



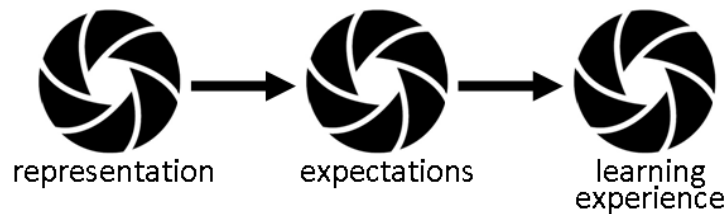
## ***Challenging the Lens: Visual and textual discourses in shaping the world of education abroad***

Forum on Education Abroad  
2010 Conference – Charlotte, North Carolina  
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### **Session overview & goals:**

This session is intended to interrogate the values/vision of the education abroad experience using the discursive lenses of text and imagery. Our goal is to look at how the stakeholders in education abroad (education abroad advisors, administrators, practitioners, our students) and others shape and experience the world through education abroad while also looking at ways of embracing the post-modern context of the current generation of participants in order to seek new ways of engaging with the world beyond our own borders. We posit a strong relationship between representation, expectations, and the student learning experience (as below), and will discuss this in relation to the values, vision and practice of education abroad.



*graphic from session authors*

### **Our point of departure:**

Education Abroad (EA) professionals shape the world discursively in a range of identities through promotional materials and program design. The lenses that help to shape the experience for prospective participants—visual discourses from the camera and narrative discourses from texts—are the source of multiple identities of the world, including the romanticized, the terrorized or the colonized. Through analysis of narrative and visual texts, this session challenges such discourses in order to reflect on the state of the field.

Arising from a nascent but timely debate within the EA community, we intend to elicit a “visions/values” self-reflection by EA professionals in how we discursively represent the EA experience. As a session that examines the discourse of education abroad through image and text, it questions the literal and figurative **vision** of the education abroad endeavor, and interrogates the **values** that these visions convey. This session hopes to provide an opportunity to debate and question current practice in a theoretical and practical environment by means of numerous and thought-provoking photographic and textual examples.

### **Image and text:**

We are interested and/or will engage examples from various EA stakeholders, including: program providers’ catalogues/websites; student blogs; Department of State Background Notes and Consular Information Sheets; and numerous photographic examples. In texts we interrogate the terms “authentic” and “real” and demonstrate how they are (often unintentionally) deployed as synonyms for “indigenous,” “rural,” and “traditional.” However to use these terms interchangeably is highly problematic. Our provocative photographic examples characterize our visions of self and the world through: 1) the obvious outsider; 2) small children; 3) cultural insensitivity; 4) traditional vs. modern; 5) the observer; and 6) the cliché.

## Post-Reciprocity:

As much of the EA discourse that we have discussed places the traveler in the context of Western colonial history and the behaviors of the colonial traveler, we seek to raise consciousness in regard to the danger of modeling the facilitation of programs abroad on the colonial and expatriate tradition. This session further intends to expose an underlying nostalgia for a bygone golden age of study and travel abroad. In an effort to change course, we put forth a new approach based upon a post-reciprocal theorization of our EA endeavors. This approach posits that education abroad professionals may need to disrupt the meta-narrative and to establish a new, less loaded, vocabulary for discussing the goals and strategies for students going abroad. The authors suggest that, in order to get beyond the narrow conception of reciprocity as the sole means of engaging the EA experience, we as educators must change the pervasive vocabulary of education abroad to influence the behaviors and attitudes of the students, faculty, and administrators involved in the project.

## Lasting impact:

We intend to challenge current practice in education abroad program promotion and program design and encourage debate regarding a 'post-reciprocity' and post-colonial perspective.

## Questions to consider on this topic:

1. How is the EA experience represented in text and image at your institution?
2. What are the narratives that you wish to drive the EA experience; and how are they related (or not) to the values, vision and desired learning outcomes of the EA experience?
3. What are the meanings of *reciprocity*, *integration*, *authentic*, *real*, *indigenous*, and *traditional* (for example) within your EA discourse?
4. Are your reciprocal EA structures built on real or assumed equality between parties?
5. What are the needs and motivations behind your model(s) of EA programming?

## Suggested/Cited Resources:

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Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Fürsich, Elfriede and Robins, Melinda B. 2004. Visiting Africa: constructions of nation and identity on travel websites. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 39(1-2): 133-152.

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Kincaid, Jamaica. 1988. *A Small Place*. New York: Penguin.

Pratt, Mary Louis. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Reisinger, Yvette and Steiner, Carol. 2006. Reconceptualizing object authenticity. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 33(1): 65-86.

Tussyadiah, Iis and Fesenmaier, Daniel. 2009. Mediating tourist experiences: Access to places via shared videos. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 36(1): 24-40.

Urry, John. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. London: Sage.

## Panelists and contact information:

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