries, research papers, an open-ended questionnaire, individual and group interviews. During the trips, we made a large number of informal and unstructured individual and group interviews with the participants, and jotted down piles of field notes, which were then supplemented with more detailed description,

interpretation, and insights afterwards. Moreover, we kept all the student journals, their online discussion postings before and after the trips, and other course projects including review of literature and comparative paper. All these archived data are crucial in helping us understand what change the participants have undergone in terms of global and cross-cultural perspectives.

Five months later after returning from each trip, we would send out a questionnaire of six open-ended questions to all the participants via email, asking them to complete it to their best abilities (See Appendix A). The questionnaire focuses on detecting what impact the China experience has exerted on the participants. Among those who responded to the questionnaire, we invited 10 to make individual interviews, utilizing the interview protocol developed (See Appendix B). All the interviews were conducted at the time and locations the interviewees determined, lasted approximately an hour, and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that it not only targeted at the evaluation questions but also allowed for maximum flexibility to maintain a natural conversation for the sake of generating more data. The interviews were crucial, because we felt that the meanings constructed from the previous questionnaire “contain an element of uncertainty, or indeterminacy” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 42), which might not be what the participants would infer themselves, either overtly or tacitly. Thus, the interviews were focused on clarifying information, clearing out the unassured, and finding out the unknown. To ensure the credibility of the study, we used peer-debriefing to confirm or disconfirm the authenticity of the interview transcripts and gain the participants’ consent for research use.

In addition to the major sources of data as described above, we also collected a large amount of personal communications throughout the international experience, with the participants’ permission. These communications include emails, informal conversations

conducted face-to-face and via phone. This type of data will not undergo systematic analyses, but will be referenced as an important resource while making interpretations in data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

All the data were coded following Carspecken's meaning reconstruction process (Carspecken, 1996), including constructing meaning fields, making validity claims, and developing coding scheme. Because the data collection is recursive in the sense that it can occur at any phase of the course without a clear boundary between when is the beginning of writing and when is the completion of data collection, the analysis and interpretation were made continuously throughout the entire course of the study. Finally, we identified five emerging themes and elucidated them in "Findings and Discussion."

"Triangulation" is the rationale behind our data analysis (Denzin, 1978). It is an effective way to increase the validity of the study by cross-checking the data from multiple sources and enabling "multiple findings either confirm or confound each other" (Symonds & Gorard, 2010). Through juxtaposing and comparing the multiple data, if we can find the relationships discovered to exist converge on the interpretations of the phenomena under study, we will have more confidence about our conclusions; if they don't, the relationships can be further clarified, explained, and explored in depth. As Fraenkel and Wallen (2008, 453) indicated, "(w)hen a conclusion is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments, its validity is thereby enhanced."

### **Findings and Discussion**

Five themes emerged and will be subsumed and reported under the following categories: (a) enhanced global and cross-cultural perspectives; (b) a narrow and superficial understanding of multicultural education; (c) a narrow and superficial understanding of global education; (d) a



better understanding of different educational systems; and (e) the effect of the China experience on leadership practice.

### **Enhanced Global and Cross-cultural Perspectives**

The abundant data have provided empirical evidence for the improvement of the global and cross-cultural perspectives of the participants. After returning, one participant posted the following words in the online discussion forum:

I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have experienced this trip and I am bringing home memories that will last my lifetime. I have a much clearer and better understanding of multicultural and global education than before the trip. We, the human race, need to come together to celebrate the fragility and diversity of mankind. Yes, we will never see eye to eye on everything that we do but it is because of our different perspectives that make us unique. We just need to channel these opinions into a more positive light, so that we as humans can work together to make our world a better place for all of us to live.

The participants realized more than ever before that the challenge of education also emerges from the overarching cross-cultural and international spectrum. Students' success in both professional career and personal life requires an informed understanding of how to approach cultures, languages, religions, politics, and many other issues different from their own and how to positively influence the world's social and economic well-being. As school leaders, they have the responsibility of fostering the cross-cultural and global awareness among their staff, teachers, students, and the community at large.

One participant wrote the following words in her last journal entry prior to departing China:

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I am leaving today full of appreciation and hungry to learn more. But more importantly, I have a greater understanding of my role as a citizen of the world. This experience is something that I will carry with me for the remainder of my life, but it has also become the catalyst for me to begin to synthesize how small my realm of understanding may really be. More importantly, it may also be the driving force behind my quest to broaden my cross-cultural and global horizons and encourage others to do the same.

This remark clearly reveals that the respondent has returned with a greater awareness of and a deeper respect for diverse cultures, multiple perspectives and worldviews, and a stronger sense of obligations of encouraging diversity.

After the China experience, more participants realized that there are no “best” values; they are simply different, and each value should be given due acknowledgement. One participant made the following remarks in responding to the after-trip questionnaire:

We often think in America that we are so advanced and know the best way for everyone, when in fact we do not. Things that work here are out of context in other places. How can we say there’s right or wrong?

Another participant concluded his last journal entry by stating, “We aren’t better or less than one another. We are all human and as educational leaders in both countries, striving to improve the way we educate our young generations for the advancement of the human condition.”

Furthermore, the participants have become more comfortable in their communication with people from other cultures, and developed a stronger desire to learn about others and a deeper empathy in their situations and quests. In a journal entry written halfway through the China experience, a participant noted his change underway:

The country was previously both physically and culturally thousands of miles from my

homeland, heart and comfort zone. Now I feel I'm way more comfortable being around masses of people different from me, and even yearning for making more interactions with them. I found myself consciously honing my cross-cultural interpersonal and communication skills, which is essential for effective leadership.

Through engaging in the dialogues across national boundaries, the participants are more inclined to think and act outside their original mindset in a stronger cross-cultural and global perspective in developing and implementing educational leadership initiatives. This is definitely an enriching educative experience, which has affected the participants both personally and professionally (Wei & White, 2011). Nevertheless, demerits walk hand in hand with merits, and will be detailed in the following sections.

### **A Narrow and Superficial Understanding of Multicultural Education**

In response to the question in the after-trip questionnaire "Did you try bringing your new experience, perceptions, or knowledge into your school? If so, what did you do, and what was the result?" One participant's reply was, "No. My campus is not diverse." Unfortunately, this attitude is not rare. Quite a number of participants phrased the necessity of multicultural education solely or primarily based on the demographic situation of the US. The increasing diversity of student bodies was cited most often as the force behind the implementation of multicultural education, such as, "It's extremely important, because they do exist in our schools and society," "We the educators have the responsibility to recognize, support, and embrace multiculturalism and diversity because of the nature of our society's makeup." One even said, "It's important because it can cause big problems in your school if the relationships are not monitored."

Some people somehow thought that multicultural education is only necessary when there is a diverse student and staff representation within the school. Some of their responses were quoted as follows, “If our students and our staff members are not from the same ethnic groups, staff members should be getting training on that culture,” “If students are from different ethnic groups, it is important to be able to teach diversity to them.” Their underlying assumption seems to be if student are all from the same ethnic group as the staff, it doesn’t matter if cross-cultural and diversity issues are taught or not.

A true multicultural education should be the education of increasing awareness of, and knowledge about, human diversity, “cross-cultural understanding, open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, resistance to stereotyping or derision of cultural difference, and appreciation of other peoples’ points of view” (Merryfield, 1995, p. 2). It should be a universal tenet regardless of the demographic representation within schools.

Another issue discovered is that many participants, while espousing the ideals of multiculturalism verbally, actually think in contradictory ways. When asked about their perspectives of multiculturalism, the words most commonly cited were “respect,” “understanding,” and “tolerance,” and the strategies were most likely to be the promotion of cultural differences to acquire appreciation for others, such as a parade of customs and traditions different from theirs. However, none of them ever questioned the assumption underlying such a stance of “lofty morality,” namely, Anglo Americans are representative of the norm, and others, though deviant from the norm, should be given respect. Instead of fostering multiculturalism, this mentality actually deteriorates the existing divisiveness and inequality. As Banister and Maher (1998) pointed out, who grants Anglo Americans the sense of superiority and the rights of self assuming as “norm” from which others are judged? What should be called into question is Anglo

American's domination instead of whether to celebrate non- Anglo American. The failure to realize the root of the problem— Anglo Americans as the “norm,” “standard,” and a privileged category, and to take the lead in challenging “standard” curriculum in support of change — poses a barrier for the participants to develop genuinely cross-cultural perspectives.

### **A Narrow and Superficial Understanding of Global Education**

In addition to the insufficient knowledge of multicultural education, some people's perceptions of global education also appeared narrow and superficial. A very common view from the participants is: Global education is essential for preparing students to be competitive in the global market because “students today are not just competing with people in their own countries but people from other countries and students must be educated in a global sense if we want them to be able to compete globally.” One participant in a group interview even equated global education with “providing students the best opportunity for success in the emerging workforce around the world.” Moreover, a few participants viewed the importance of global education in terms of the need “for a new world leadership,” saying that “we need to have a global perspective because as the world's sole superpower, we have a great responsibility to lead the world in solving international issues in this more competitive and interconnected world.”

This perception of global education resonates with the central theme of Friedman (2007) which defines global education generally in terms of the response to the challenges other newly emerging world powers present to the leading position of the US. This “competing” view of global education is not uncommon in the existing literature. Watson, Williams, and Derby (2005, p. 79) made the point that “the world economy dictates that we educate our citizens for escalating global competition.” Besides, Frey, and Whitehead (2009, p. 285), through investigating the recent policy statements over international education produced by state boards

of education, concluded that international education policy and practice in the US “has been driven less by global concerns than by its economic development priorities, national security, and domestic diversity.”

However, as Gardiner and Enomoto (2004) pointed out, the concentration on competitiveness bounds the benefits of global education within the state and/or country rather than the common good of the world. Rather than a global perspective, it runs counter to it. A true global education should be the education that helps students develop the loyalty to human good which is beyond the immediate surroundings spatially and temporally, and engage them in the undertaking that contributes to equity, peace, prosperity, and sustainability for all human beings in the world rather than competing “others” different from “us.” It is a legitimate concern that without school leaders developing a true global perspective, how students can be expected to expand concepts of citizenship across national boundaries, beyond national interest, and into a critical examination of global problems, and to be committed to the sustenance and growth of the globe and all human beings.

### **A Better Understanding of Different Educational Systems**

Owing to this study abroad experience, the participants found them better able to understand other’s contexts and concerns as they broadened their repertoire, and in the meantime, beginning to jump out of their familiar contexts, reflect upon their preconceived philosophies, practices and issues in their respective schools, as well as the overall American educational system. They all agreed that this is a good way to share experiences with colleagues in other nations, and reciprocally learn from each other how to improve their educational leadership, as a respondent said in the subsequent questionnaire, “The China experience has challenged me to reflect and question our U.S. educational system in comparison to other systems.”

While interacting with the students and administrators at a university in Xi'an, the kinship between Chinese administrators and university students made one participant write down the following reflection in her journal that day.

Chinese administrators are expected to know their students' phone numbers and inquire when students are absent or sick, treat students like they are their own children, care about students' emotional and physical well-being, and build a relationship that allows students to ask the administrators' advice on any matter. Learning happens when teachers/administrators and students have a trusting relationship and when students feel that they are genuinely cared about. I found embarrassing that we, the Americans, may not have a solid answer if we were asked the same question relating to how we develop the relationship with our students. This will definitely go in my future research paper and deserve my deliberation.

Additionally, a quite intriguing finding worth attention is that between the two educational systems, the participants discovered similarities more than differences. A participant posted in online discussion forum:

The more I learn about both (educational systems), they are more similar than they are different. Both recognize the dire need of cultivating the ability to think and analyze rather than simply doing well on exams. Both have a focus on testing, and a scarcity of resources leading to inequities in schools and inequitable outcomes for certain groups, e.g., rural students in China and students of color in America.

The participants became aware that many problems occur in commonalities that need to be recognized and addressed both locally and globally. The improvement or solutions in one community or nation inform and motivate others across the world. The realization of the parallels in two educational systems let them see human universals more than differences, and further revealed to them the significance of promoting exchanges and collaboration among colleagues of education around the world.

### **The Effect of the China Experience on Leadership Practice**

At the end of their journal entries, a large portion of the participants used the words like “potentially life changing” or “a once in a lifetime experience” to describe what impact this overseas experience had exerted on them. One participant even said that “I encourage everyone to take a trip like that for the experience.” In the personal communications with the participants in the last day in China, one participant said, “As I look back to this trip, there are many experiences and stories I can’t wait to relay to my teachers and students.” Another participant fervently said, “I’m anxious to test out my new world view in America!”

One week after returning, one participant posted in online discussion forum, “I will consciously examine all aspects of my work to find ways of applying what I have taken from this trip to my school.” Another participant posted, “Allowing others to view pictures about my experience sparks a conversation and curiosity about my experience, and the result of sharing these experiences prompts my colleagues and students to inquire further.” Though the modes of affecting their leadership practice may vary from individual to individual, they were all passionate about sharing and spreading their new knowledge and experience within and beyond their respective realms. We can safely conclude that this China experience has foreseen a potentially unpredictable impact on the participants’ educational leadership practice.



Eager as they were for a positive effect on their educational leadership, they were well aware of the difficulties bound to be encountered in the actual practice, as one participant commented in our individual interview:

We are too concerned with things like TEKS and its related issues. With the mounting attention to reading and mathematics instruction, as a result of state testing demands and the accountability measures under the federal “No Child Left Behind Act,” all school leaders, teachers, and students are struggling to cover required and tested content. The efforts of mandating any additional element into the existing curriculum are sure to suffer a considerable counterforce.

Other challenges hindering the participants from infusing cross-cultural and global mindedness into their educational leadership, as indicated by some participants, also include the blind egocentrism and deep-seated stereotypes prevalent among the school leaders themselves. One of our previous studies pointed out that for some of the school leaders, the former assumptions and stereotypes are too profoundly embedded to uproot overnight (Wei & White, 2011).

### **Recommendations**

Though considerable achievements of the China experience have been demonstrated in cultivating cross-cultural and global perspectives among these educational leaders, its constraints are also manifested. Having examined a wealth of data, we proposed five recommendations as follows. It is hoped that other educational leadership programs will find this study helpful in their endeavor to prepare culturally literate and globally competent educational leaders.

#### **Strengthening Socio-cultural Understanding of the Host Country before the Trip**

It is a very often heard comment from the participants that a cultural lead-in before departure needs to be augmented. Though the program held an orientation prior to the trip apart

from a course meant to prepare students for the fundamental knowledge about the country's culture, history, and society, the participants generally deemed it as insufficient. The cultural shock and inadaptability stemming from all kinds of aspects were well beyond their anticipation while they were physically in the country. As a participant suggested in the after-trip interview, the program "could have done more to help students mentally prepared not what they are going to do, but more on what it is going to be like in that country." We hereby call for a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural knowledge of the host country before the trip with a view of assisting the participants in better coping with a variety of challenges through the study abroad experience.

### **Devoting more Time to Discussion and Reflection during the Trip**

The suggestion referred to most often by the participants is condensing traveling items and reserving more time for reflective activities. Many participants complained that they should have discussed and reflected about what they experienced in a timely manner during the trip, but unfortunately, there were not chances provided to them as adequate as they perceived necessary. One participant said in the interview, "During the trip, we needed more time to interact as a group to discuss all that we had observed during the day and have a better perspective and understanding." However, with an overwhelming day-to-day arrangement, they found it difficult to spare time thinking and keeping journals at the end of the day under fatigue. Therefore, it is essential that the traveling itinerary be refined by making the activities more compact and giving more weight to individual and group discussion during their stay in the host country.

### **Articulating Learning and Practice**

For an Executive Ed.D. in Professional Leadership program, an effective transformation of students' learning into school leadership practice is particularly important. However, the

existence of some actual issues inevitably serves as a counterforce in bridging learning and practice, for example, the high-stakes testing, as participants noted. This implies to the program faculty and administrators that in addition to nurturing new knowledge and perspectives among participants, equal efforts should be put forth to the discussion and investigation addressing how school leaders can navigate the development of cross-cultural and global perspectives through the complexities of educational milieus.

### **Incorporating the Perspectives throughout the Curriculum instead of Opening a Specific Course**

As an important precursor and supplement to the China experience, a course entitled “Issues in Urban and Comparative Education” was offered, addressing the global and multicultural issues and perspectives. However, as we claimed in a previous study, “Simply opening one or two courses or having a brief stay in another country does not necessarily lead to the internationalization of educational leadership, neither is it an all-heal recipe for global ignorance, misconceptions and prejudice” (Wei & White, 2011, p. 423). Rather than a single course of purely international or cross-cultural focus, school leaders’ learning of the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes a global and cross-cultural society requires may best be enhanced via embedding the themes throughout the existing curriculum, let alone the fact that this is more viable and cost effective as it obviates all the red tape in expanding course offerings.

### **Building up more Local, National, and Global Networks**

While maintaining and strengthening the existing partnership with China, more connections need to be made locally, nationally, and globally, for the establishment of a more multifaceted learning community. Hopefully through this endeavor, the pre- and in-service school leaders can obtain a sustained education on global and cross-cultural issues, and involve

in leadership learning, research and practice on a larger educational landscape. Further to this, the modes of the network can be explored, too. Except overseas experiences, other alternatives, such as exchange program and joint degree program, are all worth experimenting with.

Finally, some suggestions are offered to the future participants for them to benefit from such international experience to the greatest extent. These suggestions include: (a) having preconceived notions examined thoroughly beforehand and traveling with an open mind; (b) making every effort to minimize the possible “cultural shock” and “discomfort” before the trip by gaining the knowledge about the host country to their best capacity and consulting previous participants for their experiences; (c) developing research questions in advance, traveling with them, seeking to find answers to them or deepening understanding about them during the trip; and (d) attempting to capture all the ideas and thoughts surfacing during the trip because they may turn out very enlightening and instrumental afterwards. With the concerted efforts of both the program and its participants, we have more reasons to believe that this international undertaking will unfurl a more promising prospect.

### **Conclusion**

This study details a rewarding endeavor at fostering cross-cultural and global perspectives among educational leaders through a study abroad experience. The five themes that emerged lead us to possible future explorations. Likewise, the recommendations also can facilitate future enhancement of like programs and research. It is our hope that the follow-up study will track the previous participants through delving into what long-term impact the overseas experience has exerted on them, as a participant wrote in his last journal entry, “The learning will not cease because the trip is over.”

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#### Appendix A: Questionnaire

### **Questionnaire** (sent as an email attachment)

1. In what ways has the China experience impacted you personally?
2. In what ways has the China experience impacted you professionally?
3. Did you try bringing your new experience, perceptions, or knowledge into your school? If so, what did you do, and what was the result?
4. Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties with the China experience? If you did, what were they?

5. How important are global and multicultural perspectives for school leaders? Please explain.
6. Please share additional comments regarding the China experience.

Appendix B: Interview protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**TOPIC DOMAIN ONE: PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS ABOUT CHINA EXPERIENCE**

**Lead-off Question**

Time flies. You have been back from the China trip for almost half a year. I am very interested in knowing how you perceive this experience if you look back into it at this point.

Would you like to share any of your opinions with me?

**Covert Categories**



## Enhancing Cross-cultural and Global Perspectives among Educational Leaders

- The impact of the China experience on the participants both personally and professionally
- The application of the new knowledge and perspectives gained from the China experience into their leadership practice in schools
- Their comments on efficiency of the China experience

### **Possible Follow-up Questions**

- Could you please talk about how the China experience has impacted you personally and professionally?
- Did you try bringing your new experience, perceptions, or knowledge into your school? If so, what did you do, and what was the result?
- Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties with the China experience, prior to, during, or after it? If you did, what were the challenges or difficulties?
- In reading your journal entries, research papers, response to the questionnaire, and the interviews transcripts, I found many participants said a same sentence, “This is a life-changing experience.” Do you agree on it? What would you say about this experience?

## **TOPIC DOMAIN TWO: PARTICIPANTS’ SUGGESTIONS REGARDING CHINA EXPERIENCE**

### **Lead-off Question**

You are the first cohort of students embarking on an overseas experience in this new Executive Ed.D. in Professional Leadership program. Next summer another cohort of students will undertake this trip too, and the program plans on offering such an international experience each year to its students. What do you think of it?

### **Covert Categories**

- Their opinions on offering an yearly overseas experience by the program

## Enhancing Cross-cultural and Global Perspectives among Educational Leaders

- Their suggestions to the program faculty and administrators regarding how to help such an experience more effective and fruitful
- Their suggestions to the next cohort of students regarding how to benefit more from this study abroad experience

### **Possible Follow-up Questions**

- If you were asked to give some advice to the future participants of the China experience, what would you say?
- What recommendations do you have to the program faculty and administrators for them to better equip school leaders for an increasingly global and multicultural educational milieu?