

Let's ReCap®: Using a Popular Smartphone Application to Facilitate Critical Reflection

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Introduction

Today's cellular phones have expanded from only being capable of making phone calls to having the full functionality of an internet connected computer (Lepp, Barkley, & Karpinski, 2014). Now called *smartphones*, these devices are readily accessible and regularly used by college students (Lepp et al., 2014). More than 95% of Americans now own a cell phone, with 77% reporting that they use a smartphone. (Pew Research Center, 2018). Because of this widespread accessibility, smartphone use in the classroom has emerged as an attractive option for educators to incorporate technology in their instructional practices.

While smartphones have been used in various education settings, probably the most common uses are (a) facilitating engagement and (b) encouraging student reflection (Cochrane & Bateman, 2010). The use of reflection serves several purposes, "from improving technical proficiency, through growth as a professional, to changing a whole society" (Procee, 2006, p. 238). As a consequence, when educators facilitate student reflection, they should encourage students to engage in individual learning processes and construct their own knowledge and unique understandings (Roberts & Edwards, 2016). Therefore, video reflection applications such as ReCap® allow educators to engage students in individual, thought-provoking reflection, and also present opportunities for educators to offer more timely, honest feedback to their students, especially in study abroad programs in which time is limited. Such reflection and dialogue can foster *transformational learning* Mezirow (1991), which promotes students' conceptual understanding and cultural competence (Kiely, 2004).

How it Works

The ReCap application is available for free to download on both iPhone and Android smartphones, which is appealing to both educators and students. The application provides a platform for educators to pose questions to expand discussions and initiate conversations through video and asynchronous chat options. The functionality of the application is simple and only requires a smartphone, the application, and an internet connection. For this innovative idea, we began by posing open ended question about Louisiana State University Agriculture students' personal and agricultural-based experiences during a one-week study abroad to Nicaragua. Thereafter, students recorded themselves providing video responses.

For educators, ReCap® provides an opportunity to have students engage in a thought-provoking reflection on learning tasks, assignments, or other educational experiences. By recording video reflections in real time, responses seem more visceral and genuine, and this reflection approach also allows students to ponder existing complexities more intimately. These reflections can then be combined with other forms of discussion to facilitate dialogue and reflection on various subjects.

Results to date

Existing evidence demonstrates that study abroad programs can transform students' intercultural sensitivity, global knowledge, and views on agriculture (Roberts & Edwards, 2016; Strange & Gibson, 2017). While implementing a study abroad program in Nicaragua, we used ReCap® to facilitate such transformations by implementing experiences and reflections that challenged students' existing values and worldviews— a concept known a *dissonance* (Kiely, 2004). To investigate the effects of ReCap®, we analyzed participants' daily video reflections. Reflections were then transcribed, and data was analyzed using Corbin's and Strauss' (2015) constant comparative method to facilitate three coding procedures: (1) open, (2) axial, and (3)

theoretical. Through continuous analysis and data reduction, findings emerged. The key finding of this qualitative inquiry into the process of transformational learning among students was a single, powerful core theoretical category: *dissonance*. Grounded in Mezirow's (1991) *transformational learning theory*, dissonance reflects the internal challenge to an individual's existing value system or worldview (Kiely, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). Findings were narrated through three themes: (1) *environmental*, (2) *sociocultural*, and (3) *personal* that represented the various forms of dissonance experienced by participants.

Future Plans

The number of students participating in study abroad programs has been steadily increasing over the past few decades (Strange & Gibson, 2017). There has been a significant amount of research on the impacts, benefits, and deterrents of study abroad programs, but little work has been done in regard to analyzing the use of smartphone application technology to facilitate critical reflection during such experiences. Thus, a need existed to further investigate the effective uses of innovative technology to facilitate critical reflection.

Using this innovative idea, we noted that pairing a video reflection application such as ReCap®, with group-oriented reflection sessions allowed students to better understand the various forms of dissonance as well as their shifting internalized preconceptions, which resulted in positive self-growth and increased cross-cultural competency. However, the use of ReCap® is not limited to international experiences, and further exploration of the role of programs like these in encouraging discussion and reflection among various educational settings is strongly encouraged. Moving forward, therefore, we intend to implement ReCap® in new educational settings. It should be noted that ReCap® will be discontinued in January 2019; however, its successor Synth® is expected to yield similar benefits.

Cost

Perhaps the strongest benefit regarding the use of ReCap is its minimal cost. Many video reflection tools such as ReCap® are smartphone friendly applications which are free to use, easily implemented by educators, and designed to be user-friendly for students. Not only will the use of video-reflection applications like ReCap® allow educational programs to save costs while implementing groundbreaking technology, but it also assists in conserving time as reflections can be instantly recorded and saved for future analysis and discussion. One issue we noted was that a reliable internet connection was required, as with other smart-phone based technology, which created some issues when using it in a developing country such as Nicaragua.

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