

## Constructive Disequilibrium and Transformative Pedagogy: Developing Global Citizens in Faraway Spaces

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*Abstract: In this reflective essay we examined the experiences of a group of students from a small liberal arts college in the United States on a study abroad program to the Marshall Islands to intern as preservice teachers in Marshallese schools. Specifically, we examined 32 students' critical reflections written once they returned from their programs. We interrogated their understanding of themselves regarding their privilege as American students and the inequality between the two nations. Through their teaching of Marshallese students, they deeply questioned the meaning of privilege, culture, identity, and community. We interpreted these experiences through the lens of transformative learning theory and the notion of constructive disequilibrium. When critical-transformative pedagogies inform these experiences, they nudge students out of their comfort zone and offer them opportunities to consider new possibilities that widen their life trajectories and develop global citizenship. We conclude with advocating for the importance of study abroad experiences.*

*Keywords: study abroad, transformative learning, global citizenship, constructive disequilibrium, the Marshall Islands.*

Our campuses educate our citizens. Becoming an educated citizen means learning a lot of facts and mastering techniques of reasoning. But it means something more. It means learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination. We may continue to produce narrow citizens who have difficulty understanding people different from themselves, whose imaginations rarely venture beyond their local setting. It is all too easy for the moral imagination to become narrow this way. ... But we have the opportunity to do better, and now we are beginning to seize that opportunity. That is not “political correctness”; that is the cultivation of humanity. (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 14)

As teachers, we seek to educate our students. We teach skills, critical and analytical thinking, and writing. Ultimately, many of us want our students to enter their world, their communities, with a deep understanding and care for their world, both locally and globally. We want them to be citizens of the world—“capable of love and imagination.” But, how do we actually do this? How do we expose our students to transformative new ideas and experiences that allow them to venture beyond “narrow” citizens?

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, one response to these questions in U.S. universities and colleges was through study abroad programs. Study abroad experiences offer students the chance to step outside their comfort zones and consider new perspectives (Brockington & Wiedenhoeft, 2009). The programs claim to provide experiential learning, where the world is their classroom, and personal growth and discovery are ever present (Kitsantas, 2004; Shiveley & Misco, 2015). For over two decades since 2000, study abroad has been part of the liberal arts college experience through programs that include yearlong, semester-long, or weeklong trips often to other countries. Some colleges and universities have set up entire programs overseas—as in the case of New York University Abu Dhabi, Northwestern University in Qatar, and Yale-National University of Singapore—to provide a truly

international experience. Undergirding these programs is the belief that “interaction with new ideas and people who are different is valuable and necessary, and a commitment to educating students who are true citizens of the world” (New York University Abu Dhabi, n.d.). Other programs operating domestically send students to more remote regions of the United States to achieve similar goals.

However, many teachers who have accompanied students on these adventures have noted this “stepping out” is not always what happens (Kinging, 2010). Sometimes students are not so adventurous, reflective, or even participatory with the host country or people; they may cluster together, seldom venturing out of their areas of familiarity, and in essence, remain tourists. In the words of John Ogden (2007), they are the *colonial student*, a “U.S. university student who really wants to be abroad and take full advantage of all the benefits studying abroad offers, but is not necessarily open to experiencing the less desirable side of being there” (p. 37). Further, trends indicate that students attend study abroad programs in geographical locales with which they are more familiar. Of the 347,099 American students who traveled abroad in 2018–2019, a little more than half of them traveled to Europe (55.7%), compared to those who traveled to Latin America and the Caribbean (13.8%), Asia (11.7%), the Middle East (1.7%), Africa (4.5%), and Oceania (4.4%; Institute of International Education, 2020). Such trends toward Eurocentric study abroad experiences belie these programs’ intentions of cultivating global citizenship. In fact, in a context of increased nationalism driven primarily by ethnoreligious cultural markers of in-groups and out-groups (Killick, 2017), as educators, we ought to critically examine whether the proliferation of Eurocentric destinations inadvertently creates narrow citizens whose capacity to connect with and act on behalf of the cultural other remains stunted.

Notably, Che et al. (2009) have proposed that study abroad experiences in unfamiliar locales are uniquely positioned to cultivate global citizenship capacities compared to more familiar destinations. Geographical areas that are the least familiar to the sojourner offer the most comprehensive array of opportunities to experience what Che et al. term “constructive disequilibrium” or cognitive or emotional dissonance that students may encounter in unfamiliar contexts. Experiencing dissonance may be accompanied by frustration and fear, which may short-circuit meaningful learning toward global citizenship when experienced in a nonsupportive environment. Thus, constructive disequilibrium entails supporting students to make meaning of dissonance and integrate its experience. Che and colleagues concluded their theoretical proposition with a call for further empirical work to examine how to support constructive disequilibrium in less familiar study abroad contexts as a pathway for developing students as true global citizens.

One of the main critiques of study abroad programs, particularly those in less popular locations, is that they can sometimes become educational tourism or field trips to experience the “exotic other” (Ogden, 2007; Woolf, 2006). The Eurocentric trends in study abroad programs may suggest that American students want to “buy” an adventure, but only if it does not come at a personal cost of questioning their previously held values and ideas. Perhaps students are aware that locations other than Europe are less likely to be wealthy and to have fewer conveniences, which may leave them targeted or exposed if they attempt to replicate their home lifestyles in the host country, or they simply may eschew any discomfort and uncertainty that might arise. However, this view, perhaps cynical, may not fully capture the experience that many of our students crave. Studying abroad, for most young people, is about opening up new possibilities, civic engagement, and learning from others they recognize are inherently different. Many also want to help communities and be part of a larger calling “to do good” or participate in service learning (Sánchez et al., 2006). These experiences often impact their future careers (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017)—a study abroad program can allow students to consider new prospects that their college education has not yet offered. As educators, many of us have been profoundly transformed through working with students in study abroad programs or by our own experiences in such contexts. In some cases, our entire educational trajectory has changed, and these

experiences have had a long-lasting influence on our careers. However, under what conditions is such transformation most likely to occur? How might we encourage our students to allow themselves to become fully immersed, open to other ways of knowing and being in the world, and committed to understanding people who are different from themselves? Moreover, how can we work with our institutions to open up these possibilities and weaken polarization along racial, class, religious, gender, and other differences?

This article offers a case study of students on a study abroad program from a small liberal arts college in the United States to the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in the Central Pacific to consider how students experience a program in an unfamiliar locale. First, we provide an overview of how scholars conceptualize global citizenship development in study abroad contexts from the perspective of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Then we describe the goals of our program in the RMI and how we elicited and analyzed key data for this study. Specifically, we examined students' narratives written once they had returned from the program. We asked how the experience affected their understanding of themselves as students, including their own positionality regarding privilege and identity. We found that the opportunity to step out of their environment and comfort zone allowed them to immerse themselves in new communities—despite the fear of failing—and widened their life trajectories. Transformative learning theory provided the framework to interpret these experiences. We conclude with suggestions for how journaling about critical incidents and critical reflections can serve well as pedagogical tools for constructive disequilibrium in support of global citizenship development for students in study abroad programs.

### **Global Citizenship Development as a Transformative Phenomenon**

Tarrant (2010) defined a global citizen as someone who accepts a political obligation to act in a “just and fair manner” toward or on behalf of “people who have no immediate relationship to the self ... and often live far away,” without expecting anything in return; global citizenship also involves “thinking about and acting on issues of justice, the environment, and civic obligations” (p. 435). Becoming a global citizen through participating in study abroad is best understood as a transformative process involving shifts in beliefs, values, norms, and ways of knowing (Bamber, 2016; Kiely 2004; Perry et al., 2012; Taylor, 1994). This body of work builds on an approach to learning pioneered by sociologist Jack Mezirow (1991), who outlined what he believed were the key phases of the transformation process in education. The process is triggered by a “disorienting dilemma” that reveals the limits of the learner’s perspective. This dilemma then leads the learner to question and critically assess their assumptions. Following this assessment, the learner explores other options for new roles and relationships and then builds competence and self-confidence in these new roles and relationships. Finally, the conditions dictated by their fresh perspective provide the learner with the skills to implement a different course of action—a stage Mezirow calls “reintegration” (p. 169).

Two central tenets undergird subsequent interrogation of students’ experiences in study abroad programs in unfamiliar locales. First, the host country’s sociocultural context will often present experiences that contradict the expectations, values, and assumptions of the so-called sojourner (individual visiting the host country). Second, through active reflection on previously held beliefs and exploring alternative ways of knowing, the sojourner becomes more accepting of the cultural “other” and discovers what feels like a “more authentic” relationship with themselves and the world (Bamber, 2016; Taylor, 1994). Our own ethos aligns with that of Mezirow and other theorists of transformative learning who have proposed that transformative learning results in increased openness to different viewpoints and deeper clarity of one’s own values, beliefs, and actions in relation to others. Without cultivating these capacities, which we deem central to global citizenship, our efforts as educators to counter increased polarization in the world may fall short of this goal.

Our goal in this reflective essay was to unpack this process of transformation toward global citizenship within the context of a study abroad program. We emphasize that becoming a global citizen is a process that continues to evolve long after a study-abroad or service-learning program has ended (Kiely, 2004), and cultivating reflective capacities is the key mechanism for actualizing this evolution. The case study we detail portrays the innovative application of constructive disequilibrium through the use of critical incident journal entries and critical reflections (detailed below) as pedagogical tools to support transformation toward a global citizen identity in a volunteer teaching-abroad experience in the RMI. During immersion, participants were invited to keep a journal regularly and instructed to write an entry whenever an event or incident occurred in their work or social life that caught their attention or seemed significant for their thinking or emotions, especially if it conflicted with their cultural values and beliefs. These entries were known as “critical incidents” and were completed as close to event occurrence as possible. In contrast, critical reflections (on which this study draws) were generated postimmersion. They entailed a retrospective account of the current significance of participants’ time in the RMI. In these accounts, written years later, participants described how the experience abroad fit within the narrative arc of their lives and what aspects of that experience remained salient to them. Although our analysis here focuses solely on critical reflections, our view is that the joint use of critical incidents and later critical reflections creates a supportive pedagogical environment in which students can experience constructive disequilibrium and develop global citizenship.

## Method

### *Program Description and Participants*

The program in which all respondents participated ran for 15 years in the RMI’s atolls and islands from 2000 to 2014. The goals of the program included providing the participants the chance to grow personally and professionally through living and teaching in a developing country; assisting with the implementation of the national policy of adopting English as the primary language of instruction in the schools in the RMI so that the Marshallese children would be fully bilingual by the time of their graduation from high school; serving as resources and working collaboratively with the staff at each school, their communities, and the Ministry of Education to strengthen the school system; and improving education outcomes. Participants in the study abroad program were of two classifications: interns and volunteers. Interns were generally undergraduates in their junior year at Middle College (the college’s name is a pseudonym) and taught in the RMI for 10 weeks. Volunteers were college graduates (most, but not all, from Middle College) who were required to teach for at least a full year in the RMI even though some taught for longer, sometimes spending an extra year or two in the program. In total, about 140 interns and volunteers participated in the program in the 15 years of its duration (2000–2014).

### *Data Collection*

Qualitative data were collected from a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of 32 participants (from 50 who were invited via email to submit a reflection with the presumption that they would be most likely to return a reflection, based on prior return rates for the critical incidents). Through the means of reflections, the writers participating in the project were invited to assess the ways, if any, that their experience and living abroad in a remote country with a culture dramatically different from their own impacted them. The reflections offered the participants a space to consider their involvement in the program and dialogue about civic engagement, community, and self-actualization after their return.

Data consisted of 32 essays of 3–5 pages in length written between 2014 and 2018. Thus, some writers were writing about an experience undergone 14 or 15 years ago, whereas for others, the experience was much more recent. Of the participants who submitted a reflection, 16 were female, and 16 were male; four participants identified as Black males, two as Asian males, two as Asian females, 12 as White males, and 12 as White females. The students were asked to respond to a series of prompts regarding their teaching experience in the RMI: what was most important to them, how their experience on the study abroad program fit into the arc of their life, and how, if at all, it connects with what they are doing now.

### *Analytical Approach*

We employed a narrative, thematic analysis approach (Riessman, 2008) to understand participants' immersive experiences in a study abroad program in the RMI. Given that our data were written accounts of events that included participants' interpretations of their experiences, a narrative, thematic analysis focusing on the essay content is appropriate for this study. Data were coded—as narrative segments—by the three authors separately and then discussed as a group. A narrative segment was defined as a distinct section in the essay that depicted the writer's sense making about a particular topic, event, or general experience of immersing themselves in the RMI context, focusing on the contemporary significance of the incident to the writer. The coding team spanned three generations in age and represented various social identity backgrounds and academic disciplines. Each team member had several years of lived experiences in a country different from their homeland in personal and professional capacities. As pedagogues and scholars, all three members shared a belief in and a commitment to transformative education experiences with youth and young adults for realizing a more just world.

During analytic data meetings as a group, the authors interpreted individually coded segments of text, first within the context of the whole essay by a particular writer, and then within the larger societal contexts of their immersion experiences (e.g., globalization, claims made about elite college education in the United States, race relations in the United States, among others). We then grouped writers under a list of preliminary categories (generated from the data) according to how relevant a category was to the ideas presented in each writer's essay. We added to this initial list, reread, and reanalyzed the reflective essays weekly for over 4 months. Finally, we synthesized these categories into overall themes that we believed were representative of the data patterns.

### **Findings**

The findings we share below showcase how students experienced a study abroad program intentionally designed to (a) immerse them in a culture completely different from their own and (b) foster their capacity for engaging effectively with cultural others through reflection. When people find themselves in an unfamiliar place it often requires them to look around to determine what the situation requires of them and to discover their ability and willingness to accommodate those demands. Thus, we examined what students experienced and how, and to what extent their participation influenced their own beliefs, values, and expectations of people who live a life that is significantly different from their own. We found that the study abroad program offered students a new way of looking at the world, questioning values, assessing norms they took for granted, and examining their education regarding the space they currently inhabited and the world overall.

### *Culture and Community*

For many of the students, the theme of developing a new perspective was present in their critical reflections. Although many participants had traveled overseas, this study abroad experience allowed them to see themselves, their communities, and the United States in a profoundly different light. These insights were not unexpected, but the participants' writing about these concepts implied a deeper criticality that transferred to other parts of their lives. Participants reflected on their values and larger questions about culture and privilege. Matt wrote:

For me, this experience started to raise a more general question about the mixing of cultures. Was I there to teach students how to operate in a western world? Or, was I there to learn and assimilate into the native culture while sharing parts of my own? Twelve years later, I am still not sure I have the answer for this. There were other times when I was presented with a similar question, and, for me, it was always a fine line. There is a time for absolute right and wrong, such as the treatment of women in all cultures. But some topics are not as easy, such as a decision some students face to stay at home and support the family instead of coming to school.

Traveling to the RMI forced them to confront a very different culture with values that differed from their own. Questions of universal values and absolute rights and wrongs were considered and reconsidered. Facing these philosophical questions was not simply a theoretical consideration as might be the case in the liberal arts classroom; instead, students had to choose possible responses to these questions with consequential outcomes affecting their own lives. This distinction echoes Kreber's (2012) two levels of critical reflection: content and premise, whereby the latter involves questioning assumptions that one deeply holds, which—in contrast to those abstracted from the self—increases the chances for transformation.

Another participant, Carly, reflected on her identity as an American and the assumptions she had not considered about poverty and wealth, and the impact U.S. foreign policy had on the RMI's economic condition. Carly stated:

Before Ejit [a small island in the Majuro Atoll peopled almost entirely by the descendants of people from Bikini Atoll], I never took the time to think deeply about how being an American citizen influenced my life. It was all I knew, so I took it for granted. Ejit allowed me the emotional and physical distance to really ponder what the United States meant to me personally and politically. After my year on Ejit, I left with a more discerning point of view and a willingness to question our country's world influence a bit more.

For many students, their understanding of themselves as citizens of a country with a tremendous influence on another country had not been considered. In the case of the RMI, those influences were devastating, as in the test bombing of Bikini Atoll. Our students' physical presence on the islands made them aware that they were embedded in this larger system and could not escape it. Educating themselves was a starting point in making choices about a response, and in many cases, the beginning of a much longer project that impacted career choices.

For Sarah, questions of right and wrong framed her experience. However, she came to an understanding that her socialization and education have influenced how she assesses situations:

Looking back on this now, I'm not sure who's right: the missionaries teaching Western individualism and maybe leaving Retina with no family support network, or Piki following the

values of her own culture and maybe someday running out of water. It doesn't really matter who's right, because "right" means something completely different to the various people involved. Looking back on my time in the Marshalls with the distance of seven years, I'm able to see some of the hidden assumptions that we carry with us which affect how we see the world.

These experiences do not necessarily lead to cultural relativism. Still, they allowed the participants to understand better how differences emerge and the possibilities for and barriers to forming connections when confronted with cultural diversity.

### *Freedom to Do Nothing and Fail*

For many of our students, traveling to the RMI allowed them to take time off, experience new situations, and engage with ambiguity. It was a time during which the pressure of "performing" was lessened. College for many students is a period of high stress, both academically and socially. Mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidality, occur during this period (Liu et al., 2019). In the RMI program, many students recognized that this was the first time they allowed themselves *not* to know, to be lost, and *not* to succeed, as they were thousands of miles away and engaged in a program where participating was already enough. They felt freedom from the college environment, where every grade, extracurricular activity, and interaction was scrutinized. Coming face-to-face with ambiguity on the study abroad opened up a space for creativity and spontaneous learning. One student, Annie, remembered her time on the island of Ejit:

Among other things, I learned what it felt like to commit to something that felt scary and overwhelming at times. I learned that people know when you're trying your hardest, and they appreciate it, even if your best effort isn't always perfect. I learned that being uncomfortable often leads to wonderful surprises. I learned how to fail, and then go back and try again. I learned that people from distant places are not so different after all. I learned that the single most important thing in life is love, and showing others that you care. This is some of what Ejit taught me.

Annie strived for perfection and stayed within the bounds of comfort while in college. Yet "playing" or having downtime often came up as a theme in these essays. Whether it was playing with children, going for long walks, swimming in the ocean, or reading in a hammock—the writers had time. With their emphasis on learning through experience, study abroad programs open a space for "play" and serendipity. Back in college, time for these students was considered something to race against in pursuit of the achievement goal; but in the RMI, having time was an opportunity to connect in new ways, with self, other, and place. When faced with an experience of disequilibrium, having the room to play or experiment with different ways of being may very well support the experience to be more constructive, particularly when accompanied by opportunities to make meaning of these experiences.

Another student, Ben, in recounting his experience spearfishing in the RMI, remembered that when he and a fellow student had first tried to fish, their attempts were fruitless. Their experience changed, however, with the help of experienced local fishermen:

Several weeks later we went out with the local men to an island further along the atoll, the site of a shipwrecked vessel from WWII. At low tide the shallow water was littered with black and white striped "convict fish" idling in the debris of the ship. They were easy targets for even

our amateur aim. With every dive we struck another fish. We returned with the other men with dozens of fish that we distributed around the island to several families. We had a large cookout that evening, and my friend and I felt like proud warriors. Here was one of my first humbling lessons in The Marshall Islands. Local knowledge trumped individualism and ambition. Spearfishing was not about skill or even effort. It was simply about knowing the right place and time. The trick of success in the islands was learning to follow.

Ben learned from the Marshallese residents and allowed himself to be led. Individualism and ambition could not help him there; instead, working with others, listening, and watching enabled him to catch fish. Later in his reflection, he stated: “It felt good to give up the reins.” We have observed that success is connected to leadership and prestige for many of our college students as they strive to become presidents of clubs, fraternities, or other organizations. The idea of working collectively, or learning to become an excellent follower, is not often modeled. Even in sports, the MVP, the most valuable player, is awarded to one individual. For some students, the opportunity to let go of this kind of pressure and become a beginner, with the option of failing in the RMI, was a relief.

### *Race, Ethnicity, and Being American*

Another theme that emerged, particularly among our students who did not identify as White, was how their understanding of racial identity changed while on their study abroad program. This phenomenon has often been cited by Black, Indigenous, and people of color when outside the United States. Race becomes less a focus; being a person of color is not centered; instead, being American as a primary identity becomes critical. For our students, this led to relief and a stark understanding of the influence racial identity has had on them, whether unconscious or not. One student, Kenny, a self-identified Black male, stated:

The peace, calm and relaxed pace of outer island life was a stark contrast to growing up in the city that never sleeps, New York City. In The Marshall Islands, I was occasionally referred to as riklemet, black person, but I rarely recall feeling racially stigmatized or ostracized. For (what felt like) the first time in my life, my identity as an American (more prominently than my identity as an African-American) provided me with a privilege I otherwise would never have tasted. As a black American in the Republic of The Marshall Islands, I experienced what was quietly known as ribelle-privilege that seemed to manifest itself as access to people, places and things not easily accessible to many others on the islands.

Similarly, for Mathew, another self-identified Black male, the idea of pursuing opportunities such as AmeriCorps, Teach for America, Peace Corps, and World Teach “seemed morally reprehensible” given his emerging reappraisal of “the history of the United States and because of some of the ideologies towards the West [he] was starting to develop.” However, a university-based program in The Marshall Islands that was not operating “under the guise of teaching for ‘America’” was more palatable to him. Notably, Mathew’s racial identity as a Black person ceased being just “another box” who “graduated from an inner-city school ... that goes to the university and then [off] to a corporate job.” Instead, as he wrote:

I was using my education at Middle College to help a nation struggling to contend with climate change. I was helping talented students apply to colleges so that they could help their nation. I was in many cases the only black person many of the students had ever seen/would ever see in their life. I felt like a rock star, and it meant a lot to me.

Spending time in a place that minimized negative stereotypes of his racial identity allowed Mathew to experiment with different roles that instilled pride in his own racial identity. Research by W. Carson Byrd (2017) in his book *Poison in the Ivy* shows how the nation's highly selective colleges and universities can buttress and reinforce narrow perspectives on racial inequality and stereotypical views of racial and ethnic minorities despite the increasing diversity that exists on these campuses. For non-White students on campus, race issues can often be front and center. Although not immune from racial issues, study abroad programs might provide a respite from American racial dynamics. Other identities can come to the foreground—identities that feel less contested and consequential.

In comparison, writers who identified as White wrestled more intensely with what it means to be “American” within the historical context of U.S.–RMI relations. For Mara, an intern on Majuro Atoll, this recognition occurred when one mother, Bonnie, asked her to adopt and raise her daughter when she returned to the United States after volunteering. Mara wrote:

[The] request ... still unsettles me, [and] reminds me of the complicated relationship linking me to Bonnie’s family, linking Americans to Marshallese, linking the opportunity that the U.S. represents to the despair it has created in the RMI. Even then, I knew that it was a request that had little to do with me and much more to do with larger racial, economic, environmental, historical contexts—with American activity in the RMI during WWII and nuclear tests there afterwards. We could see the effects of the U.S. military everywhere: in pieces of Navy china stuck in the coral, in the beaches named after American movie stars, in the unbelievable cancer rates, in the not-nearly-enough money that the U.S. government now paid to the Marshallese, in the resilience required to survive. What began as military exploitation has now grown to a kind of political, economic, and cultural exploitation—and as American teachers, we had to make sense of ourselves and our students within those relationships.

For some, like Chris, recognizing the intertwining of their privileged volunteer experiences with historical U.S.–RMI relationships wrought with military and cultural domination triggered a sense of White guilt. Chris reflected:

When I set out to the RMI, I signed up because of an urge to give my time and energy to others. I knew myself to be fortunate for who I was and where I came from. Ten years ago, when I made the decision to work in the RMI, I knew that I had an opportunity to give some of that fortune back to people by teaching. Much of that urge to give came from guilt. I consider myself one of the luckiest people in the world. I come from a loving wealthy family. I was accepted by my peers and community. I did not grow up hungry, afraid, or worried. I graduated from a top-class college without debt. My natural skills and interests are encouraged by the world in which I live. At the same time, I knew enough of the world to know that my experience was rare, and a happy, unbounded coming-of-age was possibly one of the greatest luxuries given to me. Teaching in the RMI supplied an immediate and attainable release for this guilt.

Very few of the White students named their own race or their Whiteness, compared to the Black, Asian, or Latinx students. The issues of guilt and privilege, including Whiteness, were not explicitly named. The opportunities and privileges the students held were never directly linked to their Whiteness. Their “luck” or “opportunity” was never named as White supremacy, nor was the “despair” of the Marshallese connected to their identity as “brown natives” and the historical racism from the United States. The students did not see themselves with a racial identity, and their Whiteness

was generally invisible. As Robin DiAngelo (2018) stated in her book *White Fragility*, most White people do not see themselves in racial terms; nor do they incorporate an understanding of how Whiteness affords them certain privileges that would otherwise have been hard to access. Our students on the study trip started developing a racial understanding of themselves and the role that race has played in their positionality within the United States and abroad. This finding suggests future versions of such programs should consider how the experience of constructive disequilibrium may be racialized and points to the need to explicitly name and unpack students' privileged identities while supporting their journey toward developing antioppressive identities and commitments.

## Conclusion

Although the global pandemic has rendered study abroad programs unimaginable since March 2020, U.S. colleges and universities will ultimately come back to “normal” ways, and study abroad programs will once again be offered. This break in such programs might afford educators the space to rethink the benefits and possibilities that exist and how they can be restructured to allow students greater flexibility and to enhance their education. If we are to produce citizens who “cultivate their humanity,” then our students need an “ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10). This happens only through exposure to others and a connection that springs from dialogue and working together; ultimately, this might lead to imagining oneself in the shoes of a person different from oneself. Often, but not always, this involves travel and immersion.

As colleges and universities respond to the challenges posed by teaching democratic citizenship in an era of continued social and racial unrest, deep economic inequalities, and political and cultural polarization, we offer a renewed call for programs that encourage crossing boundaries, both literally and figuratively. These traverses will require thoughtful planning and structures, resources to support a diversity of students to embark on these programs, and well-trained faculty who can foster opportunities for constructive disequilibrium in the service of global citizenship development.

On the basis of the RMI case discussed here, we propose four key suggestions for using critical reflections as a promising pedagogical strategy for supporting constructive disequilibrium. First, pair postprogram critical reflections with critical incidents written during the program. Our conviction is that the processes that induce perspective transformation can and should be brought into awareness to allow student ownership of their learning and growth. Whereas critical reflections allow students to narrate how their experience fits within the arc of their life trajectory, critical incidents provide opportunities to remain conscious of moments of disequilibrium during the program. Through postprogram reflections, students can integrate the immersion experiences gained during the program in meaningful ways and articulate their commitment to values, convictions, and actions that are more aligned with the “newly discovered” self.

Second, engage multiple levels of reflection throughout the students' engagement during and after the program. Transformative learning scholar Kreber (2006) unpacked Mezirow's (1991) concept of critical reflection that leads to transformation by highlighting three levels of reflection: content, process, and premise. Content reflection involves naming exactly what problem one is facing and articulating what one knows currently about solving the problem. Process reflection examines how effective one's strategies are in solving the problem. Premise reflection involves critiquing the underlying assumptions of one's current knowledge, and it involves asking, “Why is it that I choose to attend to this problem—is there an alternative?” (Kreber, 2006, p. 94). Kreber (2012) argued that in contrast to the other kinds of reflection, premise reflection fosters transformation. The instructions

we provided our students as they prepared both critical incidents and critical reflections encouraged these multiple levels of reflection. For critical incidents, we encouraged students first to write up the event or situation in as much detail as possible. They were then asked to discuss why this was a critical incident (i.e., what was problematic, curious, upsetting about the situation). They also needed to include their affective or emotional responses as well as their thoughts. And finally, we asked them to reflect on the event's meaning in terms of their growth as an educator or person. For critical reflections, we encouraged students to write about their initial motivations to attend the program, what stood out for them, and, crucially, how their experience in the RMI fit within the arc of their life. As educators, designing programs where all three levels of reflection are encouraged increases the likelihood of participants experiencing disequilibrium as constructive rather than threatening.

Third, provide avenues for collective meaning making of disequilibrium in addition to individual-oriented avenues. According to transformative learning theory, exposure to multiple viewpoints about an experience, issue, or idea allows opportunities for individuals to deliberate and test the validity of what they know (Mezirow, 1991). Although our use of critical incidents and reflections in the RMI was chiefly oriented toward individual meaning making, this need not be the case. By exposing students to multiple ways of interpreting an experience, whether through other students' or faculty's comments and reflections or accompanying texts, collective meaning making on critical incidents and reflections addresses the limits inherent in a simple student–faculty dyadic exchange. A key challenge in our case was that students were often assigned generally as pairs to locations far from each other and interaction among all volunteers was limited. However, a volunteer field director who resided in the RMI routinely checked in with each student during their placement. The program director actively responded to each student's correspondence as they submitted critical incidents and reflections. Another opportunity for collective meaning making was the pretrip learning sessions where students discussed the concept of culture shock and learned about the history of U.S.–RMI relations. Opportunities during immersion to collectively reflect on this initial learning would have further deepened students' journeys toward transformation. Future programs of this kind will need to consider reconciling similar logistical constraints with the pedagogical aspirations outlined here.

Finally, educators must foster a critical-historical awareness of power relations among groups, nations, or regions and their long-standing influence on the aims of a given study abroad program in a particular locale. Our findings suggest that immersion in a different place from one's home may foreground some aspects of one's identity while muting other aspects. For instance, not all writers who reflected on their privileged identities were able to articulate these experiences from a sociohistorical or structural perspective that highlights and critiques the conditions of inequality, subordination, and oppression. Writers who connected their experiences as volunteers abroad to the historical context of the United States' exploitation of the RMI reframed how they understood the purpose of their study abroad from a merely “volunteering” or “helping” experience to one demonstrating “connection” and “solidarity” with the other.

At their best, study abroad programs open up possibilities that have long-range effects. In the words of one of the students, Erica:

I am proud of and grateful for my three months in The Marshall Islands. I could not have predicted how it would influence the pattern of my life, but looking back, I am certain that it did. It was not an immediate catalyst but rather a brick in the foundation upon which my understanding of the world and myself continued and continues to develop.

If postpandemic, providing constructive disequilibrium opportunities becomes a core principle around which study abroad programs are designed, we believe that such programs would

become a solid “brick in the foundation” upon which students cultivate the skills and capacities for global citizenship. Ultimately, realizing this promise calls on universities to consider communities—local and abroad—as true partners in this endeavor to cultivate global citizenship.

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