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# Learning within a global community of practice: Implementation of virtual exchange into a student nurse and student midwifery programme

**Dr Debra Morgan**, Director of Transnational Education, Senior Lecturer Adult Nursing (Dept. of Nursing Midwifery and Health), Northumbria University, UK.

**Ms Gill Smith**, Study Abroad Programme Lead (NMH), Senior Lecturer Midwifery (Dept. of Nursing Midwifery and Health), Northumbria University, UK.

# Virtual Exchange

- “a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators.
- Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology.”

(<https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/>  
2020)



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# Our Specific Aims

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- Replace nursing & midwifery student physical exchange with VE alternative during the pandemic
- Create a safe online community of learning promoting intercultural dialogue, to support students to develop:
  - toward cultural competence in nursing & midwifery
  - as global citizens
  - personal/professional development inc. as global graduates (employability)
- Support widening participation
- Contribute to lecturers' general development



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# Virtual Exchange Design Overview

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- The VE was delivered virtually over two months: 1/3/21-30/4/21
- 5 countries, 10 partner institutions and 60 students participated



# Virtual exchange programme in detail

## Development

- Partner recruitment
- VE date agreement
- Aims/ outcomes
- Integration
- Material development
- Student recruitment
- GDPR
- Group allocations
- Platform development
- Monitoring & supporting
- Recognition

## Communication media

MSTeams, email - formal  
whatsapp – informal

**Transcultural learning peer groups (field specific)**

**Guide/ workbook**

### Seminar 1 - introductions

To virtual exchange; team; guide; peer groups; Q+A

### Seminar 2 - progress

Peer group development experiences; learning about cultures in general; discussion of issues; introductions to culture care study work

### Seminar 3 - consolidation

Sharing culture care study poster presentations (field specific breakout rooms)  
Informal evaluations and reflections

### Transformative learning theory applied

Active sense-making: taking responsibility, critical reflection, critical dialogue, confirming understandings

**Social theories applied (group, resilience, culture)**



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# Evaluation (student quotes)

- Seeing differences in systems (health insurance, burden, impact) fostered understanding of other cultures (inc. understanding of migrants' perspectives)
- Realising the differences in all of our nursing programmes (inc education & professional practice)
- Knowing more about different cultures has made me realise that we might have different ways of communicating or caring for our patients, therefore we should listen and see where we can help.
- Helped me be more assertive & proactive...learnt more about myself & other cultures
- My skills in effective communication were sharpened
- Made me get out of my comfort zone
- It was a very enjoyable experience and I made friends for life



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# Evaluation (student quotes)

- Time differences [were a limitation], university and placement commitments sometimes limited times to meet up. Occasionally a language barrier but we worked through this.
- The connection problems were a bit annoying, as I could not hear them properly.
- Downside, if other peers were not willing to partake in the group work.
- Lack of familiarity among the group was present, so conversations were a bit awkward, but guidebook was used as a conversation starter.





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# Emerging Barriers & Recommendations

## Emerging barriers to future VE:

- All partners have now returned to pre-pandemic approach of physical exchange
- Students have a desire to travel and university drivers support this (inc. contracts)
- VE is a resource intense activity for staff
- VE requires significant time commitment for students so any addition as an optional extra may overload students



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# Emerging Barriers & Recommendations

## Recommendations:

- Need a shared commitment and desire to undertake VE
- Decide on mode e.g. exclusive or blended
- Need to consider the logistics and allocate preparation and planning time
- VE needs to be supported and integrated into programmes with commensurate recognition for students: clinical and/ or academic time; a formal option module
- And workload allocation for staff
- Included in formal exchange contract agreements
- Formal empirical evaluation to ascertain extent of learning in each subject area

# Summary of our experience

- VE is positive, can involve many students from a range of different cultures and countries, including those unable to exchange traditionally. Students attain learning outcomes set.
- Learning outcomes appear less transformative perhaps when compared to physical exchange.
- VE is complex as an educational approach & requires application of evidence based pedagogy, excellent facilitation, collaboration and resource to ensure success.



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