

# The value of digital critical reflection to global citizenship and global health

**Lee Stoner**

Massey University  
Auckland, New Zealand

This paper will contend that *digital critical reflection* can play a key role in tackling contemporary global health concerns. More specifically, institutes of higher education can utilize study abroad to foster global citizenship, which in turn may empower students to become civically engaged and potentially drive social change. However, global citizenship, as an educational outcome, is optimally facilitated when educational experiences are married with appropriate pedagogy, including the shaping of subsequent understandings and actions with *critical reflection*. This paper will discuss a pre-existing global health study abroad course, and outline: (1) why critical reflection is an essential step to fostering global citizenship, and (2) how *digital story telling* is being utilized to enrich the critical reflection process.

**Keywords:** digital stories; critical reflection; transformative learning; educational travel; mobile pedagogy

## INTRODUCTION

There have been increasing calls (Lewin, 2009; Stearns, 2009), from both the political and academic arenas, to ensure the capacity of higher education students to think and act globally in order to effectively address political, social, economic, and environmental problems on a global scale. This paper seeks to recognize this call and extend it to include global health, which together with climate change are, arguably, the two greatest challenges facing humanity today. In particular, health systems are struggling under the escalating burden of chronic diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, which in turn are driven by poor lifestyle choices. Worldwide there were 57 million deaths in 2008, 63% of which can be attributed to chronic diseases, with over 80% of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries (Hunter & Reddy, 2013; WHO, 2015). Clearly, lives can be saved and the global economy would be much stronger if people did more to avoid poor lifestyle choices such as physical inactivity and unhealthy eating habits. Yet despite growing public awareness about chronic disease and the consequences of such lifestyle choices, chronic diseases continue to rise. Based on this observation, perhaps “personal”-responsibility is not the answer, and conceivably the answer is “global”-responsibility, manifested as *global citizenship* (Stoner, Perry, Wadsworth, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2014).

Higher education and the process of internationalization can play a key role in the fight against chronic diseases (Stoner, et al., 2014). Specifically, institutes of higher education can utilize study abroad to foster global citizenship, which in turn may empower students to become civically engaged and potentially drive social change. However, global citizenship, as an educational outcome, is optimally facilitated when educational experiences are married with appropriate pedagogy, including the shaping of subsequent understandings and actions with *critical reflection*. This paper will discuss a pre-existing global health study abroad course, and outline: (1) why critical reflection is an essential step to fostering global citizenship, and (2) how *digital story telling* is being utilized to enrich the critical reflection process.

## WHAT IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP?

Global citizenship, like other complex psychosocial concepts, being framed by a single definition does not typically capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Considering this, in conjunction with the highly contested and multi-faceted nature of the term global citizenship, there have been three key dimensions identified by (Schattle, 2009), which serve as commonly accepted denominators of global citizenship: (1) global awareness (understanding and appreciation of one’s self in the world and of world issues), (2) social responsibility (concern for others, for society at large, and for the

environment), and (3) civic engagement (active engagement with local, regional, national and global community issues).

## HOW DO WE FOSTER GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP?

Nurturing a globally-minded citizen has typically been associated with a transformative learning experience (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry, & Stoner, 2014; Jack Mezirow, 1991). This includes those pedagogies that engage the student with alternative lenses, orientations, or points of view related to a complex issue (such as global health), ultimately leading to a change in perspective. Arguably, a key to transformation is educative experiences coupled with critical reflection (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). An experience without critical reflection is solely an experience, which does not necessarily provide an individual with the opportunity to shape perspective – it actually has the possibility of being *mis-educative* (Dewey, 1938). An educative experience should serve as a departure point for learning, not an end result, and subsequently should foster an opportunity for deeper inquiry of the questions borne from the experience and subsequent reflection (Dewey, 1938).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

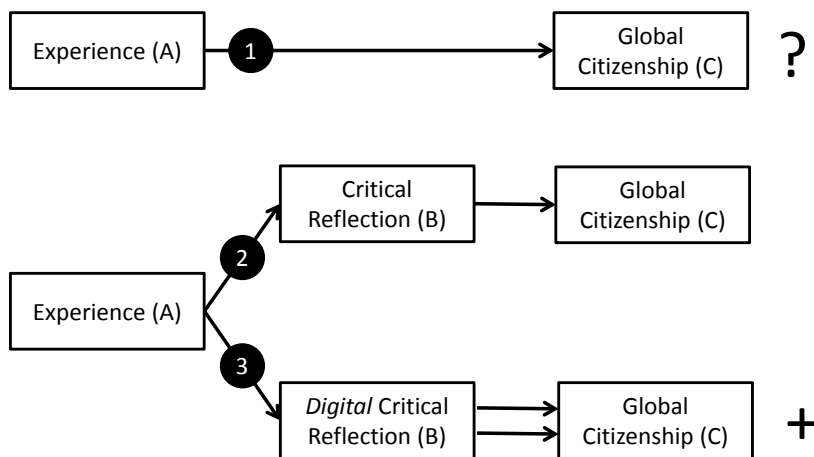
Critical reflection is the mechanism by which students begin to make meaning out of their experiences and adjust their frames of reference. By engaging students in critical reflection, students are encouraged to ‘scratch below the surface’ and become “critically aware of how and why their assumptions have come to constrain the way they perceive, understand, and feel about their world” (Jack Mezirow, 1991). From this process it is plausible that a learner’s reinvestment in informed application can lead to greater sensitivity, stronger acumen, and more informed approach to the issues that are affecting the well-being of our communities both local and global. Simply stated, the attributes of an engaged global citizen do not just happen, they accumulate through an educative experience, conscious engagement, critical reflection, and informed application.

## THE VALUE OF SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD

We assert that experientially based, short-term educational travel programs provide a relevant learning site for students to experience, grapple with, reframe, and reflect on issues global in nature—ultimately fostering the conditions necessary for transformative experiences (Bell, et al., 2014; Tarrant et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin, et al., 2014). Such programs may provide an experience of cultural immersion and exposure to values and beliefs that differ to students’ own beliefs, can highlight common challenges faced by all societies (Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014), and can serve as the disorientating dilemma necessary to initiate perspective transformation (J. Mezirow, 1978). However, it is important to note that while the *experience* is indeed a key component of transformative learning, the experience must be coupled with “integrating circumstances” whereby students begin to search consciously and unconsciously for the “missing piece” (Clark, 1991). As stated above, the catalyst for this transformation is critical reflection.

## INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND REFLECTION

Digital storytelling can serve as a robust medium for capturing the essence of a student’s perspective and level of understanding by utilizing “multimedia tools to engage individuals in authentic learning experiences that provide real-world relevance and personal-value within a situated context” (Walters, Green, Liangyan, & Walters, 2011). Our position is not one that is anti-paper-based reflection; traditional forms of critical reflection can and do work in the context of short-term study abroad (Bell, et al., 2014; Tarrant et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin, et al., 2014). Nonetheless, we argue that reflective experiences can be further enhanced by using technologies and services many students are intimately familiar with and use on a daily basis (Figure 1). In this regard, digital storytelling can provide students with a louder, clearer voice, utilizing a presentational form (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009) to reflectively articulate themselves and develop the foundation of a civically engaged citizen.



**Figure 1. Pathway from experience to global citizenship.**

**Pathway 1** presents the ‘just do it’ approach, where it is expected that experiential education (A) is sufficient to foster global citizenship (C). **Pathway 2** couples experiential education (A) with a traditional critical reflection (e.g., paper-based) (B) approach, an approach demonstrated to lead to global citizenship (C) within the context of international education (Bell, et al., 2014; Tarrant, Lyons, et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin, et al., 2014). **Pathway 3** replaces traditional critical reflection with digital critical reflection (C), an opportunity to meet learners on the platforms and forums where they live, communicate, and already engage, and subsequently enhance reflective process. Reproduced from(Perry et al., 2015).

Reflective digital stories, when compared to traditional reflective journals, have been demonstrated to be more indicative of the impact experiences had on students’ learning and competency (Walters, et al., 2011). Walters et al., (2011) state: “While journals recorded a catalogue of events, the digital stories, even at the lowest-level of reflection, were more indicative of the impact of the experience... than journals” (p.49). While it has been clearly presented that critical reflection methods are imperative for students to make sense of experiences, the use of digital media could be a medium that provides students with familiar space to be authentic and true-to-self. Moreover, this forum has greater potential to take the learning experience beyond the classroom, helping students to connect with the global-community, and to potentially become truly engaged global citizens empowered with voices to evoke change (Perry, et al., 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Arguably, personal-responsibility is not the answer to tackling contemporary global health issues. Conceivably the answer is global-responsibility, manifested as global citizenship. Institutes of higher education can utilize study abroad to foster global citizenship, which in turn may empower students to become civically engaged and potentially drive social change. Global citizenship, as an educational outcome, is optimally facilitated when educational experiences are married with appropriate pedagogy, including the shaping of subsequent understandings and actions with critical reflection. While traditional forms of critical reflection can and do work in the context of study abroad, reflective experiences can be further enhanced by drawing on mediums familiar to students in the form of digital storytelling.

## References

- Bell, H. L., Gibson, H. J., Tarrant, M. A., Perry, L. G., & Stoner, L. (2014). Transformational learning through study abroad: US students’ reflections on learning about sustainability in the South Pacific. *Leisure Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.962585>
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books.
- Hunter, D. J., & Reddy, K. S. (2013). Noncommunicable diseases. *N Engl J Med*, 369(14), 1336-1343. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMra1109345>

- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning : experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs; London: Prentice-Hall.
- Lewin, R. (2009). Transforming the study abroad experience into a collective priority. *Association of American Colleges and Universities Peer Review, Fall*, 8-11.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective Transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100-110.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Perry, L., Stoner, L., Schleser, M., Stoner, K., Wadsworth, D., Page, R., & Tarrant, M. A. (2015). Digital Mediums as Reflective Tools: Finding Appropriate Spaces for Students to Get Introspective. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 42(2), 323-330.
- Schattle, H. (2009). Global citizenship in theory and practice. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad : higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 3-18). London: Routledge.
- Stearns, P. N. (2009). *Educating global citizens in colleges and universities : challenges and opportunities*. London: Routledge.
- Stoner, L., Perry, L., Wadsworth, D., Stoner, K. R., & Tarrant, M. A. (2014). Global citizenship is key to securing global health: the role of higher education. *Prev Med*, 64, 126-128.
- Tarrant, M. A., Lyons, K., Stoner, L., Kyle, G., Wearing, S., & Poudyal, N. (2014). Global Citizenry, Educational Travel and Sustainable Tourism: Evidence from Australia and New Zealand. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 403-420.
- Tarrant, M. A., Rubin, D., & Stoner, L. (2014). The Added Value of Study Abroad: Fostering a Global Citizenry. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(2), 141-161.
- Taylor, S. S., & Ladkin, D. (2009). Understanding Arts-Based Methods in Managerial Development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8(1), 55-69.
- Walters, L. M., Green, M. R., Liangyan, W., & Walters, T. (2011). From Heads to Hearts: Digital Stories as Reflection Artifacts of Teachers' International Experience. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 20(2), 37-52.
- WHO. (2015). WHO highlights need for countries to scale up action on noncommunicable diseases Retrieved March 23, 2015, from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2014/action-on-ncds/en/>

Stoner, L. (2015). The value of digital critical reflection to global citizenship and global health. In T. Reiners, B.R. von Kinsky, D. Gibson, V. Chang, L. Irving, & K. Clarke (Eds.), *Globally connected, digitally enabled*. Proceedings ascilite 2015 in Perth (pp. 562-565). <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2015.917>

Note: All published papers are refereed, having undergone a double-blind peer-review process.



The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution licence enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.