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Reimagining Risk Management: Decolonizing Crisis Response Through Holistic Partnership Building in Education Abroad

Daniel Bryan[1], Chelsea Viteri[1], Caitlin Murphy Hatz[2], Kati R. Csoman[3], Edwin Manuel Pilaquinga[4], Emily McGrath[5]

Abstract

This article uses a case study approach to reimagine risk management in education abroad programming. It brings together a group of program partners to explore pre-COVID risk management decision-making during political unrest in Ecuador in 2019. Through continued dialogue and self-directed creative reflection techniques, the partners (a Dean of International Education and Study Abroad Director from a college in the United States, the Executive Director and Resident Director from the program provider, a local participant from the host community, and a student from the semester's cohort), all of whom are co-authors, overcome geographical distance and language barriers to reflect on their experiences over the entire process. Recognizing that COVID-19 changed how education abroad approaches risk management and responding to how movements for social justice are calling for diverse participation in policy

1 Fundación Pachaysana, Quito, Ecuador
2 St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY, United States of America
3 University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, United States of America
4 Pintag Amaru, Pintag, Ecuador
5 Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA, United States of America

Corresponding author: Daniel Bryan, daniel@pachaysana.org

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decisions, the authors explore the Ecuador case study as a way to confront their biases and assumptions, as well as those projected in our field. Placing special focus on the colonizing nature of Global North to Global South partnerships, the article calls for a greater conversation of decolonizing risk management, ending with lessons learned and recommendations for enhancing partnerships to better serve students, communities, and institutions of higher education as a collective whole.

Abstract in Spanish

Este artículo utiliza un estudio de caso para re-imaginar la gestión de riesgos en la programación de educación en el extranjero. Reúne a un grupo de colaboradores de un programa para explorar la toma de decisiones en la gestión de riesgos durante las manifestaciones políticas en Ecuador en octubre del 2019. A través de un diálogo continuo y técnicas autodirigidas de reflexión creativa, los colaboradores (la Decana de Educación Internacional y la Directora de Estudios en el Extranjero de una universidad en Estados Unidos, el Director Ejecutivo y la Directora Residente de la organización proveedora del programa, un participante local de la comunidad anfitriona y una estudiante de intercambio del semestre), todos los cuales son coautores, superan la distancia geográfica y las barreras del idioma para reflexionar sobre sus experiencias durante todo el proceso. Reconociendo que COVID-19 cambió la forma en que la educación en el extranjero aborda la gestión de riesgos y respondiendo a las exigencias de movimientos de justicia social por una participación diversa en las decisiones políticas, los autores exploran el estudio de caso de Ecuador como una forma de confrontar sus sesgos y suposiciones. Con un enfoque especial en los legados colonizadores de las relaciones entre el Norte Global y el Sur Global, el artículo pide una mayor conversación sobre la descolonización de la gestión de riesgos. Finaliza con lecciones aprendidas y recomendaciones para equilibrar las alianzas entre diversos actores y servir mejor a los estudiantes, las comunidades locales y las instituciones de educación superior como un solo colectivo.

Keywords:

Risk management, partnerships, decolonization, community-based learning

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic's impact on higher education institutions and limitations to the mobility of students, faculty, and staff led the authors to reflect on a case study of evacuating U.S. students from two distinct but associated study abroad programs in Ecuador in fall 2019. The authors posit that there is a need to reexamine how we approach risk management in a post-COVID world, taking into consideration the underlying principles and educational goals of study abroad and community-engaged learning. In this article, through an exploration of this case study, we bring together diverse perspectives from those involved in the crisis situation with the aim of re-imagining how risk management can contribute to decolonizing study abroad while simultaneously achieving broader goals associated with developing global citizenship and advancing social justice.

In spring 2020, as college and university administrators in the United States were finalizing the return of students from abroad and facilitating the continuation of instruction, discussions ensued on how to resume 'normal' activities for the fall semester. The July 2020 IIE report on the effects of COVID-19 on U.S. higher education institutions (Martel, 2020) revealed that 67% of institutions had already canceled study abroad for fall 2020. Yet, at the same time, the vast majority of colleges and universities (87%) were planning to offer hybrid instruction in the same semester. While State Department warnings played a major role in decisions, this report was published before most travel bans that barred entry of U.S. citizens to many countries. Systemically, there seemed to be a striking incongruence for risk tolerance when comparing outgoing study abroad and the resumption of campus operations at U.S. institutions of higher education.

At the time of writing this article, the same institutions were planning 2021-22 study abroad with COVID-19 adaptations based on models for reopening home campuses and according to long-held notions of best-practices in study abroad. Looking back at many of the proposed protocols and adaptations, such complicated operating requirements call into question whether immersive experiential learning was possible. The country and community-specific program providers were forced to adapt to models that may or may not work in their contexts. This leads us to question how significant modifications to risk management practices impact the integrity of educational goals, the

commitment to local host communities, the sustainability of programs abroad, and how they reinforce conformity to practices based on Western educational models.

Acknowledging that education abroad is carried out according to numerous models and through partnerships, we continue this article in the following manner. First, we explore and question how the field of international education, specifically in the U.S. context, approaches risk management according to overarching standards and policies. Next, we distill this exploration down to our driving questions and contextualize them according to "bigger questions" on interculturality. These are the questions that will inform our analysis and reflections over the rest of this article. We then describe the unique model of study abroad from which the case study is addressed and show how this model led to forming our group of authors. After a brief summary of who we are, we describe the case study by naming the key players and the principal events. Next, we explore the questions from our varied perspectives (home/sending institution, student, program provider, and host community member). Lastly, we engage in a dialogue among all the authors and provide lessons learned and recommendations.

Examining Standards, Relationships and Power Dynamics in Risk Management

As pointed out in the webinar, "What Not to Restart and Opportunities for Moving Forward: Global Engagement Post-Covid," sponsored by Haverford College's Center for Peace and Global Citizenship (Haverford, 2020), the pandemic has shed greater light on our interconnected humanity and shared vulnerability, indicating opportunities for collaboration and growth among partners in study abroad and community engaged programming. The webinar warns us about returning global learning programming to the way things were, suggesting that risk management has been part and parcel of North to South "colonizing," for which it is time we develop a greater level of consciousness. Jackline Oluoch Aridi, Ford Program's Regional Research Programs Manager for East Africa and staff member for the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, refers to how countries and communities in the Global South have a history of approaching risk by constantly adapting to a new normal; yet, the North has missed the opportunity to learn from the South, in

particular Africa, and how its people manage the dramatic lifestyle shifts that the pandemic requires of us (Aridi, 2020).

Hector Cruz-Feliciano (2018) grounds the risk-management conversation in Latin America. He observes that sending schools base their decisions on liability concerns instead of working with local partners who best understand the context of their security situations, noting that such concerns are born more from perceptions than reality, which leads host institutions to denounce their "imperialist attitudes." Clearly, power dynamics inform and limit how we approach risk management.

Risk management parameters are usually established and measured according to standards in the field of education abroad as balanced with liability standards at individual institutions of higher education, and this study asks us to take a deeper dive into the human dialogues and intercultural contexts surrounding such standards. The Forum on Education Abroad, the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad in the United States, continuously updates its *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* (latest edition being the sixth, 2020a) by adapting its "shall" statements to indicate the minimum requirements necessary to establish collaborative partnerships in all areas of program administration, including risk management, safety, and health matters.

The Forum's new *Guidelines for Conducting Education Abroad during COVID-19* (2020b) also address the need to consider the impact of decisions on partners and host communities and state that institutions and partners should "commit to collaborative, transparent decision-making... to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions" (p. 2). Moreover, the guidelines ask us to examine the "balance or imbalance of power between universities and providers" (p. 2) and to recognize "the economic and social impact that canceling a program can have on the local community where the program was planned" (p. 4). A striking aspect of the new guidelines is acknowledging the necessity to engage students as "partners with a shared goal" and to "recognize the agency of participants" (p. 10).

The new Forum guidelines reflect the nuance and complexity to risk management decision-making. If we engage students as partners in their study abroad experience, institutions must be willing to involve them as partners in the creation of risk management parameters, allowing for students to assume

more responsibility for their risk. With regards to overseas partners, reimagining partnerships implies prioritizing reciprocity as an essential aspect of decision-making in risk management especially when considering how programs affect their livelihoods and well-being. Yet, it appears that most institutions of higher education in the United States continue to standardize their risk management practices for all study abroad programs. Crisis decision-making scenarios often lead us to abandon ethical considerations as we work to ensure safety and security of "our own," and the impetus for decisions is to appease institutional and other (i.e., parental) demands. The updated Forum standards respond to our field's actions and suggest clear power differences at play between sending institutions and partners abroad; between the sending institutions and students; and between the students and host community members.

Crisis also brings opportunity for learning and growth, and scholars across the field of international education are studying how the pandemic is exposing areas for deep reflection and ongoing dialogue among all players in study abroad. Stephanie Doscher (2020) writes about COVID-19 as an opportunity for universities to reconsider the motivations for internationalization and consider the "why." Hans de Wit and Philip G. Altbach (2020) harken back to an appeal from Knight and de Wit (2018) to examine the "core principles and values" that drive internationalization of higher education and whether those foundations have supported the role of higher education to contribute to a "more interdependent world…, the next generation of citizens, and the bottom billion of people living in poverty on our planet" (p.4).

We bring COVID-19 into our discussion because as it changes our field's approach to risk management, it should also bring into question how our field responds to crisis situations more generally. For us, it calls us to reflect on our roles, the power dynamics, and the decisions regarding student safety in Ecuador in October 2019, when the country faced widespread political unrest (henceforth referred to as "El Paro" or "The Strike").

Our Driving Questions

Decolonizing risk management in study abroad is a lofty task that can easily get stuck in academic or activist discourse; therefore, it is essential to distill our curiosities to actionable driving questions. Based on the diverse perspectives of the six authors, representing over 50 years of experience in

international education, we recognize that while at times consulted, students, receiving institutions, program providers and host communities are primarily recipients of the home institution's decisions, and they must act accordingly. This situation can easily be interpreted as a hierarchical or top-down (or outside-in) relationship, in which risk management communication feels transactional and one-directional. By transactional we mean to describe a relationship that is grounded in the exchange of services, where the actors follow the procedures and policies of an institution according to terms that are not usually decided by the actors themselves. Often, the actors feel like cogs in a machine that respond and move according to those powering the machine. The home institution informs the student (and usually the other actors) about the results of a decision that were made, often by the "higher ups," in the student's best interests. When this happens, the intercultural exchange, which was established through a dialogue of mutual understanding and trust, is quickly reduced to a transactional relationship, in which the different actors are quickly siloed within the boundaries of their respective roles. At this point, students are often afforded a choice to either comply with the home institution's decision or withdraw from the program.

In contrast to a transactional approach, a relational approach goes beyond following a procedure and focuses on engaging a more profound dialogue among all the actors in a partnership. The relationship is built over time and ideally incorporates a multiplicity of voices, actors, and perspectives into the decision-making. Relational refers to creating together, instead of transacting what has already been created. In Global North/Global South relationships, a relational approach is a decolonizing act when partners question their biases, radically listen to others, and break hierarchies that privilege one actor (i.e., western universities) over the other (i.e., local communities). A relational-decolonizing approach values and respects different ways of knowing and being, catalyzing a shift from colonial legacies that patronize non-western epistemologies and ontologies to form a much deeper and pluralistic exchange.

We argue that our field must question risk management with the same complexity that we apply to the greater practices of study abroad and higher education as a whole. No one wants to feel as if their roles are reduced to a cog in the machine for student safety, especially if that machine represents the aforementioned imperialist attitude. Rather, everyone wants to maintain or

further develop the relationships they have built up to the point of the crisis. Thus, we propose these questions to the field as a way of taking our first steps toward decolonizing risk-management:

> Driving questions: How does a transactional approach to risk management bring out personal and institutional biases, and how do those biases further complicate power dynamics among the primary actors in study abroad programming? What steps can we take to move the field from the transactional to the relational?

When discussing transactional and relational approaches to risk management, we acknowledge the seemingly endless array of interrelating questions. For example, considering that COVID-19 and the subject of this article's case study are intricately tied to the movements for social justice in our communities and on our campuses, how can we integrate ongoing conversations about social inequity and power dynamics into our approaches of risk management? We hope this exploration will encourage readers to identify their own specific questions.

Our work is aligned with scholars and practitioners who are calling to decolonize international and intercultural education (see Adkins et al., 2019; Aman, 2017; Gorski, 2008; Sharpe, 2015) and networks such as Critical Internationalization (see Stein, 2019; Stein et al., 2019; Knight, 2014). In line with these authors, this article is not only asking readers to simply reflect on risk management protocols in study abroad; rather, it asks us to rethink international education by examining how our approaches to risk management conform to dominant structures and colonial legacies in higher education.

We ground and explore our driving questions through two lenses, critical interculturality and border thinking. Critical Interculturality (Walsh, 2018) suggests moving away from notions of multiculturalism or functional interculturality, calling for radical changes in the dominant order, visibilizing the way in which current structures reflect and follow colonial logics. It asks to "put in equitable relation diverse cultural logics, practices, ways of knowing, thinking, acting, being and living" (Walsh, 2018, p. 59). It is not a state of being but rather a constant process of negotiation with different people and ways of seeing the world. It does not negate difference, nor does it try to eliminate it. On the contrary, critical interculturality views difference as a powerful tool to create new ways of thinking, collaborating, and practicing solidarity. Via this

lens, we decolonize risk management through the potential of our intercultural relationships.

Intercultural relationships occur in physical and imagined space(s) and Border Thinking (Mignolo, 2012) helps us rethink the notion of "where" we meet to negotiate and collaborate. This lens encourages us to rethink borders as both geographic and epistemic. For over 500 years, Western epistemologies and ontologies have negated, oppressed, and obliterated non-Western ways of knowing (Grosfoguel, 2013; Mignolo & Walsh 2018), creating an epistemological frontier and expelling what does not fit the Eurocentric experience (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Border thinking was born as a response to the violence inherent in the creation of this frontier (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Meeting at the border displaces Eurocentric modernity from the center, and recognizes that there are people, languages, epistemologies, and ontologies on each side (Walsh, 2018). Through this lens, we recognize our complicity in the maintenance of an epistemic wall that divides ways of seeing and knowing the world. To decolonize risk management, we must situate our intercultural relationships in a border space where we are vulnerable to change.

Provider Program Model

This article explores the complex nature of risk by examining varied perspectives to El Paro via a distinct model of study abroad. The case study involves two closely associated programs that at the time of El Paro were departing on a shared excursion to the Ecuadorian Amazon. Fundación Pachaysana, an Ecuadorian non-profit organization dedicated to community-based education and international exchange, was the "program provider" for one of the programs. For the other program, based at a local university, Pachaysana was an associate charged with carrying out their excursions and community-based educational activities.

Pachaysana's programming model practices Fair Trade Learning (see Hartman et al., 2018; Hartman et al., 2014) and Decolonial (or Decolonizing) Pedagogy and Methodologies (see Andreotti, 2015; De Lissovoy, 2010; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Smith, 2013). "Fair Trade" refers to providing an equal educational opportunity for local communities and assuring that program-generated income is distributed (and invested) among local and international program participants. "Decolonial/Decolonizing" refers to integrating diverse ways of knowing and being, especially from host

communities, and treating the educational programs as activist spaces where the diverse participants work together to disrupt and dismantle systemic and embodied oppression. In practice, study abroad students, mostly from the United States, come to an Ecuadorian host/partner community where they live, work and study with at least an equal number of local community participants. Together, students and their local community counterparts form one cohort and work through a curriculum that addresses the host community's immediate needs. The model then applies the semester's work to developing further projects such as community-based tourism, permaculture gardens, arts camps for children or even Participatory Action Research.

From Partners to Co-Authors

The Pachaysana's program model is composed of four primary actors, all of whom are represented as contributors to this article. First, there are home institutions (also referred to as sending institutions) of the participating students that are usually represented by study abroad offices, often referred to as offices of international or global programs (the majority of our readers are most closely related to this voice). Second, there are the students from those institutions that participate in the study abroad program. Third, each semester depends on the active participation of the community that hosts international students, participates in the courses, and continues with the semester's work by carrying out resulting projects. Finally, Pachaysana acts as what is usually referred to as the program provider, which also means serving as the primary educators for the courses.

The six authors participated in a multi-faceted dialogue over many months to write this article. Two authors directed an office of international programs from a home institution that recalled its students during El Paro and COVID-19; one is a year-long international student who was present in Ecuador during El Paro and COVID-19; one is a community member who was a host brother and course participant during El Paro and COVID-19; and two are the Pachaysana program directors who coordinated the communications and evacuation efforts from Ecuador.

The dialogue, carried out through conference calls, email and text messages, covered everything from legal considerations in risk management to dense theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Those conversations led us to identifying the driving questions that each author responded to by

contextualizing our experiences from El Paro to our bigger stories, which of course revealed even more questions. Eventually, we came together for an extended conference call to explore our questions more deeply. Instead of simply talking about what we had already written, we utilized an interactive, arts-based activity to explore the multiple perspectives of what we experienced during El Paro as well as to identify strategies for moving toward a more ethical and reciprocal approach to risk management in study abroad. This activity will be more fully described later in this article.

"El Paro" Case Study

In order to explore the case study from multiple perspectives and according to its numerous layers of complexity, we describe the primary actors, each of which is represented with an author, and divide the events according to three primary stages. As noted, Pachaysana is the program provider whose personnel were physically present with the students and community participants throughout the 11 days of the crisis, and who maintained regular communications with the various home/sending institutions that had students in the program. The participating local (and host) community is Pintag, an Andean agrarian community just outside of Quito. Pintag Amaru is a local organization that leads the community's study abroad programming and with whom Pachaysana had collaborated for three years leading up to the events. The international student and home institution authors are from Juniata College, with whom Pachaysana had worked for five years. Juniata has regularly sent students to both of the associated programs in this case study, and it had students in both programs during El Paro. We should also mention that Juniata became Pachaysana's official School of Record in 2020.

In October of 2019, in response to austerity measures implemented by the government, the Indigenous movement led nationwide protests, which included mass marches, blocking roads and bridges to impede mobility, and seizing oil production facilities. Quito was certainly the most affected part of the country where no less than 50,000 indigenous arrived from different provinces. Their activism paralyzed the country, bringing the economy to a standstill and shining a light on the intense social stratification that defines Ecuador's reality. In just 11 days, it felt as if hundreds of years of systemic injustices had finally boiled over, resulting in a situation where you either sided with the government and multilateral organizations like the IMF, or you sided with the Indigenous.

Those in line with the former called for stability and continued economic growth, while those in line with Indigenous called for disrupting structures that caused social injustices, and while there were exceptions, the division was most recognizable according to social class. If you were part of the top socio-economic brackets, you probably sided with the government and business interests. If you were part of the lower brackets, you most likely sided with the Indigenous and structural disruptions. Making matters more complicated was how people in these different socio-economic groups accessed information. Mainstream news sources told stories that favored the government's response to the protestors, while alternative news sources favored the Indigenous movement and sectors of society that supported the Indigenous.

Political protests are common in Ecuador and study abroad programs usually continue normally after a brief interruption; however, the situation quickly evolved into an unusually tense situation for all the primary actors. In the first stage, from Oct 3 to Oct 6, when the strike was just beginning and primarily led by those working in public transportation, the focus was on continuing with normal programming to the best of Pachaysana's abilities. Coincidentally, Pachaysana had planned a 9-day excursion for both programs and local community counterparts during the exact days of the strike. In the second stage, from Oct 7 to Oct 10, it became clear that the strike was going to intensify, forcing Pachaysana to cancel the remainder of the excursion and bring everyone to Pintag. During these days, as the Indigenous began to arrive in Quito and take the lead of the strike, students and local counterparts participated in local community activities while Pachaysana monitored events and communicated with the home institutions on a daily basis. Toward the end of this stage, community members in Pintag, international students and Pachaysana felt the conflict between running a safe study abroad program and the desire to support the Indigenous movement. Most especially, community members who were charged with hosting the students wanted to bring food and supplies to the Indigenous in Quito, even join their marches in the streets. In the third stage, from Oct 11 to 13, as the situation intensified, international students were moved to the homes of Pachaysana's Resident Directors, which allowed for close monitoring of their safety while freeing local community members in Pintag to participate in the protests. During these days, many study abroad programs in Quito were either evacuating their students or supporting student/family decisions to self-evacuate from Ecuador. On October 13,

Indigenous leaders and government officials negotiated an agreement that reversed the austerity measures and daily life began to stabilize. Shortly afterward, students returned to Pintag and their host families to continue with the regularly scheduled programming.

It is important to mention that each of the home/sending institutions reacted differently to the course of events and Juniata was the only one with students in both of the programs. The U.S.-based study abroad institution for which Pachaysana was working as an associate decided to follow the advice of an international insurance company and mandate a temporary evacuation of its students. The home institutions with students in the Pachaysana program decided to follow Pachaysana recommendations, which were to keep students at staff homes and wait. On Oct 12, the various factors led Juniata to exercise two evacuations, one medical evacuation of one student who was suffering a chronic illness during El Paro and one security-based evacuation of two students in the associated program.

As is the case in all crisis situations, each actor experienced a unique lived reality, and we now share our independent reflections as we look back at El Paro.

Reflections from Each Program Partner/Author

Sending School Perspective

Voices of co-authors from Juniata College: Looking back now, we conclude that Juniata's decision to evacuate students was rushed and affected by institutional biases, which we most likely share with most institutions of higher education in the United States. Due to the complexity of factors, including the potential lack of access to food and medical supplies, roadblocks, airport closures, recommendations by legal counsel, and pressures from concerned families, it was too hectic to see our biases in the moment of crisis. We confronted them over the next year while engaging in the deep reflection this dialogue demands. We share them with the hopes of inspiring authentic dialogue among our colleagues in the field.

Juniata did not engage in deep dialogue with Pachaysana or with the students in the program. It was also clear that the staff at Pachaysana, while leading with compassion and taking into consideration the perspectives and needs of the students, the communities, and the sending institutions, were

overwhelmingly influenced by the sending institutions' needs. Critical Interculturality (Walsh, 2018) provides us a context to consider how conferring with the various stakeholders, including the local community members who are a critical component of the community-based learning model, may have allowed for a different approach to ensuring student safety. The local community members were not brought into the critical moments of decision-making. The decision to evacuate Juniata students was made quickly and with the final authority coming from our travel safety committee. Although the representatives of Juniata were in communication with students, and although decisions were made in good faith according to what they believed were in the best interest of the students, the students were not consulted about their evacuation. In fact, dramatically in one situation, a student tried to stop the evacuation process. As a secure car was enroute to retrieve them, they questioned whether the decision had been made in the interest of students and the partner community.

As the evacuated students were on their return flights home, the situation in Ecuador calmed down significantly. Such a sudden turn of events left Juniata staff feeling uncertain. In a matter of days, the political tension seemed to almost disappear and the pressure to allow students to rejoin their programs lingered. Such rapidly changing events led Juniata students to further question our timing and reasoning for our decisions. While some students asked to return to Ecuador shortly after evacuation, others questioned how it could be possible to return safely on such a quick turnaround. In the end, Juniata dramatically shifted its perspective and reversed course, allowing students the option to return to Ecuador after a brief stay at their homes in the USA.

While Juniata acted with what we believe to be the students' best interests in mind, our back-and-forth decision making is reflective of two prominent biases we believe are prevalent in our field: 1) viewing the Global South (Ecuador in this case), as "the other," and 2) whether due to liability concerns or not, crisis decisions reflect an "institution knows best" approach.

Regarding the first bias, like most institutions, Juniata has vastly more experience in the Global North. Whether through current programming or the experiences of our staff, we feel more comfortable making decisions when facing crises in Europe or regions in the world that seem to share cultural norms. Because those programs are associated with an infrastructure that is similar to

ours, or because we better understand the services they offer us, we consciously or unconsciously treat them as more reliable than those in the Global South. It was not until we spent considerable time working on this case study with the program provider, the participating student, and the participating community member that we fully opened our understanding of the local infrastructure and services. This reflection can help us to engage in an anti-oppressive approach to internationalization (Stein et al., 2016) in which the community partners' perspectives are central to decision-making.

With relation to our second bias, no aspects of institutional power should be exempt from conversations of systemic injustice. Juniata made the best decision possible in the time it had according to the existing relationships it had established. Nevertheless, just as crises called us to question and transform the college-student and college-community relationships thanks to social movements like Black Lives Matter and Me Too, crisis situations should inspire us to question and transform the relationships in education abroad programming. We do not argue for institutions of higher education to give up their authority, but to make themselves vulnerable and open to other voices in crisis response through intentional planning requiring dialogue and shared decision-making.

Host Community Perspective

Voice of co-author from Pintage: The case study cannot be seen as separate from the community development processes occurring in Pintag. For years, Pintag Amaru has been working to better understand our own culture, history, and struggles and how those relate with an ever more globalized society. Over the years, our work has shown us that we are intricately connected with other cultures and societies as much as to global politics, and we know that all these interconnections affect our way of life, our access to basic services and our very rights. We are a group of artisans, farmers, and day laborers, and when the austerity measures were passed in October 2019, it affected us at the deepest levels. As we work through this analysis, we recognize the complexity of our many roles: we are members of the community of Pintag, youth leaders who conform the collective Pintag Amaru, and partners with Pachaysana in intercultural education and study abroad programming.

As the events unfolded, and we transitioned to hosting the students and acting as local counterparts, the distinct elements of our collective identity came

into light, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. We felt the need to join the protests on the streets and march against the unjust government measures, yet we also wanted to fulfill our responsibility of keeping the students safe. While at no point did we consider abandoning our responsibilities and moral duty to take care of the students, and even though we felt conflicted, the decision was made to remove the students from Pintag. The decision to remove the students, over which we have little to no authority, combined with the complex characteristics of our collective identity, raises questions that we ask ourselves to better understand our work in this field.

From Pintag's perspective, part of sharing our culture is sharing our struggles, our motivations, and our needs; El Paro provided an excellent opportunity to learn about who we are. However, in these situations where does a learning opportunity end and is that ending point different depending on who makes the decision? How do the institutions see the conflicts that are developing in our country and how are the participating communities taken into consideration? Can there be flexibility in risk management protocols considering the different situations and partners involved? Is there an understanding that decisions taken for the security of some, for example the students, can result in greater problems for others, for example the host communities? Can the basis of security protocols reflect the same working spirit we have with the rest of the programming, coming out of a relationship founded on open communication, trust, and solidarity?

International Student Perspective

Voice of co-author from Juniata College: As a Communications major, one of the first things I learned was communication models. What we refer to as a transactional approach in this article mirrors the Interactive Model of communication (Ashman, 2018). This model shows us how one person can send a message to another person, and that the cultural, social, physical, and relational context of each person and even environment, will affect the way the message is received. That is just how communication works, meaning intent does not always equal impact. Although the Interactive Model is reliable, it has its critiques. It has been said that the model's focus on 'senders' and 'receivers' lack of an open-ended and free-spirited space to create dialogue can result in misconstruing the messages (Ashman, 2018). Feedback is just as important to communication as the original message, something that Interactive models do not allow for.

During El Paro, while there was communication on multiple levels and coming from many directions at once, I could not perceive genuine feedback. The students received hourly updates from Pachaysana about the situation in Ecuador, and of course we were constantly fielding messages from our home institutions, parents, and friends at home. I felt hyper aware of the differing opinions and perspectives around me and found it difficult to explain to one person in the United States the true situation of what was actually happening in Ecuador. Even locally, there was so much tension, fear, and uncertainty. A country and its people were struggling and there was so much pain, conflicting politics, and instability. In Pintag, our host families were waking up in the dark hours of the morning to cook and prepare food to bring to the protesters in Quito. The air was tense and anxious, but powerful. This national comradery, which I would later observe with the BLM movement back home, was something I had never witnessed before. One night, after everyone in the city went to their windows to bang their pots and pans at 7PM as a sign of protest (called a "cacerolazo"), I bore witness with my tears, unable to contain my admiration for the sheer human strength that surrounded me.

My study abroad experience taught me to look at the world as a place of "many ways of knowing," and I wonder how those making policy decisions take into consideration questions of equity and create mechanisms to respond to our fluid and ever-changing world. I understand why institutions lean toward uniformity and consistency when making decisions about the safety of students, as it makes for a more clear-cut answer for how we should deal with situations. The only problem is that life is not consistent or clear-cut, and the rules and procedures that work for some cases do not work for all. This rigid and transactional risk management approach that I witnessed during El Paro was a clear indicator to me of the colonialism and western ideology that is very deeply embedded in many study abroad offices. This rigidness regarding rules and regulations is reflective of the culture within the United States, and our unwillingness for conversation and compromise. I believe that our decision-making processes, no matter the setting, must always be reflective of the many lives involved in said situation. Our risk management modeling should reflect the dialogues I had when living and learning in Pintag, allowing for feedback, respecting the opinions of others, always considering different ways of knowing, and most importantly, having trust, even in difficult times. I believe that allowing a conversation driven by empathy to guide our decisions, especially in

times of crisis, will lead to steadier heads, more ethical outcomes, and more surely guided hearts.

The Program Provider Perspective

Voices of co-authors from Fundación Pachaysana: Pachaysana found itself in a position we can only describe as the in-between. We felt in between our different relationships, trying to balance our varied responsibilities and ethical commitments with international students, Ecuadorian community partners and U.S.-based sending institutions, and we felt in between our many roles, feeling as if our multiple lives as program coordinators, social justice educators, community activists and members of Ecuadorian families pulled us in all directions. We attempted to balance the relationships and roles by guiding our actions according to the values of justice and reciprocity; however, El Paro presented tensions that made it almost impossible for us to remain mission-focused and student safety clearly became our top priority. In placing student wellbeing at the pinnacle, we later recognized how such choices complicate racial dynamics and our own identities.

We discovered that Pachaysana's institutional responsibilities in risk management are the prime obstacle in carrying out fair-trade ethics and fulfilling our commitment to decolonizing study abroad. Our responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the students came into conflict with our responsibility of providing a safe learning/working environment between community members and the students and to ensure that the students' presence does not cause an unwarranted burden on the community. We relocated the students multiple times, we carried out constant check-ins to assure the students were well informed and emotionally supported, and we altered our curriculum to turn the crisis into learning opportunities. In contrast, with local participants splitting their time between supporting the students and traveling to the frontlines of the protests, we could not offer them the same level of support. Locals confronted danger by standing up for what they believed in while the students rested safely with host families or at Resident Director homes. The racial undertones were all too obvious. The white bodies of students were being safeguarded and, in some cases, evacuated back to the United States while the brown bodies of local community members were only partially supported while fighting for social justice in confrontations against the police and military.

The transactional nature of risk management led us to a hierarchization of our roles. Although our nature as an organization and individuals made us constantly question how we could support the different actors in an equitable way, we felt as if we were juggling contrasting elements of our identity instead of finding a way that they can work in harmony together. Without knowing it, our actions were creating a hierarchy. First, we were Pachaysana team members doing what was right for the organization, then we were Ecuadorians concerned about the future of our country and community partners, and lastly, knowing that our families would be safe at home, we were family members. This unspoken dynamic was witnessed in our actions. First, we moved the students to safe spaces, then we contacted our sending school partners, then we led activist efforts such as facilitating donation drives to support protestors and then we made it home to our families. Focusing on the multiple transactions made us feel overworked and exhausted, and in some cases our family relationships suffered.

Bringing It All Together

The authors of this article represent the diversity of our field, and in order to bring out the varied experiences and ways of knowing of each person, we processed our perspectives through a creative dialogue, allowing each person to express themselves according to how they felt most comfortable. Because this work was created during the pandemic and our varied geographical locations, the dialogue occurred over Zoom, and so that everyone could speak in the language of their choice (Spanish or English) we invited a trusted interpreter to work closely with our Spanish language-only participant.

Based on the authors' initial responses to our driving questions, we decided to shift our intercultural dialogue in a way that challenges the epistemic wall. We knew that meeting to simply talk about our experiences in risk management would favor those who discuss the topic regularly, and that we needed to create a space that makes room for multiple ways of knowing and being. In response we decided to implement an arts-based approach, and each of us came to the Zoom dialogue with a visual representation of how we interpreted the system that drove the risk management decisions during El Paro. Some authors drew pictures, one created a collage of photos, one designed an elaborate concept map and one asked us to visually imagine the system while describing it. After each author presented their images, we asked each other

questions and made comments about how the different images impacted us. By trying to understand each image, we were able to better understand each other. We then looked for how and where our images interrelated with one another, encouraging all of us to see the system as a story or interconnected stories.

Our story was characterized by vastly different depictions of the system that drives risk management and student evacuations. Contrary to the U.S.-based participants, the community member used the metaphor of a body to describe the system (see Figure 1), calling for a holistic approach to sustain the health of the entire organism.

Figure (1): Image by Edwin Pilaquinga of a human body connected to a larger ecosystem to represent risk management

The sending institution representative used the metaphor of a guillotine to describe a process that is mechanical and unyieldingly powerful, and whose final act is taking life away (see Figure 2).

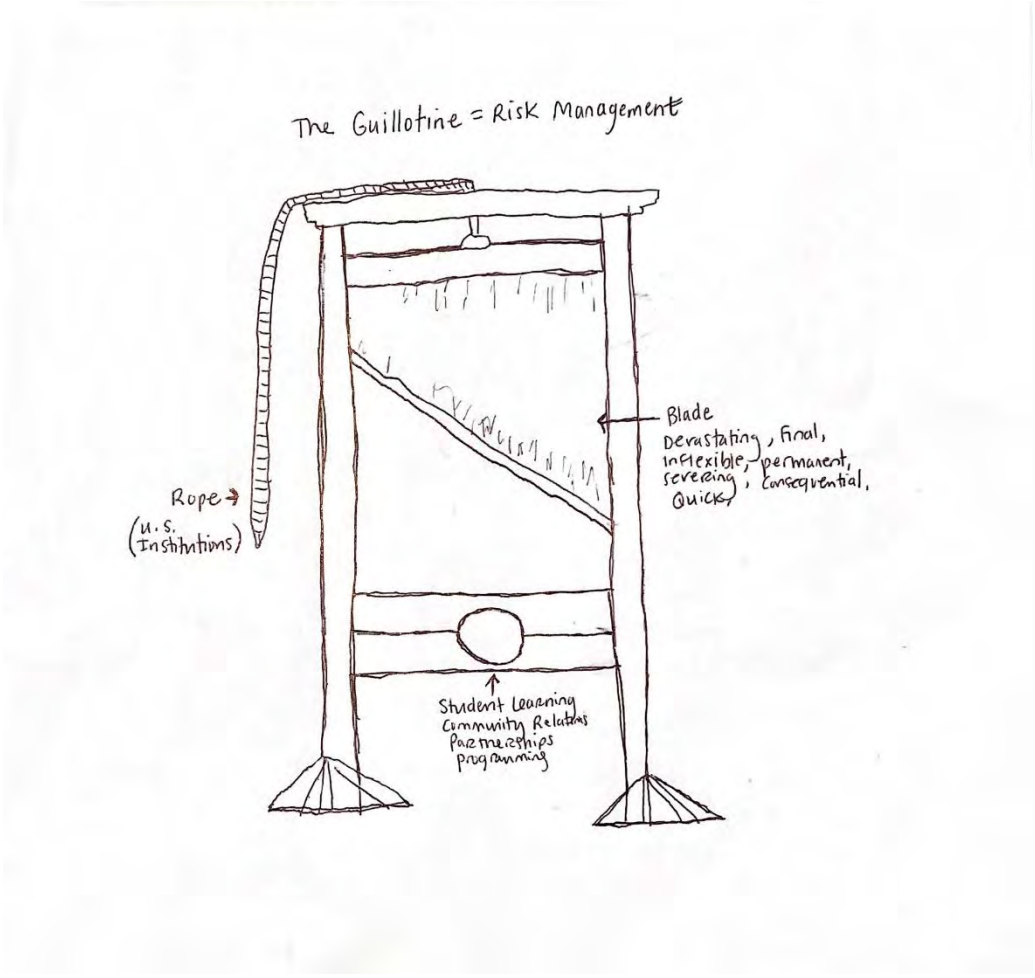

FIGURE (2): IMAGE BY CAITLIN MURPHY HATZ OF A GUILLOTINE TO REPRESENT RISK MANAGEMENT

This organic vs inorganic approach to conceptualizing the system reflects the tension between deeply meaningful intercultural educational experiences and simpler travel abroad experiences. By going into greater depth, we recognized that the inorganic risk management system thrives through regular maintenance to fulfill a single function. When well-oiled, this machine does its job and gets the students to safety. The organic system seeks to become a self-correcting one, like a body, which exists through a constant questioning of what safety means and how it is achieved. Instead of maintaining itself with regular check-ups with an expert to assure the mechanics will work when needed, this system thrives with a holistic approach that is nourished by an

ongoing and multilateral dialogue. The inorganic risk management system represents the transactional approach where interculturality serves a function in maintaining a larger system and existing power relationships, while the organic system represents the relational approach, which critically examines what interculturality means and seeks continuous transformation by engaging diverse logics.

When looking for interconnectedness between our depictions of the risk management system, we noticed disturbing power trends, and all authors agreed that new models should strive for equity across primary actors. The visual representation of the program provider showed power hidden in gray matter that started in some unidentified part of the sending institution and seeped into every other aspect of the programming, while the student drew a centrally-located eye whose gaze overwhelmed the other perspectives. We questioned who truly holds the power in that gray area, or who is this eye, and how their power is manifested in actions. We recognized that the power represented in our drawings was dominated by the same privileges that sustain the larger higher education system. In short, power is driven by institutional wealth, and in turn is characterized by a legacy of colonial whiteness, leading us to link Ogden's (2007) "view from the veranda" interpretation of today's colonial study abroad student with risk management. We operate risk management from a kind of colonial veranda with the border wall fully intact.

As we reflected on this creative dialogue among all the authors, we realized the obvious: to move from transactional to relational risk management we must diligently and equitably cultivate the multi-layered relationships in study abroad programming. Diligence refers to involving all players in defining risks and designing risk management processes from the beginning and continuously transforming those processes together. Equity refers to giving power over to those actors who typically do not have it. It is important to note that sharing power is not simply bringing various actors to the table but allowing for their presence to shape and co-create the dialogue. Sharing the table refers to arranging a kinder transaction across the border, while sharing power implies border crossing and border thinking, referring to meeting in that elusive space where we all contribute to transforming the system together.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations

The majority of our authors met regularly (first weekly, then monthly) for over a year, allowing us the time to build trust and grow together. Our work elicited dozens of questions and considerations, which we distill into our eight most important lessons-learned and recommendations. We ask that you, the reader, approach them as if you are now part of the dialogue with us, rethinking how you have handled risk management decisions and interacted with your partners in crisis situations. We also ask you to make yourself vulnerable to the challenges these recommendations present, realizing that steps forward may mean downsizing portfolios, inviting new partners to the table, and taking a serious look at our own assumptions and biases. We do not assert that we have the answers. Rather, we hope to inspire a dialogue that will move the field toward an enactment of the Forum's latest Standards (6th Edition, 2020), specifically focusing on greater inclusion, reciprocity, and equity with our partners and host communities. This dialogue is intended to lead us toward transforming structures in our field, whether by dismantling those that no longer serve our reality or building new ones that help us become more effective educators.

1. Lesson learned: Risk management is relationship management. Recommendation: Give risk management the time to grow and shape itself equitably. Are we willing to invest time into a risk management relationship that goes beyond responding to a crisis? Healthy relationships are not shaped by how they respond to a crisis, but how they have prepared for the crisis ahead of time. Preparedness for conflicts requires regular meetings to keep informed of the circumstances in each other's countries, to establish baselines for safety based on each other's needs, and to adapt protocols according to the ever-changing realities. This recommendation calls for international educators to build in more time for all key stakeholders to learn about and from one another. During this process, in addition to updating the content and procedures of risk management protocols for the designated program, they are creating an approach that is equitable and ethical.

2. Lesson Learned: Individual and institutional biases impact risk management. Recommendation: Acknowledge, name & actively work toward dismantling bias in all aspects of study abroad including risk management - What are our assumptions about the places where we send students and where

do those assumptions come from? What inherent biases do we have about the safety of a location or what constitutes safe behavior? Do we perpetuate the same biases that we ask our students to challenge in themselves? Counteracting injustice requires us to recognize our own biases and how they impact our decisions, and in turn, how those biases impact student learning and our relationships with our partners. We need to challenge ourselves to learn more deeply about the cultures and communities where we are partnering, and we need to be willing to trust the expertise of local partners.

3. Lesson Learned: The big decisions are made primarily by sending institutions. Recommendation: Reevaluate who makes key decisions and bring in additional voices. - Does excluding certain voices in risk management decisions further entrench study abroad on the veranda, contributing evidence to the "imperialist" impressions held by many in the Global South? Let us determine whose voices are missing in risk management decision-making, and as a way to ensure equitable and sustainable programming, let us bring them in as co-decision-makers. If we are fostering more robust relationships, these voices will feel essential, not complementary, for guaranteeing the safety of students.

4. Lesson learned: Decisions during crises have lasting impacts on all, especially local partners and students. Recommendations: Identify potential consequences of actions for all parties and conduct extensive follow up after the crisis - Can identifying how our actions negatively impact our diverse partners help us be more thoughtful and transparent in decision-making? If we start with all stakeholders at the beginning of our decision-making, we can clearly articulate and map out the consequences of how our decisions will affect all involved. Then, after a crisis situation, we conduct follow up with all of our partners to assess the health of our relationship and heal any wounds.

5. Lesson learned: Students feel disempowered by institutional decisions. Recommendation: Develop policies and strategies to increase student agency - Can students be given more agency in decisions that impact their educational experiences? Can we create a relationship with students that empowers them to be informed decision-makers for their own health and safety? This lesson-learned asks us to reconceptualize standards around U.S. institutional liability and responsibility vis-a-vis the student as a partner instead of a client or service user.

6. Lesson learned: Study abroad offices manage large portfolios that make it impossible to carry out these recommendations. Recommendation: Less partners- deeper relationships - Instead of focusing on almost endless options for our students, can we build long-lasting and trusting relationships between sending institutions, students, the program providers, and the communities where those programs are carried out? We recognize that this will decrease student options for programming; however, if students are treated as partners in study abroad programming, as suggested in the previous recommendation, they would then play a significant role in creating and developing the partnerships. This recommendation asks study abroad offices to stop transacting programs to students and focus on building sustainable partnerships with their students, providers and community members abroad based on shared values.

7. Lesson learned: study abroad often focuses on "outcomes" that achieve certain benchmarks. Recommendation: Challenge our notions of reciprocity and re-focus on relationship-building - Instead of developing programming from a "send and receive" perspective, can we focus on compromise and a shared vulnerability? Can a new approach to risk management help us reimagine how we practice reciprocity in our partnerships? Reciprocity is more than exchange; it is a relationship-building exercise. Let us focus our partnerships on creating relational opportunities for cultivating our shared missions, values, and identities rather than transactional opportunities for checking the boxes on our strategic plan.

8. Lesson Learned: how we dialogue with partners does not take into account our multiple ways of knowing. Recommendation. Challenge ourselves to question our normalized ways of dialogue. Can partners apply their diverse cultural perspectives to new and exciting ways of engaging in conversation? Our collective implemented art to inspire observation and reflection, but knowledge can be created and shared in ways that many of us have never considered. Every effort to broaden our communication and engage other ways of knowing represents another move toward dismantling the epistemic wall and decolonizing our relationships.

Conclusion

We set out on this journey to learn from one another and to challenge our preconceived notions of risk management. What evolved was a recognition of how risk management in education abroad mirrors a legacy of colonialism, which we embody and project in our biases. We can only transform these biases by truly seeing our reflections in the mirror, which takes courage and vulnerability. In identifying and talking about our biases and life experiences related to El Paro, we took the first steps toward decolonizing our relationships. We began as colleagues whose relationship was focused on providing meaningful educational experiences for students, but we conclude as true partners who seek holistic relationships that prioritize education, growth, and justice for all.

Any intent to decolonize study abroad must begin with looking at ourselves in the mirror. If we in our field can see ourselves as parts of a living-breathing body, and if we can see our students, providers, and host communities as parts of the same body, then we can begin to converse frankly about the health of the body. We cultivate our relationships as a way of caring for our body, and in doing so we make ourselves healthier and our students safer.

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Author Biography

Daniel Bryan is an educator, activist, artist, and scholar specializing in the use of participatory theatre as a means of education and conflict transformation. Originally from the United States, he has lived for over 20 years in Quito, Ecuador where he has directed community-based and university-based study abroad programs. He is co-founder and Executive Director at Fundación Pachaysana and a regular lecturer and scholar/artist in residence at colleges and universities in the U.S.

Chelsea Viteri is an activist, educator, researcher, and artist at heart. A youth worker and community organizer who has worked with diverse communities in both Ecuador and the United States, utilizing artistic expression, including theatre, music, poetry and documentaries, as a means for collective empowerment and creative conflict transformation. Previously Pachaysana's Resident Director, Chelsea is currently working as Program Coordinator for the Global Studies Program at Washington University in St. Louis.

Caitlin Murphy Hatz is the Director of Off-Campus Programs at St. Lawrence University. At the time of writing this article, she served as the Director of Study

Abroad and later Dean of International Education at Juniata College. Throughout the past ten years, Caitlin has worked in international education in a variety of roles including study abroad, international student support and recruitment, global programming, ESL, and partnership development. She enjoys travelling, speaking Italian, and exercising outdoors.

Kati R. Csoman is the Director of the Nationality Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Programs at the University of Pittsburgh and served as Dean of International Education at Juniata College. Her experience in international education administration spans over thirty years and includes responsibilities related to institutional partnerships, study abroad, international student and scholar services, risk management, and intercultural learning and assessment. She has led several study abroad programs, including a semester program to The Gambia.

Edwin Manuel Pilaquinga Llulluna was born in the house he still calls home in the Andean community of Valencia de Pintag, just outside of Quito. He splits his days as a construction worker and a farmer, and he is passionate about his community's history and struggles for development. He is working to apply ancestral knowledge to his participation in local dance and music groups, and he is a founding member of the collective Pintag Amaru.

Emily McGrath is a communications professional who uses her love of culture and humanity to bring a creative touch to the world around her. She graduated from Juniata College in 2021 with a degree in Intercultural Communication and Spanish and she is currently a member of the Social Impact and Sustainability team at PR firm, Edelman. She enjoys growing and foraging food, fiber arts, riding her bike, and spending time with her family.