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# Collaborative Cosmopolitan Capital in In-Service Teacher-Led K-12 Study Abroad Programs

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## Abstract

Research highlights the many benefits of study abroad in higher education with emerging scholarship on study abroad in K-12 education. This paper focuses on how leading study abroad fosters a collaborative, cosmopolitan-oriented, professional environment for secondary teachers in Washington, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS). Theoretically we apply frameworks related to the development of cosmopolitan capital and the formation of collaborative professional communities. Using a qualitative case study approach, we draw on data from interviews, written materials, observations of pre-departure meetings and training, and post-program survey responses. Analysis illustrates several emergent themes: First, educators with previous international experience tend to seek out globally oriented in-service teacher education experience. Second, the majority of participating teachers report leading study abroad experience as beneficial to them. Third, findings show the importance of forming professional communities among global educators. Together these findings signal the unique benefits of study abroad in teacher education and professional development settings.

## Abstract in Spanish

La literatura destaca los beneficios de estudiar en el extranjero en el ámbito de la educación superior. La literatura resalta las oportunidades emergentes de becas para estudiar en el extranjero en el sector de la educación K-12. Este

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artículo se enfoca en cómo los líderes de programas de estudios en el extranjero promueven un entorno profesional colaborativo y de orientación cosmopolita para los docentes de secundaria en las Escuelas Públicas de Washington, D.C. (DCPS). Teóricamente se aplican marcos relacionados con el desarrollo del capital cosmopolita y la formación de comunidades profesionales colaborativas. Mediante un estudio de caso cualitativo, se recopiló datos a través de entrevistas, materiales escritos, observaciones de reuniones y capacitaciones previas a la salida, así como respuestas a encuestas posteriores al programa. El análisis de estos datos revela varias temas emergentes: 1.) Los docentes con experiencia internacional previa tienen que buscar oportunidades de formación docente que tengan una orientación global, 2.) la mayoría de los docentes participantes afirman que la experiencia de liderar estudios en el extranjero les ha resultado beneficioso, y 3.) los hallazgos subrayan la importancia de formar comunidades profesionales entre docentes que se identifican como educadores globales. Considerando los tres temas emergentes juntos, estos hallazgos muestran los beneficios únicos de estudiar en el extranjero dentro del contexto de la formación docente y de la formación del desarrollo profesional.

## **Keywords**

Cosmopolitan capital, cosmopolitanism, global citizenship, study abroad, teachers

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## **1. Introduction**

Over the past several decades, considerable attention has been focused on educating for the increasingly interconnected global world. Among the different initiatives and avenues aimed at cultivating the kinds of global skills, dispositions, and action-taking abilities in education is study abroad. A robust body of research has illustrated the positive outcomes related to study abroad, from interpersonal to intercultural competencies (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2015; Kuh, 2008; Loveland & Morris, 2018; Streitwieser et al., 2019). Among the different beneficiaries of study abroad are pre-service teachers, thought to be vital to the shift needed to incorporate global perspectives into K-12 schooling.

Much of the research on teachers and study abroad focuses on pre-service teachers. Despite these important insights into the role of study abroad in teacher education, the predominant focus on pre-service teachers has left a considerable gap in understanding the potential of study abroad as a key component of in-service teacher education and as a professional development opportunity for existing teachers. Moreover, most of the research on study

abroad programs has focused on individual teacher outcomes, such as how teachers participating in a study abroad program develop intercultural competency (Cushner, 2007) or how they reshape their classroom practice following study abroad. Little is therefore known about the intercultural competence development and the professional learning communities that can form among teachers who lead K-12 study abroad programs (Engel & Gonzalez, 2022).

In this paper, we focus on the following research question: How does leading study abroad foster a collaborative, cosmopolitan-oriented, professional learning environment for teachers? Led by this question, we developed a qualitative case study of a district-wide, K-12 education abroad program in a large public school district in the US (Washington, DC). In the program, in-service teachers, working in middle or high school classrooms, lead the DC Public Schools (DCPS) Study Abroad Program. The DCPS Study Abroad Program is fully funded, targeting rising 9th and 12th graders, as well as students attending one of the district's four Opportunity Academies. These are high school campuses serving overage, under credited students, students with less credits than the average student their age, through individualized education plans to reach high school graduation and beyond (*Opportunity Academy*, n.d.). Educators take a leadership role in the program, from promotion and recruitment, working with students and families, leading pre-departure sessions in teams, traveling with students, and managing required student projects. Teachers involved in DCPS Study Abroad also participate in professional development sessions on intercultural development and study abroad. Through this case study of the program, we elaborate a concept of *collaborative cosmopolitan capital* to argue that educators in the program collectively develop cosmopolitan capital within this collaborative professional environment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cosmopolitan Capital

Conceptually we draw on ideas related to the development of cosmopolitan capital and the formation of collaborative professional learning communities among teachers involved in K-12 study abroad. Cosmopolitan capital is typically understood as an individual construct (Calhoun, 2002; Delanty, 2009; Engel & Gibson, 2020; Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Weenink, 2007). That is, global experiences are sought after by *individuals* for skills, such as

language and cultural competencies, which may manifest in social, cultural, and human capital.

In the traditional Bourdieusian sense, seeking educational opportunities to acquire social and cultural capital mitigates against social inequalities resulting from social reproduction, within which schools are a mechanism of the reproduction of these inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986). Igarashi and Saito (2014) discuss how, globally, education systems “legitimate cosmopolitan schemas” through policy and curricula and that academic qualifications serve as “objective proxies of competencies of their holders,” and to legitimate cosmopolitanism as such, it cannot be equally accessible (p. 226-227). While the authors (Igarashi & Saito, 2014) discuss institutionalized cultural cosmopolitan capital in higher education, similar institutionalization of cultural cosmopolitan capital can be seen in policies and curricula at the primary and secondary levels of education (Kolar, 2010; Maxwell et al., 2020).

Education is thought to be parsimonious to socio-economic advancement (Labaree, 1997). While the link between education and such advancement is largely anecdotal (Aghion et al., 2009), parents desire educational opportunities for children that they perceive to provide socio-economic benefits (Delanty, 2009; Yemini et al., 2019). With the shift toward cosmopolitanism in curricula and education policy, educational opportunities like sending children to schools with certified global educators and extracurricular activities like study abroad may be manifestations of opportunities perceived to be socio-economically beneficial. Research has shown that global educators often work in isolation within their classrooms, schools, and districts (Engel & Gonzalez, 2022). The limited interactions teachers have with one another may not be surprising given that the nature of teaching can be isolationary (Ali Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). This isolation may extend beyond the classroom, to encompass study abroad programs led by individual educators from a single campus. As such, the central organization and administration of DCPS Study Abroad positions the program to foster a unique professional community among teachers across secondary campuses in the school system. Collaboration among education professionals is important for the fields of study abroad and teacher education. The programmatic characteristics of DCPS Study Abroad may serve as an example within the field of study abroad that, through fostering collaboration, enhances the experiences of program leaders and participants.

## 2.2. Professional Learning Communities

While teachers often collaborate within schools, cross-district collaborative professional relationships among teachers are often limited. This is predominantly due to time constraints and an ever-increasing number of roles and responsibilities teachers assume throughout their professional careers (Weingarten, 2019). Time is thought to be one of the key ingredients to creating and fostering sustained professional collaboration and development (Trabona et al., 2019). To collaborate across a district requires time dedicated to do so (Stoll et al., 2006). This can only be accomplished with the full support of faculty, staff, and school administrators (Engel & Gonzalez, 2022; Hinshaw et al., 2022). In some cases, where collaboration flourishes across school districts, motivation to engage in collaborative practices exists across the levels of faculty, administration, and community.

Collaborative learning and professional learning communities (PLCs) are established practices in the realm of teacher education and professional development (Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs, despite lacking a universally accepted definition, are thought to be a group of teachers who continually share and reflect upon their practices, collaborate, and who promote learning and growth (Feldman, 2020). PLCs most often form within the same school (Stoll et al., 2006). Social learning in PLCs is discussed in the literature in the context of teachers across various content areas, levels of education, and in both local and global contexts (Carpenter & Munshower, 2020; Flint et al., 2011; Gleeson & Tait, 2012). Aspects of social learning (Wenger, 2000) include “cognitive (thinking), behavioural (acting) and relational (relating to others) components” (Bergmark, 2023, p. 220). These have been echoed from antecedent calls for inquiry-driven learning (Dewey, 1929).

With social learning theory in mind, additional conceptual characteristics of professional learning communities can be used to explore the development of collaborative cosmopolitan capital to better understand the experiences of individuals working in a globally oriented professional learning community. As previously mentioned, there is no singularly accepted definition of PLC; however, several characteristics arise across decades of research. We draw upon the following characteristics to define elements that constitute a PLC: (1) shared goals, (2) trust, (3) collaboration and active participation, and (4) guiding activities related to practice (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Huijboom

et al., 2020; Meeuwen et al., 2020; Sargent, 2015; Zulu & Mukeredzi, 2021). These are not the only widely agreed upon characteristics of PLCs, but they are relevant to this inquiry as discussed in our findings. Understanding how the global educators serving the DCPS Study Abroad program collaborate and navigate this cross-district, professional community to ensure successful outcomes for the program, the students, and themselves may shed light on how teachers, working together in DCPS Study Abroad, develop collective forms of cosmopolitan capital.

Research over many decades has, by now, clearly illustrated that study abroad experiences form an integral part of high-quality learning experiences for students who can participate (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2015; Kuh, 2008; Loveland & Morris, 2018; Streitwieser et al., 2019). There are particular benefits to study abroad for pre-service teachers (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). For example, study abroad is found to be a significant practice aimed at increasing pre-service teachers' intercultural competence by exposing them to new pedagogical approaches and educational philosophies, as well as being better equipped to address the growing diversity within their US classrooms (Cushner, 2007). Additionally, pre-service teachers have the potential to gain self-knowledge, develop personal and professional competence, and foster a greater understanding of both global and domestic diversity (Cushner, 2007). Other research on study abroad programs for pre-service teachers shows that participation in these experiences is popular, successful, and replicable (Stachowski & Sparks, 2007).

There is a dearth of literature on study abroad programs targeting in-service, K-12 teachers, a sizable population totaling roughly 4 million in the United States (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; He et al., 2017). The studies that do focus on in-service teacher education primarily address programs where teachers participate in study abroad as individuals, often working with teachers outside of their community, district, and state context in programs, such as EF Educational Tours, the NEA Foundation's Global Learning Fellowship, WorldStrides, or the Fulbright-Hays Program (Ortloff & Shonia, 2015). While important, these focal points in the literature mean that little is known about the intercultural competence development and the professional learning communities that may form among teachers who lead study abroad programs in centrally administered K-12 programs (Engel & Gonzalez, 2022). In DCPS, teachers from across a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, both personally

and professionally, come together with a shared common focus of promoting global education and providing study abroad opportunities for students who might otherwise not be afforded the opportunity. Teachers may be motivated to embark on this journey as individuals seeking more professional development within their careers or to reinvigorate connection within the isolated context of being a global educator at their school.

In our paper, we draw on these theoretical insights to frame a question of how leading study abroad fosters a collaborative, cosmopolitan-oriented, professional learning environment for secondary teachers created through the district-wide model of K-12 study abroad developed by DCPS. We refer to this in our paper as *collaborative cosmopolitan capital*. In the following section, we further describe the context of K-12 study abroad in DCPS.

### **3. Context: Study Abroad at the District Level**

The DC Public School (DCPS) system created a centralized, fully funded study abroad program in 2015. Targeting rising 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, as well as students attending one of the district's four Opportunity Academies, "the program helps ensure that our global citizens have access to global experiences and works to make travel the expectation rather than the exception for all students" (DCPS at a Glance, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Educators from across DCPS promote the program, take an active role in managing and leading the student application process, select students, frequently meet individually with parents, lead pre-departure orientations, travel and lead student reflections during travel, maintain communications with students after travel, and manage the post-travel *Making Global Local* project. To date, over 250 educators have led over 1500 students on 64 different study abroad experiences to 18 countries.

Educators from across DCPS are invited to apply annually to participate in the DCPS Study Abroad Program and roughly 20-25 educators are chosen as travel ambassadors. They have a range of backgrounds and roles within DCPS, including teachers of various subjects, instructional coaches, and other specialized professional roles within schools, most having spent years in the classroom before specializing in administration or instructional coaching. These educators lead groups of students from across the district in pairs or groups of three, divided by level (middle or high school) and location. They also participate in professional development sessions prior to the selection of students.

## 4. Methods

We draw on a single, qualitative case study design for our inquiry into the DCPS Study Abroad program, looking at the program across multiple years (2016-2023). The selection of participants and data sources is purposive (Maxwell, 2013). Data are drawn from multiple sources, including (1) individual interviews with 30 teachers participating in the program across multiple years; (2) observations of pre-departure sessions across multiple years, including training events and pre-departure sessions with students led by teachers; (3) post program survey results across multiple years; and (4) DCPS-provided training materials, including presentations used during pre-departure training for teachers, end of year reports presented during pre-departure training for teachers, and the DCPS handbook outlining the code of conduct, duties, and responsibilities of teachers leading DCPS Study Abroad. As this study involves a secondary analysis of existing data (Heaton, 2004), using thematic coding (Bernard et al., 2017), undertaking this work poses minimal risk to participants. The study has IRB approval through George Washington University, as well as a memorandum of agreement with the Office of Global Engagement in DCPS. The second author of this paper has convened research teams to study the Study Abroad Program since its launch in the 2015-2016 school year. The first author has been working on this research team since 2021. Neither author has been employed by Washington, D.C. Public Schools, nor have we been teachers in the program. Additionally, one of the authors is a former secondary teacher who has led study abroad for students in a different state. Data collection was formal as the authors have access to archived data, and DCPS Study Abroad administrators shared program data not previously requested for past work (Heaton, 2004).

Drawing on multiple sources of information, we take a holistic approach, treating all teachers in DCPS Study Abroad as a single case. We analyzed multiple sources of data to understand themes related to the development of collaborative cosmopolitan capital in professional learning communities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, thematic coding was used across all data utilizing a priori codes that draw from cosmopolitan capital and social learning in a professional learning community framework to explore the development of collaborative cosmopolitan capital. We looked for recurrences, different words used to describe themes (Bernard et al., 2017).



Data analysis is a supplementary type of secondary qualitative analysis as we take a more in-depth look at collaborative cosmopolitan development among teachers, not previously addressed in the literature on DCPS Study Abroad (Heaton, 2004). A disadvantage to this post hoc approach is that because we are unable to ask new questions of teachers, some areas within the analysis appear to be less saturated. Careful attention was given in these areas as the first author practiced reflexive memoing to identify assumptions and biases brought to the research as a 14-year veteran teacher who led study abroad for students when teaching high school social studies in a different state.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Previous International Experience

Findings show that DCPS teachers who have had a previous international experience tend to seek opportunities to facilitate global education, like leading study abroad. For example, among the 2022 cohort of travel ambassadors, 65% had previously led an international experience for students prior to doing such in the DCPS Study Abroad Program, and 45% of this cohort had previously served as DCPS travel ambassadors (TA Interviews, 2022). Looking across all years of DCPS Study Abroad, a majority of teachers had previous international experiences, either having led students abroad in a different school system or in a different program, studied abroad themselves, or lived or worked internationally prior to their involvement with DCPS Study Abroad (DCPS End of Year Reviews, 2016-2023). Slight fluctuation among the numbers of returning teachers is indicative of the recruitment process in the study abroad program. The Global Education Office administrators prioritize teacher (and student-participant) applications from campuses in the district with historically few applicants and accept teachers from campuses that have either never sent teachers with the program or share teachers from campuses that have not been a recent participant in the program (GEO Administrator Interview, 2022). The current objective of Global Education Office administrators is to recruit two-thirds of participating teachers who have had prior international experience and one-third who have not. This ratio is a recent change within the DCPS Study Abroad Program as the inaugural year of the program saw only 35% of travel ambassadors with previous leadership of “international student travel” (DCPS End of Year Review, 2016). Subsequent years of the program saw fluctuations in the number of educators with previous international experiences. In 2017, 46%

had previous international experiences (DCPS End of Year Review, 2017). Among the 2018 cohort of travel ambassadors, 33%, and, in 2019, 40% had previous international experiences (DCPS End of Year Review, 2018, 2019).

## 5.2. Persistently Motivated to Serve the Program

Persistent motivations among educators to lead study abroad include an orientation toward cosmopolitan capital and global citizenship education, affording equitable access to international travel to students in DCPS, and self-concept clarity, defined as “the extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept are ‘clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable’” (Adam et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 1996). Teachers who persist in applying to and leading the study abroad program have an orientation toward cosmopolitan capital through global citizenship education (GCED), equity and access to study abroad, and self-concept clarity.

### 5.2.1 Cosmopolitan Capital via GCED

We understand cosmopolitan capital to include skills, like language and cultural competencies (Byker & Putnam, 2019; Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Weenink, 2008; Weiss, 2005). Global citizenship education (GCED), and various articulations of developing cosmopolitan capital through study abroad appear in interviews, post-program surveys, and training materials. The United Nations defines GCED to “provide the understanding, skills and values students need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the 21st century, including climate change, conflict, poverty, hunger, and issues of equity and sustainability” (UN, n.d.). DCPS defines global citizenship education as, “an interdisciplinary approach to learning the content, concepts, and 21st century skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world” (*DCPS Global Education*, n.d.). Speaking about active engagement as a world citizen, one teacher wrote, “Learning about another part of the world through a hands-on travel experience broadens my worldview and makes me a stronger person, teacher, and mother” (Post-Program Survey, 2023). Training materials from 2018 showcase a report on the status of world languages education in DCPS and reinforce the mission of “teaching our students to communicate with their neighbors down the street and around the world” (DCPS Training Materials, 2018). While language acquisition is considered cosmopolitan capital, that teachers receive training to attend to language acquisition during study abroad reinforces the GCED definition of “skills to

cooperate...” (UN, n.d.). Across all years of the Study Abroad Program (2016 - 2023), training materials include the expectation for educators to be a source of information on global education (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2023).

Another teacher talked about leading students through a U.S. city they have visited numerous times, saying “you could really see how the city is culturally interwoven...able to see the multicultural aspect of the city” (TA Interview, 2022). This statement was made in the context of being surprised to find a new dimension in a familiar space, a reorientation of perspective toward cosmopolitan capital. Further evidence of cosmopolitan capital can be seen in training materials throughout the years. The following quote is taken from a post-program survey and highlighted in training materials, speaking directly to cosmopolitan capital development, “My own use of conversational Spanish has improved, and I intend to continue working on that skill now that I have returned.” (DCPS Training Materials, 2016). When asked about perceived relationships between leading study abroad and professional beliefs and practices, one teacher said, “I really want to be involved in the program because I want to teach students what it is to be a global citizen by actually being a global citizen” (TA Interview, 2022)

### 5.2.2. Equity and Access to Study Abroad

The DCPS Study Abroad Program’s mission is to foster within students an expectation that they have access to study abroad experiences, considered essential to developing cosmopolitan capital. Given the priority assigned to student applicants who are deemed the least likely to be able to access a study abroad experience, teacher applicants from accepted students’ campuses are also prioritized to lead the study abroad program. Teachers leading study abroad for these students report strong feelings of support from program administrators and advocate that the DCPS Study Abroad Program continues to provide opportunities for these student groups. One teacher wrote, “The experience for our students (especially those East of the River) must continue to flourish. I believe that with more exposure...Study Abroad can reach its intended student populations. And I would like to help with that” (Post-Program Survey, 2023). In 2022, a teacher reported, “I enjoy building relationships with students. Many of us experienced a lot of “firsts” together” (Post-Program Survey, 2022).

Teachers serving DCPS Study Abroad advocate for increasing equity and access to international travel and cosmopolitan capital for their colleagues, as well as for students. In 2023, a teacher said, “I would like others to have the opportunity at my school” (Post-Program Survey, 2023). This statement was in response to a question about the teachers’ willingness to continue serving the program. While this teacher responded negatively, the teacher expressed a desire for other teachers to have access to DCPS Study Abroad. Throughout the years, teachers leading study abroad for DCPS overwhelmingly report their desire to “share my travel expertise with others” (Post-Program Surveys, 2016-2023). When asked each year, more than half of the teachers report this desire as their top-ranked motivation for applying to lead study abroad (Post-Program Surveys, 2016-2023). The implications of this motivation include providing equity and access to cosmopolitan capital through working collaboratively to acquire travel expertise.

### 5.2.3. Self-Concept Clarity

Further evidence of persistent motivation to lead in the study abroad program can be seen in teachers’ reports of increased self-concept clarity. Teachers reflect upon their positionality while leading study abroad in the DCPS Program and talk about acknowledging biases regarding study abroad host countries, as well as biases toward students from other school campuses. One teacher said, “there are thoughts and impressions and biases that I automatically bring to the table, because of who I am, because of the role that I play in DCPS” (TA Interview, 2022). Teachers report that they value working with teachers (and students) across DCPS as a good reminder of the diversity of the DCPS (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2023). Another teacher said the following, “I felt myself stretched as a leader and educator” (Post-Program Survey, 2022). Desire to challenge oneself to grow personally and professionally is shared among teachers serving DCPS Study Abroad. Teachers reported becoming “more sensitive to world struggles and challenges,” having humbled themselves and having overcome “challenges I didn’t know I had” (DCPS Training Materials and Post-Program Surveys, 2017).

Responding to the post-program survey in 2023, the first year DCPS Study Abroad traveled internationally after the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers stated: “I would continue to be my authentic self in a posture of learner-leader. I think

that is what works best in this role, the ability to take in just as much as you give, maybe more,” and another teacher expressed,

Over the years DCPS Study Abroad has helped me recognize and appreciate different perspectives... I have improved life experiences, self-awareness, and conscious efforts to empathize with others...I have become more attuned to what others are saying...a deeper understanding of...perspectives and emotions, fostering better communication. (Post-Program Survey, 2023)

As part of the teacher training, the DCPS Study Abroad Program administrators bring resources and guest speakers to discuss encountering identity during study abroad. Presentations from Diversity Abroad, Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, the Washington Post, LAI Video, and the U.S. Institute of Peace, as well as other DCPS departments, focus on providing training for teachers to use with students while also offering guidance to teachers navigating similar experiences themselves (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2019).

### 5.3. Forming Collaborative Professional Networks

Findings suggest the formation of collaborative professional networks among the teachers leading DCPS Study Abroad. While many teachers expressed being individual champions of global education within their classrooms and schools in interviews and post-program surveys, our findings illustrate that district-wide programming may create an environment for developing a network of global educators. The following characteristics of professional learning communities are evident among teachers leading within the DCPS Study Abroad Program.

#### 5.3.1. Shared Goals

Guiding our thinking about the formation of professional learning communities is that PLCs are generally understood to have shared goals or aims (Stoll et al., 2006). One such goal emerges through teachers' attention to students' learning and educational experiences during study abroad (Post-Program Surveys, 2016-2023). Having a shared goal is also evident from the training materials (2016-2023) that highlight the expectation that teachers leading study abroad be available to students and parents as a source of information about the program. This shared goal of global education is also evident from interviews conducted over the years of the program. In interviews between 2017 and 2022, as well as in observations of teacher-led meetings for students

and training events (2017-2022), teachers articulate that they see themselves as facilitators of students' global education, encouraging a growth mindset and an openness to new experiences and cultures, and teachers report helping students make connections between their local environment and the world (Post-Program Surveys, 2016-2023). This is not only self-reported by teachers, but teachers work collaboratively to help students fulfill one of the program requirements, Making Global Local Projects, inquiry-based projects about their study abroad destination (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2023). In an interview, one teacher stated, "we would study art in different cultures, and so we would always bring in the idea of, 'Everybody's not the same, we are what we art,' ...a lot of the units that we study deal with either the arts or social justice or just things that incorporate having an awareness of where you are in the world" (TA Interview, 2017). Six years later, another teacher mentioned supporting students to "become global citizens by exposing them to real world experiences" (Post-Program Survey, 2023).

The student-centeredness of teachers' responses in interviews and post-program surveys over the years (2016-2023) is another shared goal within this professional learning community. Talking about students' goals and teachers' hopes for student travelers dominates conversations with the teachers of DCPS Study Abroad. In fact, teachers usually must be prompted to speak specifically about themselves and their colleagues. One teacher remarked that they could clearly see, through pre- and post- travel interviews with students, that "their worldviews and cultural knowledge were expanded due to their travel experience" (Post-Program Survey, 2023). This response addressed an open-ended question asking teachers to reflect on their global competencies based on the Asia Society's Global Competencies Matrix, used by the Global Education Office for program evaluation (GEO Interview, 2016).

### 5.3.2. Trust

Fostering an atmosphere of trust is another characteristic of PLC formation. Fitting nicely adjacent to this concept, is social learning, both of which are observable between the teachers leading study abroad. While engaging in icebreaker activities and discussing information related to their roles as travel ambassadors, teachers converse with one another openly. Smiles and open body language were evident at an individual level, as well as calling out perceived helpful information to the whole group being met with affirming

head-nods and smiles (Training Event, 2023). In response to a request for additional comments from program administrators, a teacher stated, “Lastly, I would give the TAs an opportunity to select who they would like to work with. Many of the TAs have developed relationships and work very well together” (Post Program Survey, 2023). Not only does this exemplify the trust teachers develop among themselves, but it is also evidence of trust between teachers and administration. Further evidence of this collegial trust and the professional learning community teachers create among themselves is stated by another teacher, “When traveling, teachers lean into the relationships they cultivate during professional development sessions. I had a wonderful experience this year. My fellow TA was fantastic, and we made a great team” (Post Program Survey, 2023).

Additionally, teachers recruit colleagues to participate in the Study Abroad Program. This suggests the connections that teachers make with others who share the common goal of promoting global education via study abroad. When asked about how teachers became involved in the Study Abroad Program, one teacher responded, “I actually have a friend that used to work for DCPS and previously was a travel ambassador, and she spoke very highly of the program, and when I saw the application I figured I should apply and see if I’m chosen as an ambassador” (TA interview, May 2022). Further evidence of the trust between teachers as a community and trust between the teachers and program administrators is that annually, between 20-30% of teachers new to leading study abroad for DCPS report that they were referred by a colleague (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2023).

### 5.3.3. Collaboration and Active Participation

Collaboration and active participation are another indicator of a professional learning community. It is evidenced in multiple observations of teacher training and teacher-led pre-departure meetings. In an interview in 2017, one teacher mentioned speaking with another travel ambassador who was leading the trip to China, and they collaborated because the other travel ambassador had led a trip there in 2016. She also gave her insights on what should be covered throughout the meetings for the 2017 cohort of teachers. This same teacher also spoke about bringing in the Chinese language teacher and former TA from their home campus “who...described to the students things that they might experience while being in China like... people [in China] trying to get

pictures with them or touch them [DCPS students], as they may have never seen a person with brown skin before” (TA Interview, 2017). Collaboration of this nature highlights the creation and collaborative cosmopolitan capital for teachers leading study abroad for DCPS. During the 2023 teacher training, teachers discussed possible risks and situations that may arise during travel. A teacher with previous experience leading study abroad provided some examples of what to expect and how they and the co-leaders acted in each example. The teachers discussed ways to handle those situations utilizing their understanding of DCPS guidelines and previous experiences from either personal experience or from working with students (Training Event, 2023).

To maintain equity and access to study abroad, DCPS Study Abroad program administrators added a domestic location in 2017 for students unable to obtain travel documents to go abroad. As further evidence of collaboration and active participation in the PLC among teachers during this inaugural year for domestic travel, one teacher leading this opportunity reflected,

We spent a lot of time working together, so myself and the travel ambassador and talking with the 11th grade travel ambassador that went to New York as well... to figure out how to differentiate the material we were being given and make it meaningful to us and the domestic. Oh, and I think... Everyone was learning along the way as this was the first time this had been done as part of the travel ambassador program and I think we all picked up some things along the way. (TA Interview, 2017)

Through collaboration and active participation in the professional learning community, teachers in the DCPS Study Abroad create cosmopolitan capital for each other and leverage their embodied cosmopolitan capital for the benefit of their colleagues.

#### 5.3.4. Guiding Activities Related to Practice

Professional learning communities tend to be structured with guiding activities related to practice. These activities may present opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own cosmopolitan capital and to share this capital with their colleagues. From 2016 - 2019, teachers leading study abroad trips had the opportunity to participate in an abbreviated study abroad experience for training purposes that could generate cosmopolitan capital in teachers with no or distant prior global experience (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2019). The



abbreviated study abroad experiences are designed to simulate the longer study abroad experiences teachers will lead. The abbreviated study abroad experiences are typically 4-5 days, including 2 days for international travel. When in the host-city, teachers have a rigorous schedule of site visits and training sessions for 2-3 days, with attention to presenting the sites through a practical lens. Teachers are presented with opportunities to ask questions, address concerns, and gain practical experience in an environment curated to provide experiential learning of how to lead secondary students during study abroad, covering logistics and security as well as various types of learning opportunities at various destinations (WorldStrides, n.d.)

Teacher training in the Study Abroad Program has included guest speakers from Diversity Abroad, among other organizations local to Washington, D.C., to engage teachers in reflective practices focusing on identities and other unique considerations for DCPS teachers [and students] while studying abroad. In individual interviews, post-program surveys, and as noted in training event observations (2016-2023), teachers shared examples, discussed what these considerations mean, and talked about how to address any questions or concerns that may arise during and after the study abroad experiences. Teachers have shared their personal experiences with intensity factors related to, “high visibility; overt racism/microaggressions; racial profiling; fetishization; conflating race/ethnicity with nationality; US American identity abroad; implications for mental health; discrimination can negatively affect cultural adjustment while abroad” (DCPS Training Materials & Observations, 2023). The communal knowledge and subsequent reflection and discussions from this activity allow teachers to learn and collaborate in building their cosmopolitan capital, while also contributing to the formation of collaborative professional networks.

#### 5.4. Perceived Benefits of Program

Lastly, the majority of participating teachers report leading study abroad experiences as beneficial to them professionally and personally, which they linked especially to their encounters and exchanges within these group settings. Teachers predominantly report that they appreciate and value the colleagues who co-lead the study abroad trips with them. Statements of valuing their colleagues included, “our team worked well together,” “I really enjoyed working with both TA’s,” and “I consider them my co-leaders [all the same]” (Post-

Program Survey, 2016-2023; TA Interviews, 2022). When asked, teachers mentioned creating group chats with fellow TAs to stay updated and informed both prior to and during the study abroad experiences (TA Interviews, 2022). Teachers also relied on the live Google documents and the DCPS learning management system to organize important information during the preparation phase to travel (DCPS Training Materials, 2016-2023).

Teachers also report interactions between themselves (and with students) as beneficial to their personal and professional development. Speaking about such interactions, a teacher said, “traveling internationally allows a vulnerability that allows everyone to grow. This growth only strengthens each of us,” implying that teachers (and students) develop relationships that provide space for vulnerability and take actions or steps to grow through this vulnerability (Post Program Survey, 2023). Another teacher from this cohort reported, “I enjoy the enlightened experiences that occur within myself (and with the students). I enjoy pushing myself to explore and discover and modify my own beliefs” (Post Program Survey, 2023).

Similarly, teachers have reported enjoying “working (with students) in extended classroom opportunities,” viewing study abroad as an extension of their facilitator/instructor role (Post-Program Surveys, 2022-2023; TA Interviews, 2016-2023). In a post-program survey response, one teacher states, “I hope that when students have great experiences with teachers outside the classroom it impacts their views of educators and maybe influences their upcoming school year” (Post Program Survey, 2023). This indicates that leading study abroad could have positive residual effects for other teachers in the district.

Teachers also perceive that they can encourage students to grow into more globally minded individuals, to become global citizens, and to foster cosmopolitanism in the students they lead in study abroad. Teachers articulate a belief that one of their professional obligations is the promotion of global citizenship in students and providing students an opportunity to be global citizens via study abroad (TA Interviews, 2017, 2022). Such interactions do not end with students. While we also consider promoting global citizenship education to be a motivating factor for continuing to lead study abroad experiences repeatedly, it can be considered a benefit of leading study abroad.

Teachers perceive they have cosmopolitan skills and resources to impart to fellow teachers (and students) in the study abroad program (DCPS Training

Materials, 2016-2023; Post-Program Surveys, 2016-2023). Along these lines, teachers also reported that they feel a nice balance is struck between themselves and their colleagues while in the program, with teachers having strengths in certain areas that offset weaknesses in others. To this end, one teacher reported to have a perceived weakness in addressing “matters of the heart” with students (TA Interview, 2022), so another teacher stepped in to address a potentially sensitive issue with students during the study abroad experience. Teachers also expressed their appreciation for defining roles and responsibilities while in host countries (Post Program Surveys, 2016-2023). These exchanges demonstrate that the strengths of the other teachers compliment perceived weaknesses, providing evidence of professional collaboration and benefiting the teachers leading study abroad opportunities.

## 5.5. Limitations

We note there are several important limitations to mention before discussing our findings. First, by undertaking a secondary analysis of existing data collected over a relatively long period of time (2016-2023), we do not currently have access to all participants cited in this study for follow-up. Also, we do not have a way to differentiate participants across the years as either one-time leaders or as long-standing leaders within DCPS Study Abroad. This is primarily due to the archived interview data being de-identified to protect participants’ privacy, but also because data collected throughout the years was done by multiple persons, some of whom were also de-identified in the data. Additionally, while this study helps develop a better understanding of the forms of K-12 study abroad, often overlooked in study abroad, it is important to recognize the limitations in extending these conclusions to study abroad more generally. Despite these limitations, this study sheds important light on the relationship between study abroad and teacher education by elaborating on the formation of collaborative professional networks that are much needed to ensure the sustainability of study abroad programs, especially those in secondary education.

## 6. Discussion

In presenting our findings, we aim to elaborate a concept of *collaborative cosmopolitan capital* to argue that educators in the DCPS Study Abroad Program collectively develop cosmopolitan capital within this collaborative professional environment formed through study abroad. In the following sections, we

discuss our findings in terms of cosmopolitan capital and how it may be collaborative within the context of DCPS Study Abroad. Then we discuss collaboration in terms of a professional learning community (PLC) that may be emerging among the teachers who lead study abroad in DCPS. We do not intend to make any causal claims regarding the development of a formal PLC or the development of cosmopolitan capital as a result of leading study abroad. Rather, in our elaborations, we view this work as foundational, pointing to the need for additional research and development of a conceptualization of collaborative cosmopolitan capital in study abroad.

### 6.1. Cosmopolitan Capital

As cited in the seminal literature, cosmopolitan capital is predominantly thought to be an individual pursuit (Calhoun, 2002; Delanty, 2009; Engel & Gibson, 2020; Lindell & Danielsson, 2017; Weenink, 2007). However, the ability to work collaboratively, in the high-paced environment of leading study abroad for K-12 students, is a determining factor for the success of DCPS Study Abroad. Teachers with prior international experience are able to harness their individual cosmopolitan capital to benefit their colleagues. Resulting cohesion may be a product of teachers with previous international experience lending their proficiency in intercultural competence to ensure the DCPS Study Abroad Program's success. That teachers resoundingly reported a desire to share their travel expertise with others suggests that teachers acknowledge their individual cosmopolitan capital and mobilize it in a collaborative way. This collaborative mobilization of cosmopolitan capital may be transactional in nature, considering interactions at and among social sites. Outcomes of these interactions include events at the sites and characteristics of the sites (Tilly, 2008). The interactions teachers have while leading study abroad can be reciprocal among the teachers. Delanty (2012) describes relationships between "Self and Other and World" with "Self" and "Other" as being worked out in context of interacting with the wider "World" (p. 340). The author goes on to discuss "generative mechanisms," specifically "intercultural awareness and cross-cultural experiences stimulated by education," that operate on a cognitive level in the form of "processes of relativism and the mutual recognition of the other [manifesting in] increased levels of self-reflexivity, reciprocity, and cultural creativity" (Delanty, 2012, pp. 346-47). Teachers' individual and collaborative reflexivity is part of the relational ontological view of cosmopolitanism.

Although global education lacks a standard definition in curriculum frameworks (Molina & Lattimer, 2013; Orloff & Shonia, 2015), DCPS has defined it as “an interdisciplinary approach to learning the content, concepts, and 21st century skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world” (DCPS Global Education, n.d.). Teachers understand the importance of learning skills and competencies to be successful in navigating the interconnected and culturally diverse spaces they occupy in Washington, D.C. This definition demonstrates a tendency within DCPS toward facilitating the development of cosmopolitan capital for teachers, in addition to students. The DCPS Study Abroad Program claims to “ensure that our global citizens have access to global experiences, so that travel becomes the expectation rather than the exception for students” (DCPS Study Abroad, n.d.). DCPS defines global citizenship to be “students [that] are inquisitive, informed, and active world citizens, prepared for success in college, career, and life in an increasingly diverse international community” (DCPS Global Education, n.d.). These definitions provide the institutional context within which teachers leading study abroad in DCPS work. The emphasis DCPS places on student-preparedness to navigate the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century represents institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986) cosmopolitan capital. When teachers leading the Study Abroad Program articulate fostering the development of cosmopolitan capital by creating global citizens in their students, teachers also reflect upon their own continued development of cosmopolitan capital, including the cosmopolitan capital leveraged by their peers. This supports the evidence that teachers who are persistently motivated to serve in the study abroad program articulate fostering cosmopolitan capital via global citizenship education, reflect on their own, continued development of cosmopolitan capital, and collaborate with colleagues so that they may benefit from the cosmopolitan capital.

Finally, that teachers are committed to increasing equity and access to study abroad can also be understood to mean that teachers are committed to increasing equity and access to cosmopolitan capital that can be gained through study abroad. This is somewhat paradoxical in that teachers are part of an institution that reproduces social inequality, thereby implying that through the nature of their chosen profession, teachers, despite intentions and actions to the contrary, play a role ensuring the continuation of those inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Igarashi & Saito, 2014). However, teachers understand that institutionalized cosmopolitan capital can be gained through DCPS Study

Abroad, and they do not seek to disrupt social reproduction. Rather teachers leading study abroad in a fully funded, public-school setting, collaborate to leverage their individual cosmopolitan capital to act as stewards of cosmopolitan capital for others. We think about stewardship to mean having individual cosmopolitan capital and taking responsibility for providing others with the opportunity to acquire it. We also acknowledge that stewardship is a complex term due to its historical association with colonialism among other phenomena (Peçanha Enqvist et al., 2018; Welchman, 2012).

## 6.2. Professional Learning Communities

Drawing upon a recent study that converted “conceptual definitions of professional learning community (PLC) characteristics into behavioural indicators,” we discuss aspects of PLCs evidenced within the DCPS Study Abroad Program (Huijboom et al., 2020, p. 752). Having a shared goal and focus on concrete outcomes is evident throughout the years of the program. Fostering professional or collegial trust is also evident based on observations and teachers’ responses in interviews and on post-program surveys. From documents used to guide and inform teachers as they prepare to lead students from across DCPS to various international and domestic locations, evidence of space for teachers to collaborate manifests in observed actions and are self-reported in reflections and interviews. Teachers socially construct (Wenger, 2000) their understanding of DCPS Study Abroad guidelines and expectations. Teachers engage with each other and training materials to feel comfortable and confident about leading a successful study abroad experience. Guided activities are also incorporated to encourage organization and to ensure teachers can fulfill administrative responsibilities of DCPS Study Abroad.

In terms of a shared goal (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015), teachers highly value helping students develop intercultural competence. Over the years, the DCPS Study Abroad Program has attracted teachers with this common focus, enabling them to build a professional network based on leveraging similar experiences and collaboratively working toward shared goals. Across the years of this study, teachers mention networking with fellow teachers in the program and building a kind of camaraderie and collegial trust (Huijboom et al., 2020), another widely accepted characteristic of professional learning communities. As cited in the findings, fostering a trusting environment among like-minded colleagues can be understood not only as evidence of an emerging PLC, but also

as a major benefit for teachers personally and professionally. Statements like these indicate both collaboration and evidence of cosmopolitan capital. This is not to say that all teachers in DCPS Study Abroad easily coalesce. However, teachers were generally professional, even if they reported to the administration a preference to work with different teachers in the future.

In terms of collaboration and active participation (Hord, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006; Zulu & Mukeredzi, 2021), teachers leading study abroad in DCPS help and support each other and assist one another in terms of the logistics of leading study abroad, and they go beyond these seemingly cursory exchanges in providing feedback and teaching each other and sharing their cosmopolitan capital. Teachers also collaboratively and actively participate in activities related to practices of leading study abroad (Huijboom et al., 2020). While the activities related to practices of leading study abroad can be programmed into mandated training events and modules, as cited in the findings, participation in these activities can also be organic interactions among teachers as they carry out the everyday work of leading study abroad (Little, 2002). Participation is also thought to be “norms of interaction” that can “enable [or not] teacher learning and reform of practice” (Stoll et al., 2006). As mentioned in the findings, teachers leading study abroad for the first time in DCPS and teachers leading domestic travel in the first year it was offered, actively participate in learning best practices, adapting those practices to their individual personalities and leadership styles, and reforming what they already know about leading study abroad to fit an ever-changing landscape of international education opportunities. Similar collaboration may be occurring toward generating or leveraging cosmopolitan capital. Bringing competencies, skills, and experiences to a community and remaining open to further developing these skills, also points to teachers developing collaborative cosmopolitan capital through their leadership in study abroad.

## **7. Conclusion**

We have applied the frameworks of cosmopolitan capital and professional learning communities to argue that collaborative cosmopolitan capital may develop in certain group circumstances. DCPS Study Abroad is one such group wherein teachers from across a school system come together to provide secondary students with the opportunity to engage in global education via study abroad. It is in working toward a shared goal that teachers find

themselves in a unique, networked, professional learning community (Prenger et al., 2017). Teachers collaborate and leverage their individual cosmopolitan capital to ensure the study abroad program operates successfully. From bringing in other teachers as guest speakers and communicating with the Office of Global Education, fellow travel ambassadors, students, and their parents, teachers act as stewards of cosmopolitan capital in others. Teachers' collective actions and DCPS' professional expectations of teachers facilitate the generation of collaborative cosmopolitan capital.

Within the scope of this paper, as we see it, collaborative cosmopolitan capital is generated and exists among teachers. A future area of research could be to explore how leading study abroad not only allows for collaborative cosmopolitan capital within the U.S.-based PLC, but if, and to what extent, collaborative cosmopolitan capital might be extended to the host communities interacting with DCPS teachers. Another area of research for future consideration is to delineate and document particular aspects of cosmopolitan capital that lend themselves to collaborative cosmopolitan capital. We also see this work as having potential implications for study abroad programming across various disciplines in higher education. If collaborative skills and professional networking are desired outcomes of the higher education experience, this study provides new directions for thinking about how study abroad participants in higher education may acquire and may leverage individual cosmopolitan capital for individual and collective benefit.

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