GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AS SITES FOR MUTUAL LEARNING. UK Perspectives.

INTERIM RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT.

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In an era of global uncertainties (environmental, social, political and economic) providing a global dimension to children’s formal education experiences has become more important than ever. This requires more of an emphasis on global and development education in Initial teacher education (ITE) and teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD).

One of the strategies used in the UK for developing teachers’ knowledge about global issues is study visits between the Global North and South. A variety of different types of experience exist from one and two year voluntary service overseas, through visits to partner schools to short-term study visits; all of which offer very different experiences, depending on their purpose. However, we are not aware of any study to date that has systematically investigated what and how professionals from both countries learn from North-South study visits, when these visits take place in the context of a global educational partnership; nor has research investigated the relationship between teachers’ learning and their developing practice over time.

The main purpose of this research project is therefore to investigate what teachers learn from study visits, and how they make use of what has been learnt back in their own educational settings, giving equal weight to the learning of both northern and southern partners. Specific objectives are to:

- Analyse the development of two global partnerships and the context they provide for study visit courses
- Explore and analyse UK teachers’ changing perspectives on development and global partnerships during two study visit courses
- Explore and analyse Gambian and Southern Indian professionals’ changing perspectives on development and global issues during the study visit courses
- Explore the key factors that prompt changes in perspective
- Investigate ways in which the study visit courses inform the development of teachers’ practice over time.

This study makes a significant contribution to theoretical knowledge in the domains of transformational learning through intercultural, collaborative experiences and application to professional practice over time, bringing much needed Southern perspectives to our understanding. In addition, the study aims to build research capacity by identifying and exploring innovative participatory approaches to research between the North and South.

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1 At the time of application for funding for the project, the term ‘partnership’ was used as a short-cut for different types of North-South relationships that might also be termed links / connections. Similarly, the term ‘teacher’ was used as a short-cut for teachers, student teachers, other educators and development workers.
2. UK Context.

In 1997 the then New Labour government produced a white paper in which it set out its International Strategy. As part of this strategy, the Department for International Development (DfID) was formed and published its own ‘Strategy for development’ in 1999. In this publication, Clare Short (Minister for International Development at the time), made a statement saying that she wanted:

...every school in the country to have the opportunity to develop a link with a school in the South ... linking is an area which needs great care. I am not interested in links which are one-sided, or which are based simply on charity because they do not create mutual respect and learning. But where links are based on equality and mutual learning, and on a genuine commitment from both sides, the results can be remarkable. (Short, 1999)

Soon after this, broad international agreement was achieved on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set out targets for achievements in eight areas of development by 2015, of which the following appear to have had most impact on formal school education:

MDG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger  
MDG2: Achieve universal primary education  
MDG3: Develop a global partnership for development

It is evident in the UK that education is seen as one of the key means of achieving these goals and that the formal education sector has a crucial role to play (DfID, 1999). For example, in 2003, DfID set up the Global Schools Partnerships programme. Since then nearly 2,800 school partnerships have been established (June 2011) between schools in the UK and schools in 57 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (DfID, 2011). The influences of MDG1 and MDG2 on this programme can be seen in a booklet giving support for schools with a global partnership. While the booklet provides guidance on how to develop global partnerships that are based on principles of equity, reciprocity and sustainability, the first message in the preface, signed by Gordon Brown and Hillary Benn (Chancellor for the Exchequer and Minister for International Development respectively at the time of the document’s publication), states:

Through school links, UK students will learn just how limited the provision of education is in so many countries and discover that across the world almost 80 million children – most of them girls – don’t go to school, today or any day. And many more go to schools many miles from their home, without enough textbooks, teachers and even simple things like toilets or classrooms. (DfID, 2006: 1).

Mixed messages such as these are common throughout policy documents on global education and in practices evident in schools. It seems that the educational goals for intercultural learning through global links are being conflated with development goals, creating tensions between the aim of ‘wanting to make a difference’, and the aim of
challenging stereotypes that exist about distant people and places. Some might go further to argue that study visits come close to a sort of neo-colonialism with the North plundering the South for knowledge and professional gain (Andreotti, 2006; Disney, 2009). This points towards the need for professional development for teachers that not only focuses on their understanding of development and global issues, but also develops a ‘critical ethics of care’ (Engster, 2004) by enabling teachers to look beyond the immediate needs of individuals to understand the ways in which these needs have been created by social institutions and relationships:

What this means is not simply that the powerful must learn to ‘care about’ the suffering and the destitute in what could possibly – although not necessarily – become a paternalistic act which preserves existing power relations. It means that those who are powerful have a responsibility to approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal relations have led to exclusion and marginalization ... and suffering (Robinson 1999, 46, cited in Engster, 2004:18).

It is against this backdrop that two UK organisations have worked closely with two Southern organisations over more than ten years to provide opportunities for intercultural learning for teachers and other educators. Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) has worked with Goodwill Children’s Homes in Tamil Nadu, Southern India, with a study visit for Canterbury students taking place on almost a yearly basis since 2000. Tide~ global learning has worked in partnership with the National Environment Agency, The Gambia, with groups of UK teachers and educators going to The Gambia as part of a course since 2002. Both North-South relationships have been developed on principles of equity, mutuality and reciprocity and as such provide an opportunity to investigate what type of learning takes place for teachers and students who take part in study visits facilitated by these organisations.

3. Theoretical Perspectives.

3.1 Postcolonial theory.

In considering what might be an appropriate theoretical framework for the research, Fran’s own experiences in co-leading the UK-Gambia study visit course between 2002-2005, and the findings of a pilot study in 2006-07 (Martin, 2008) suggested that a theory would be needed that challenged the deep seated and implicit neo-liberal discourse that arguably underpins so much of the educational activity connected to global citizenship and north-south partnerships. If this challenge was to have weight and validity then selecting a theory from outside the Western Academy seemed necessary. Postcolonial theory emerged from the South as a critique of how the Western world represented the South in colonial times (Said, 1985). As such it is particularly well suited to theorising the learning that takes place during North-South study visits from former colonial countries to locations that were formerly colonized (Gambia and India).

Post-colonial, literally the period following independence from colonial rule, needs to be distinguished from postcolonial (without the hyphen) which is ‘a critical approach to
analysing colonialism and one that seeks to offer alternative accounts of the world’ (Sharp, 2009:4). It is an analysis and critique of the ways in which western knowledge systems have come to dominate on a global scale. Postcolonialists argue that

While political, and to a less extent economic, decolonisation might have occurred with independence, cultural decolonisation – what some call decolonisation of the mind – has been a much more difficult process. (Sharp, 2009:5)

Postcolonial theory shows how the West used its own binary logic to make sense of those who were encountered during colonial times. Said (1985) offered a critique of Western imaginations of the ‘Other’, arguing that they portrayed those in the South as inferior, uncivilised, undeveloped and savage in contrast to the West’s civilised, technologically advanced and developed way of life.

On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (Said, 1985:49).

Such a stance reveals how the West assumes a universal view of the standard against which others can be understood, and when extended to the post-colonial era the legacy is evident in the way that Western interests are projected as the World’s interests in what Spivak has described as the ‘worlding of the West as World’ (1990). An example of this can be found in how countries in the South, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, are pathologised through a focus on what is seen to be lacking according to Western standards – lack of health, sanitation, democracy, wealth, ability to meet ‘their’ needs. Viewed from a neoliberal ethics of ‘care’, this can lead to paternalistic attitudes in which southern countries are treated in a child-like manner, unable to take care of themselves and in need of a caring father figure – Western solutions and Western Aid. Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, sums up this attitude beautifully when describing her arrival in the USA to study, and the reaction of her American roommate at the university.

What struck me was this: she had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronising, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her, in any way. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity ...

After I had spent some years in the US as an African, I began to understand my roommate’s response to me. If I had grown up in America, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner. (Adichie, 2009).
Postcolonial theory shows that what is lacking in the context of global educational partnerships is a focus on the histories behind relationships between the North and South.

### 3.2 Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a theory of adult learning that was developed by Jack Mezirow in 1985. It is a theory that considers both what is transformed (habits of mind, worldviews) and the processes that appear to support such transformations. Other salient aspects of the theory are that transformations are irreversible, and that evidence of transformation of a habit of mind comes through changes in how one behaves / acts in the world (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow identifies the following phases as being integral to the process of transformation:

- A Disorienting Dilemma – e.g. moving to a new culture
- Self-examination – with a focus on emotional responses
- A critical assessment of assumptions – habits of mind, worldviews
- Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
- Planning a course of action
- Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
- Provisional trying of new roles
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (adapted from Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

Transformative learning theory has been applied by a number of researchers to the learning that takes place as a result of participation in study visits from the UK to the Global South (see, for example, Hutchings and Rea, 2011). However, we are not aware of any research that investigates whether the ‘life-changing’ transformations described by people who take part in study visits endure in the longer term. We also question the focus on individual transformation, when study visits are about intercultural learning and therefore predominantly about a relational experience. In such a context one would hope for some transformation of how both North and South relate to and perceive each other.

Kasl and Elias (2000) therefore encourage us to consider transformative learning as also being about shifts in social habits of mind. For Daloz, this means a willingness to ‘look at difference’ through a ‘deeper immersion into the rough-and-tumble of human relationships; an education that enhances our radical interdependence … [and] frees us from a “false consciousness” of our separateness into a richer understanding of our underlying relatedness’ (Daloz, 2000:120, italics in the original).

### 3.3 Displacement Spaces

Displacement spaces are the ‘places we move into (either by force or by choice) whereby we see things differently’ (Brock et. al. 2006:38). As Brock et. al point out, ‘it is not merely the diverse experiences that really make a difference in teachers’ learning but the careful and thoughtful reflection and discussions of those experiences that matter’ (ibid:39) along
with an openness and willingness to confront possible misconceptions, fears and ignorance. In a sense, revision of one’s identity in relation to cultural experiences is required. In some respects, displacement spaces are an alternative way of describing the ‘disorienting dilemmas’ that are the first phase of transformative learning outlined above. However, we believe that the concept of disorienting dilemmas, although they include the idea of an emotional response, are too heavily focused on the cognitive domain; the concept of displacement spaces extends this to include spaces that are challenging not only intellectually, but also emotionally, physically, metaphysically, spiritually and existentially.

3.4 Communities of Practice

The concept of ‘communities of practice’ is based on the understanding that learning is a socio-cultural activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor. In a nutshell, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Not everything called a community is a community of practice. A neighborhood for instance, is often called a community, but is usually not a community of practice. Three characteristics (Wenger, 2011) are crucial:

*The domain:* A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

*The community:* In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. A website in itself is not a community of practice. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together. Interactions can be in both formal and informal situations. Members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis.

*The practice:* A community of practice is not merely a community of interest – people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction. The development of a shared practice may be more or less self-conscious. For example, members may be less aware that their informal discussions as important as their formal discussions.

It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community. Within a framework of community of practice Wenger conceptualises learning as a ‘changing experience of participation’ and theorises that this framework ‘locates learning capability in the relationship between individual identities and social systems’ (2005:2). This seems particularly applicable to the relationships between individuals and their study visit groups within the UK, and between UK – Gambia / UK – Southern India teacher groups at the point of contact during the study visits.
4. Research Questions being investigated: UK context

The overall aim of the project is to investigate what teachers and Initial teacher Education students learn from North-South study visits, and how they make use of what has been learnt back in their own educational settings, giving equal weight to the learning of both northern and southern partners. A secondary aim is to identify and explore innovative participatory approaches to research between the North and South.

The key research question is: What impact do two North-South study visits have on teachers’ understanding of development issues and how does this inform their understanding of, and practice in, global partnerships?

During the first eighteen months data collection and analysis focused on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Phase and period of data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How have two North – South educational partnerships developed and what context do they provide for educational study visits?</td>
<td>Phase 1 data collection, December 2009 – July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do teachers from both North and South learn about development and global issues from their involvement in study visits?</td>
<td>Phase 2 data collection, October 2009 – June 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are the key factors that prompt any changes in knowledge and beliefs?</td>
<td>Phase 2 data collection, 2010-11 October 2009 – June 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does this learning inform their practice over time?</td>
<td>Phase 3 data collection, September 2011 – March 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From a UK context Fran has been investigating the nature of the relationships between organisations in the Global North and South, how these relationships developed over time and what sort of context they provide for the study visits (helping to answer research question 1). Helen has been investigating what UK teachers (and other educators) learn from the two study visits and how they make use of what had been learnt back in their own educational setting (helping to answer research questions 2 & 3).

We are now investigating the relationship between what the UK teachers learnt from the study visits and their practice over an extended period of time (research question 4), an area that is not currently well understood. The original proposal emphasised teachers’ professional practice, however, one of the key findings has been that the study visits have impacted on both UK teachers’ professional and personal practice. Data gathering for question 4 is ongoing during Autumn 2011 – Spring 2012 and so this report will focus on findings in relation to questions 1-3.
5. Methods of Data Collection

5.1 Methodology

The North-South partnerships that provide the context for the study visit courses being investigated are based on the principles of reciprocity, equality and mutuality. The study visits, with their emphasis on prompting changes in perspective through intercultural, mutual learning are based on similar principles. It was therefore deemed inappropriate (a) for the research to be conducted in an objective way by an ‘outsider’, and (b) for the research to be conducted solely by UK researchers. The methodology adopted is therefore qualitative and interpretive, with the overall aim of gaining insight into / illuminating the phenomena under investigation. In order to mirror the multi-perspectival, mutual learning principles, local researchers in The Gambia and Southern India were appointed to assist in adapting research tools for data collection and analysis, and in disseminating of the project’s findings. This enables intercultural, mutual learning to take place between northern and southern researchers in the same way as takes place between northern and southern teachers during the study visits.

A postcolonial approach to conducting research requires that the research design needs to take seriously how ‘an ethical engagement with the Other’ (Andreotti, 2007) is developed. It also requires a willingness on the part of the research team to enter into a process of:

- learning to unlearn (unpacking one’s own historical and cultural ‘baggage’);
- learning to listen (to multiple perspectives);
- learning to learn (taking on new perspectives, re-arranging and expanding one’s own);
- learning to reach out (exploring new ways of being, thinking, doing, knowing and relating)


A commitment to these ways of working has had a profound impact on all aspects of the research from its conception, highlighting the challenges inherent in developing a project that aims to avoid repeating colonial patterns of behaviour. With this in mind, a participatory approach to the research has been adopted (Bennett and Roberts, 2004) in an attempt to ensure a voice for all involved in the research, and to embody the principle of the right of people being researched to influence how the research findings are portrayed and the public debate that ensues. This has meant deliberately challenging hegemonic structures that exist within the academy and has necessitated a long lead into the start of the project (table 1).

The range of perspectives informing the research focus and design, and the collaborative nature of that process, was an attempt to work in ways that reflected a view of knowledge as being socially constructed, relational and multi-perspectival. In other words, to deliberately challenge the binary, oppositional and hierarchical ways of understanding the

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2 How these terms are defined by participants and their organisations is part of what is being explored through analysis the data.
world that tend to dominate public Western discourses. It was also hoped that this would set an appropriate foundation for how the study would then proceed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Collaborative Activity</th>
<th>Influence on research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-2005</td>
<td>FM* co-leads study visit course to The Gambia on three separate occasions</td>
<td>Insider perspectives on the nature of the partnership between the lead organisations that facilitate the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Member of staff in lead role in the National Environment Agency, The Gambia, begins to talk about the importance of the work and the need to document it in some way.</td>
<td>Initial stimulus for the research comes from Southern organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Discussions between Tide~ Global Learning and the NEA about feasibility of research project. Agreed that FM will look at funding sources.</td>
<td>FM, working within university sector, seen to have greatest opportunity to seek funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>Internal funding at University of Exeter gained to conduct a pilot study on the Gambia study visit course</td>
<td>Position paper developed; findings published in two international journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Small-scale research grant secured from British Academy to conduct a consultation phase with the aim of developing a proposal for a large-scale research application.</td>
<td>Participating organisations in North and South, and a range of end users in the UK take part and help to shape research focus; from those consulted a number agreed to act in advisory capacity to the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Principle Investigator invited to take part in a study visit course for UK student teachers to Southern India with a view to including the course in the research.</td>
<td>Insider perspectives gained; opportunities to consult with Northern and Southern organisations who facilitate the study visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>ESRC research application developed in collaboration with the four participating organisations, submitted January 2009. Project approved August 2009 with start date of October 1st 2009.</td>
<td>Led by University of Exeter, but informed by advisory group and those in lead roles in participating organisations. Design aims to mirror equitable, reciprocal, mutual learning principles that underpin the courses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* During 2002-06 Fran was working at University of Worcester and co-leading the Gambia study visit course as a tutor. In 2006 she moved to University of Exeter and her role then shifted from co-leader of the course to participant researcher and, subsequently to Principle Investigator of the current project.

Table 1: Timescale over which the research project was developed in a collaborative manner.
5.1.1 Researchers’ positionality in participatory, collaborative research

As evident in Table 1, as Principle Investigator Fran was coming to the planning phase of the project as both researcher and participant. During the consultation phase with the four participating organisations it became clear that an objective ‘bystander’ stance as researchers would neither be possible, nor desirable. This has had a profound effect on how the research has been conducted. We recognise that our experiences and values will affect our choice of theory, concepts and research design and that to not acknowledge this to ourselves and others throughout would hold the danger of those values being ‘present in the form of unrecognised assumptions that shape what is done in an uncontrolled manner’ BERA (2011). To explicitly acknowledge these things ‘is therefore part of good research practice’ (ibid), but it does mean that we then need to pay attention to issues such as:

- If we acknowledge our own position, value-stance and bias in writing up their research, what should we declare and in how much detail?
- How does ‘positionality’ impact upon research and how, and to what degree, should we make it known?
- Where and how should reflexivity work within research design and planning, data collection and data analysis, research writing and reporting?

Whilst this might be seen as being partisan in relation to the research, our ethical position is one of [self]-critical partisanship, in that we cannot avoid being partisan, but we can constantly reflect on the nature and impact of that partisanship. One of the mechanisms we have devised to support our reflexivity, in addition to keeping research diaries, is to maintain dialogue with research participants (organisations and individuals), each other (the whole research team), the wider research community (an advisory board) and key stakeholders and end-users (advisory board, interim conference). The following section gives some examples of how this has affected the research thus far.

5.2 Ethical considerations

In a project of this nature it is to be expected that a number of ethical issues will arise during the research. The usual ethical considerations were identified before the research began, with ethical consent being gained from the University of Exeter’s ethics committee. These included: approaches to gaining informed consent from the range of different participants; drawing up memoranda of understanding with participating organisations (including those of the research consultants); procedures around principles of anonymity and confidentiality; procedures around data collection and avoidance of harm or detrimental effects on any participant or participating organisation; and roles and responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduction of the research. As outlined above, our commitment to developing ethical ways of working with all concerned across four organisations in three countries has guided much of the research in both design and action stages.

However, no matter how carefully one considers what ethical issues might arise, research is an unpredictable business and other issues usually present themselves once the project is underway. A number of unanticipated ethical issues has arisen so far during the project, and the research team has had recourse to a project mentor and an advisory group who have offered valuable support.
For the purposes of this report, we will briefly outline three issues that were not anticipated at the beginning of the project:

1. How can the researcher ethically position herself in relation to participants? Issues of an insider / outsider.
2. How does one respond to a serious ethical issue that is uncovered by the research?
3. What does it mean to be a participant in participatory research?

1. Both Fran and Helen have found the dual role of participant and researcher a challenging one – particularly when one’s roles, as a participant embedded in a process, begin to become blurred and one becomes privy to information that might not have been revealed if one was solely in a researcher role. Ethical decisions then have to be made about what it is appropriate to include when reporting the findings and, as this interim workshop shows, our approach to this is to be as open as possible and to share our findings with participants so that they have the opportunity to comment on our interpretations of their experiences and the contexts for these.

2. The second issue arose from the interviews that were designed to explore the context for the study visits to India – namely that students spend up to ten days in one of the Goodwill Children’s Homes (GCH) in Tamil Nadu. As Fran was exploring how GCH came into existence and how it had developed to become the organisation it is today, it became clear that (as for many children’s homes across the world), there was a history of child abuse at one time. Advice on this issue was sought from the advisory group, the project mentor, and the chair of Exeter’s ethics committee and, in the spirit of the participatory, collaborative nature of the research, concerns were shared with CCCU staff. In terms of the main issue the key areas to establish were whether the issue was historical or current, whether it was a moral and/or legal issue, and whether any further ethical protocols needed to be established to cover the remaining period of research. Taking this approach meant that the issue was discussed openly, and thus it was possible to establish that the situation was historical, GCH have strong procedures for Child Welfare, and CCCU students were not directly affected by the issue. However, as an example of the power relations that exist between the UK and India, from a postcolonial perspective, it is an important part of the contextual data for the research.

3. The third issue has led to a heightened awareness of what ‘informed consent’ means in the context of participatory, collaborative research. Tom and Herbert (2002) discuss how
relationships between researcher and research participants central to researchers’ claims to knowledge. In the case of this project, Fran had been involved in the Tide~Gambia study visit course for a number of years, and the CCCU-India study visit since 2008. Friendships had naturally developed from these associations and the assumptions that sometimes come with blurring of personal and professional relationships led to some tricky ethic issues that can be summarized as:

- Power differentials – where does the locus of control lie? Informed consent does not necessarily mean that consent has been given entirely freely
- ‘Informed’ consent – what one understands in theory and how that is played out in practice are two different things!
- Private / public – what one is happy to share in private with a friend one might not wish to have aired in public as part of a high profile project
- Insiders / outsiders – the blurring of professional / personal adds further complexity to this
- High stakes – for participants’ professional roles, for the participating organization, for the personal friendships
- Paradox of friendship – we are both more and less vulnerable

5.2 Research methods

The research takes place at two levels: at the strategic level of the research (research questions 1), data have been gathered interviews with course leaders, and the use of research diaries; at the pedagogic level (research questions 2-3), a multi-sited ethnographic approach has been adopted. Helen has been a participant in both courses, gathering data through participant observation, supplemented by semi-structured interviews and learning journals. Participants have also completed a biographical questionnaire. A more detailed description of the research methods follows.

5.2.1 Biographical questionnaires

These were completed at the beginning of each course (Tide~ 8, CCCU=11). Student teachers were asked about their degree course, e.g. specialism / module options, career plans; experienced teachers were asked about their role in school, posts of responsibility, future career plans. All were asked about prior relevant experiences (e.g. travel, VSO) and their reasons for taking part in the study visit courses.

5.2.2 Individual interviews

At the strategic level, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with those in the UK organisations who played a lead role in developing the partnership / link with the southern organisation, and with the study visit leaders (n=6). A core set of prompt questions was devised to provide a similar structure for each interviewee. However, interviews were conducted more in the style of conversations with the interviewer following lines of enquiry as they arose.
At a pedagogic level, a sub-sample of participants from each course (Tide~=4, CCCU=5) were interviewed on three occasions spread across the course and study visit as a whole (before, during and after the study visit). Participants were chosen based on both their responses to the biographical questionnaire as well as observations made during preparatory sessions. The aim was to choose participants who would represent a range of prior experiences and perspectives in order to get as full a picture as possible on the potential impacts from study visit courses.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature, were conducted individually between Helen and the participant and varied in length, lasting between 20 minutes and 1hr 30 minutes. Each was recorded and fully transcribed with the content from each interview helping to inform the next. An interview guide was prepared for each stage of interview and consisted of a list of open ended questions (with sub questions as prompts)- these differed slightly between Tide~ and CCCU to reflect the different contexts, but the themes were generally the same. Questions focused on: individuals’ existing knowledge and understandings of development and global issues; learning from the course to date; reasons for applying; hopes and expectations; the impact of displacements in environment and culture on individuals’ thinking; the role of intercultural experiences; experiences that have challenged individuals’ prior perceptions; and the impact the experience has had on them personally and professionally.

5.2.3 Participants
The next two sections outline brief profiles of the in-depth participants. All have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Tide~ GSVC participants
• Andrew – primary school teacher in his 2nd year of teaching who had just been given the responsibility of Sustainable Schools co-ordinator. Andrew had never travelled outside Europe before and his main reasons for applying were to develop his own knowledge of sustainability issues (which he described as limited) and to apply what he learnt into his professional practice.
• Geoff – 16 years experience as a senior lecturer in Primary Education (with responsibility for geography) at a British university who had an interest in developing two-way links with people working in education in The Gambia. Geoff applied in order to develop global learning within his teaching contexts as well as developing his own understating of learning in a global context. Whilst he had travelled widely this was mostly in the global North.
• Melissa- primary school teacher with a TL2 role as Sustainable School coordinator including responsibility for International Schools and Comenius. Melissa was also coordinator for geography and global links and had retrained as a teacher after doing an MA and some lecturing in photography, having a family and running a vegetable box scheme. She had been on trips to schools in Europe as part of school’s Comenius programme but had not travelled widely apart from that. Her main reason for applying was to gain first-hand experience of a county in the global South and to work alongside Gambian colleagues.
• **Nigel**—secondary school geography teacher with Advanced Skills post developing curriculum links with local primary schools. Had travelled widely as a tourist but never to West Africa. His reasons for applying were to visit a part of the world that he’d never previously been to with a view to understanding development and global issues.

**CCCU ISV participants**

• **Hannah**—final year BA (Hons) Primary Education student who would start her first teaching post on return from India. Although she had spent a month in The Netherlands as part of an ‘alternative placement’ part of her degree she had never visited a country ‘which is as deprived as India’. This was a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ in which she hoped to develop her understanding of different cultures with a view to applying it to her teaching practice.

• **Imogen**—final year BA (Hons) Primary Education student who, like Hannah, would start her first teaching post on return from India. Imogen had spent her alternative placement teaching in New Zealand but had never visited a country in the global South. Her reasons for applying were to learn about a different culture and their values, putting what she learnt into both her teaching practice and personal life. She was keen to go within a supported group.

• **Mike**—2nd year BA (Hons) Education Studies student who hoped to continue on at Masters level studying in the area of International Development. Mike was active within Rotary International and had travelled to Kenya the year before to carry out some development work in a rural school. One of Mike’s lecturers who had previously been on the study visit inspired him to apply and he was keen to ‘look beyond my work in Africa’ and experience another culture.

• **Maxine**—2nd year BA (Hons) Education Studies student with an interest in international development. Maxine was a mature student who had had various jobs since leaving school after A-levels 30 years previously, including, for the past 8 years on and off, teaching English as a foreign language. She had travelled widely including to various countries in South East Asia, spending 6 months teaching English in China and a holiday to Goa in India 12 years previously. Keen to learn more about global education and Indian culture she had applied for the study visit.

• **Megan**—lecturer in Early Childhood Studies for the past 2 years. She started her career as a nurse and went on to work as a social worker in child protection. Her lack of experience of other cultures inspired her to apply and she was keen to ‘understand and learn from other traditions and wisdoms’ and ‘to find the gifts of love, friendship an affection in unusual places and to offer the same gift back’. Various experiences in her personal life that had had a profound impact on who she is.

**5.2.4 Participant Observation**

A major part of the data collection involved Helen recording participant observation notes throughout both study visit courses. This recorded both descriptions of the kinds of activities taking place (course content), the pedagogy underlining the courses and reflections on what and how course participants seemed to be learning from their experiences. This was combined with her learning journal (see section 5.4 below).
5.2.5 Learning journals
Participants were asked to keep learning journals as part of the courses and although these were private documents, they were drawn upon to inform interviews, evaluations etc. As a participant-researcher Helen also kept a learning diary from the perspective of a participant, charting her personal and professional learning on both study visit courses. Fran also kept a learning journal during both study visits. Her records focused on her own observations of course processes and her own continuing development as a result of participating in the study visit activities. In addition, Fran’s journal was also used as a research diary and hence recorded research processes, reflections on working with southern researchers and so on.

5.2.6 Other data
A host of other data were collected. For the GSVC these included: application forms; mid-course and end of course evaluations; reflective written piece at the end of the study visit week; email correspondence between the group; course handouts; copies of group activities conducted in both the UK and in the Gambia (including alongside Gambian teachers); email reflections from course leaders and Helen and/or Fran after each preparatory and follow-up session; and photographs. For the ISSV these included: two recordings and one written account of facilitated reflective sessions; photographs; and a reflective written piece at the end of the study visit week into insights gained.

In addition, documentary evidence was gathered from both Tide~ global learning and Canterbury Christ Church University where it was available and informed about the development of the partnership / link with the southern organisation; these included letters, emails, course and study visit programmes, reports.

5.2.7 Follow-up focus groups
In-depth participants took part in a focus group approximately 12 months after the end of the study visit/course. Four out of the five participants attended from the CCCU sample and the focus group was 2 hours duration. Two out of the four participants attended from the Tide~ global learning sample and the focus group was 1 hour in duration (the other two participants have agreed to answer questions via email). Questions focused on personal and professional impact of the course and, where appropriate, how this is beginning to inform their practice. Technically these follow-up focus groups relate to research question 4, concerning how teachers’ learning from study visits informs their practice over time. However, since it is part of Phase 2 of data collection it is included here.

5.2.8 Data analysis
In-depth analysis of data has been conducted using NVivo. A mixture of interpretive and reflexive approaches to data analysis is being taken:
The [interpretive] approach is concerned with making sense of research participants’ accounts, so that the researcher is attempting to interpret their meaning. ... The reflexive approach attempts to focus attention on the researcher and her or his contribution to the data creation and analysis process. (Welsh, 2002:1)

The first level of analysis, undertaken by researchers on the data that they gathered, is interpretive; when northern and southern researchers have shared analyses and undertake additional collaborative analysis, this has been reflexive. The findings presented below relate to analysis of data in relation to research questions 1 – 3.

6. Interim findings

6.1 How have two North – South educational partnerships developed and what context do they provide for educational study visits?

For the purposes of this report, the following focuses on the nature of the North-South relationships and their development over time, with reference to the context that they provide for the educational study visits as appropriate. A number of common themes emerged from analysis of the data, but since this is not a comparative research project, the findings for each context (UK-Gambia, UK-India) are reported in turn.

6.1.1 The Tide~ global learning – National Environment Agency partnership

The partnership between Tide~ global learning and the National Environment Agency began in 1999, although there had been some links between the two organisations for some years before that. First and foremost there was recognition by all those interviewed that developing a partnership based on ethical ways of working was a long-term venture.

_The length of time that it really takes to develop a partnership that is open, mutual and reciprocal, that does develop organically, is hugely a long term venture._

(Interview with current Tide~ director, May 2010)

Analysis of the data so far, gathered from documentation and interviews with those in a lead role in Tide~ global learning, reveal the following further key features of the partnership:

- A shared concern about raising effectiveness of teaching about sustainability in primary schools was the motivating force behind the move from an informal connection to a more formal partnership
- There are no formal memoranda of understanding, but that does not detract from the level of commitment shown on both sides
- Development of the partnership has taken place quite naturally over the years; through conversations, emails and face-to-face interaction during the study visits, the needs of each organisation have been discussed and formed the focus for the next stage of activity
- The partnership has not avoided difficult issues such as the imbalance between the UK and The Gambia with respect to the financial resources they have to draw on.
The question of financial support from Tide~ for NEA activities has been discussed but from an early stage such charitable activities were avoided as there was a danger that this would create an imbalance of power.

- The partnership has led to some tangible outcomes (notably a joint publication in 2002 “Educating for Sustainability”), but the key outcome for both organisations is that it facilitates teacher development about global issues, sustainability and working in partnership.
- Tide~ sees the partnership as being central to many aspects of the work it is involved in – beyond the study visit courses.
- Mutuality is at the heart of the partnership and provides an ethos for the working relationship that all are committed to. Over time a great deal of trust has developed between the two organisations, as they work in a reciprocal way towards their shared goals.
- Thus there is recognition that equality in the partnership does not mean things have to be the same on both sides; there is an openness to difference and to learning from difference.

A few of these will now be discussed in more detail.

6.1.1.1 Shared goals
The Tide – NEA partnership has developed over a number of years, with a relationship between the two organisations being established in the mid to late 1990s, some years before the formal study visit courses began. The Tide – NEA partnership grew from the NEA’s previous involvement when a teacher group from Tide went to The Gambia, but on a study visit rather than a course. The then director of Tide contacted a number of organisations in The Gambia to see who would be interested in having professional conversations with UK teachers over issues such as sustainability and development education.

*So one of the other things was that I had identified lots of interesting organisations, change organisations … which were useful contacts and … what I got them to do was agree to be interviewed by say two teachers or three teachers at most and that was one of the tasks [for UK teachers on a study visit in late 1980s] yes. … And in fact the NEA was one of those. (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009)*

Tide was interested in exploring a deeper relationship, and this coincided with a time when the NEA, within their education and communications division, was trying to establish an Education for Sustainability (ESD) sub-committee that would involve local teachers. The mutual interests and, in some respects values, of the two organisations led to further work on subsequent visits, with teachers from both countries visiting the partner organisation during the early stages of the relationship.

6.1.1.2 Openly discussing tricky issues
The issue of finance was discussed from the start: ‘we are not making money demands nor are we offering you money’ (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009). Tide and the NEA shared a desire to undertake creative work involving UK and Gambian teachers.
looking at issues of sustainability and pedagogical approaches to teaching about this in their respective primary schools.

Building trust was identified as important in the sense that other organisations had come from Europe before, promising sums of money to facilitate certain types of activity, but often these had not materialised. Tide explicitly stated that ‘we don’t want to exploit you but we want to learn something,’ and that they were seeking to work together ‘but in a quite modest sort of way’ (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009), so expectations and goals were initially not too ambitious which allowed the partnership to develop at a pace that felt comfortable to both organisations. The informality of the partnership is seen as an enabling factor in helping to avoid the power differentials that often follow when funding from one partner to another is involved:

Partly what makes it work is that it doesn’t actually get into a dependency and that was my ...
Fran: So a dependency in the sense of?
Well you know that we are not seen as a formal relationship that requires accountability about funding. (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009)

This does not mean that differences in financial resources are not recognised or acknowledged within the partnership, but it also does not mean that imbalances in resources lead to inequality in the relationship.

6.1.1.3 No formal memorandum of understanding
This commitment to working a way that challenged the usual donor-recipient relationship that is common between the UK and The Gambia, seemed to be enough to sustain the partnership without the need for a formal, signed agreement beyond a chain of letters that teased out ways of working together that would be of benefit to each organisation. That the partnership, which has developed since the mid-1990s, continues to be valued by both parties is evident in the fact that they continue to work together and if, as is sometimes the case, a study visit course does not run one year (e.g. due to lack of take-up) it does not affect the desire to continue. However, current uncertainties in the UK are making this commitment more of a challenge than usual

there is strong recognition here ... that this is incredibly valuable work from TIDE’s point of view, and the big question is how on earth we make it possible to continue doing it. We are all on the same side as each other on that – it’s that we want to do it. It’s just a struggle to see how we really get it, keep on keeping it viable. (Interview with Tide~ project leader May 2010)

6.1.1.4 Mutuality at the heart of the partnership
The principle of mutuality in the relationship is strong at a theoretical level,

the more successful partnerships will be where both sides ... decide that it is something that is valuable and they want to move forward on, but if you find mentally you have to change what you do, in order to fit in with another
organisation’s approach, then that is not a partnership, that is you being subservient to their needs and then that is not sensible, which is not to say that at different points, during that relationship, that one group of needs might take priority over another, so it would be something that you would hope that at some stages Tide~ is able to offer particular skills and at other stages NEA is able to offer particular skills and that the length of time means that, you know, there is mutual benefit on both sides, even though at different points in the relationship it might [appear to be imbalanced] (Interview with Tide~ project leader May 2010)

and at a practical level, although this is something that constantly needs working on as was evident in the 2010 study visit,

I think everybody learns something from the partnership…. I think partly there were elements of joint working, which are not quite the same as mutual learning, on the workshop day that did not quite work out as I would have wanted to. I think we did not plan them far enough in advance, I also think there were a lot of new people on the Gambian side to the process, who did not necessary come with expectations about their role that were in tune with where we had been before. Perhaps I got a little, not complacent, because it had worked quite well in the past, I assumed that it would probably work quite well again. So that reminds me that you have to keep on working at those things. (Interview with Tide~ project leader May 2010)

Mutual learning processes are therefore an integral part of the study visit course,

By learning from each other already, working together, considering what education meant, about the exchange of ideas, having to provide at the beginning there was a lot of emphasis on working together and mutually as well. Hopefully people detect what that mutual learning was. (Interview with Course Leader, February 2010).

There is some evidence that mutual learning processes enable all concerned (course leaders as well as course participants) to begin to question assumptions,

That is one of the major things about working with an international partner that always comes about – is you end up looking at familiar things in a different way. (Interview with Tide~ project leader May 2010)

6.1.1.5 Central to the work of Tide~
It is clear that the relationship between Tide~ and the NEA, along with the study visit course, is central to the work of Tide~ as a teacher network. The capacity of the network, and the range and types of understanding and skills of members of that network, are greatly enhanced by the partnership.

The number two thing which is a strategic thing from TIDE’s point of view and justified partly because of all the investment of time, capacity and money that we put into it is that [it] … gives rise to a number of teachers who go on to playing key roles in the network and therefore it’s a capacity building role in terms of our overall
strategy, network building and then many of the teachers, certainly in this course who I imagine are going on to play leading roles within the network within the next few years. (Interview with Tide~ project leader May 2010)
	here are many people who I have spoken to in the last year, from trustees to members of the network, to you know, partners to a whole range of people who will see their visit to the Gambia, whether it’s as part of this last 10 year engagement or whether it was prior to that, as being the starting point of their involvement. (Interview with current Tide~ director, May 2010)

6.1.1.6 Equitable but not the same
A further principle underpinning the partnership is an understanding that working towards an equitable relationship does not mean that things have to be the same on both sides. For example, between 2000-2002 teacher groups in The Gambia and the UK worked together on a publication (Tide/NEA, 2002). The production and printing costs were covered by Tide, but each organisation put in resources such as expertise, teacher time, and access to sites in The Gambia and the UK that enabled a focus on specific sustainability issues. The publication was then distributed within in each country – for sale in the Tide publications catalogue in the UK, offered as a free resource to teachers in The Gambia who came to ESD training events.

_We have demonstrated this that we have been able, we have been willing to enable them over and above ... and the obvious example of that is the publication._

Fran: The publication yeah.
And that that was tangibly that we were, we had put ourselves out for them but we gained from that you know it’s not a, it’s not charitable or anything. (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009)

The process of UK and Gambian teachers working together enables capacity building for both organisations, as well as providing stimuli for further work within each organisation between study visits. Where tricky issues arose, there was an openness within the partnership to explore differences and to learn from them, rather than each organisation seeking to change the other in some way:

_... you know that the openness of that actually was of value because we did not have an agenda of changing [each other] ... we weren’t playing at saying who was equal in the partnership._ (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009).

Within this context, Tide then further developed the study visits into study visit courses in 2002 because although a visit to a southern country,

_is going to be of value ... the learning isn’t structured very much at all actually and therefore the learning when you come back, you are not challenged._ (Interview with former Tide~ director, November 2009).
6.1.2 The Canterbury Christ Church University – Goodwill Children’s Homes Link

The first thing to note is that Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) describe their relationship with Goodwill Children’s Homes in Tamil Nadu as a strong link or relationship, rather than a partnership.

I always think of it as inevitably as very asymmetrical, but it is not a partnership... It can’t be a partnership, because we are not entering into it, we are not discussing what it’s [Goodwill is] doing, and the benefits sort of emerge... mmm... what other words could we use?
Fran: Well, no, it is a relationship.
Yes, it’s a... It is a relationship that we have a ... link. We have a link, I think is probably as good a word as any. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

Analysis of the data gathered so far reveals the following further key features of the link,

- The link has been in existence as a connection that facilitates study visits since the late 1990s
- No formal memorandum of understanding has been drawn up at any point, but this does not appear to affect the commitment of both organizations to continue working together
- The main professional focus for the link is on providing an experience for CCCU students in a ‘developing’ country
- However, CCCU has ongoing relationships with other organizations in India and this study visit provides one means of developing staff capacity about education in an Indian context, Indian culture and so on. CCCU therefore benefits from the relationship at a strategic level in terms of its contribution to their Internationalisation agenda
- For some members of staff a personal relationship has developed over the years and there is naturally some blurring of personal-professional roles
- The strength of relationships is seen to be very supportive of the study visit
- Differences in wealth lead to differences in some practices within the relationship; there is a recognition that this is a problematic area that is openly discussed
- There is evidence of mutuality in tangible ways and in terms of ongoing learning for those in a lead role

6.1.2.1 A deeply human relationship

The link between CCCU and Goodwill has developed very much on a personal level, with the key individuals acting on behalf of their organization in a loose rather than formal sense. It is the personal, individual relationships that are described as being at the heart of the link.

We love being with them, we love talking with them and finding out about how their lives are progressing, but we’re not working together on an academic partnership.
Fran: No, or any other sort of educational one?
No, except when we are there, when we, as it were, muck in together with them and try and see that we don’t tread on too many toes and be reasonably sensitive, and so on for about a week or so
Fran: And responsive to each others’ needs etc
That’s right. So it’s….I think what’s central to this, is humans to humans, it is a deeply human relationship, and that is what India does best in a way. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

Where there has continued to be contact between study visits this has therefore been at a predominantly personal level, and sustained over time,

... and actually now we’ve been to their weddings, we’ve been to their christenings, and we’ve seen each other grow old and it’s lovely. It’s a lovely relationship. ... We think as ourselves as friends, we send each other cards and we swap notes about our lives. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

6.1.2.2 The key focus for the link is facilitating study visits.
For CCCU the link focuses around the opportunities it provides for giving students a developing world experience in a safe setting that was not based on tourism, so that ‘they could actually see what things were really like’ (Interview with Goodwill UK Trustee, January 2010).

Yes. I mean, I felt very much that we were... what we wanted to do was to give students overseas developing world field work experience and that’s really where it comes from. In that sense we weren’t looking at a partnership. ... we’re providing students in the UK with the chance to see and experience educationally, something which they couldn’t see and experience educationally any other way. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

However, as noted above, the relationships developed very much on a personal level over time and this was beneficial to the study visits, and created some tensions.

The relationships which support the visit, ... are very strong, very important, [because] very often we are visiting regions which are, for want of a better word, on the fringes. (Interview with study visit leader, July 2010)

I find the trip increasingly demanding, because not only am I relating to quite a large number of Indian colleagues and friends in that very deep way, but also trying to run the trip for the students and support them in whatever way they need, and I’m pulled in lots of different directions and that’s the challenge of it for me. It’s very exciting, but very demanding. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

Some of these tensions were as a result of the ways in which mutuality and equity are played out in the link.

6.1.2.3 Mutuality and equity
There is an understanding that the relationship is not symmetrical, but that each organization benefits from it and that there is a kind of equity – albeit that the benefits are realized in very different ways on each side.
We respect our hosts, they respect us and I think we bring to them, and enrich their lives in different ways, just as they enrich our lives in different ways, and so it’s predicated on a relationship of some sort of trade off, some sort of balance. There is a balance. It’s not symmetrical, but there is a balance and it’s a bridge. (Interview with CCCU project leader, June 2010)

Some of this trade-off is a straightforward exchange of payment by CCCU to Goodwill for accommodation and subsistence for the time spent in the home. An additional donation is also given each year in recompense for enabling students to spend some time teaching children in the Goodwill primary school, and interacting with them during leisure time. But the exchange clearly goes beyond this to learning about and from each other in ways that have an impact at institutional level,

... Are the scales balanced when we go for the people who are here, have they gained, what have they gained from us? And they’ve fed us, they’ve housed us, they’ve shared some aspects of their lives with us. I don’t know. Sort of, whether it’s a fair and equal exchange, does it have to be a fair and equal exchange...I was really struck by what [Goodwill’s Child Welfare Officer] said when I commented on how contained the children [in the home] were, how independent they were and how well behaved ... and some of our children find that really difficult in our primary schools, and it was almost as if he didn’t believe me. He said how can this be, you taught us how to do this (Interview with CCCU tutor, July 2010)

Some of the institutional benefits for CCCU are outlined separately below.

6.1.2.4 Not avoiding tricky issues
The very fact that Goodwill Children’s Homes is a charity is an interesting context within which intercultural learning between former colonizers and colonized takes place. Partly for this reason the study visit provides experiences outside of Goodwill in other areas of Tamil Nadu and in Kerala.

It’s eye opening firstly at a straightforward comparative level, but it’s also eye opening and challenging because ... it throws into sharp relief all the different assumptions and theoretical and philosophical stances which underpin one’s own practice, it’s extremely difficult to identify while you’re in the UK. It is the process of standing outside and looking in from a distance. It suddenly challenges your identity in a big way ... Challenges your educational philosophy, your educational identity and your personal identity. So, it’s...the whole trip really was intended in my mind at the beginning, to provide a portrait of India, so that it wasn’t just focused on coming to Goodwill. (Interview with project leader, July 2010)

However, the core of the visit is to stay for between 7-10 days at Goodwill and the tricky issue of sponsorship usually arises each year. As a charitable organization, a successful funding stream is for people in the UK to sponsor individual children in the homes. As discussed in section 2.1, this is a common way in which people in the UK are able to do their bit and ‘make a difference’. However, when the relationship is a direct and personal one, this can raise some interesting questions about the effect of sponsorship on both the
donors and the recipients.

We have the same problem when we leave here. About a day before, you know the children here are sponsored, the children don’t really know sometimes whether they’re sponsored or not, but about a day before we leave, the word goes around that you can ask these people for sponsorship and all the children want to be sponsored. The children who have no sponsor, ask for sponsorship, the children who have a sponsor, ask for sponsorship and they get very unhappy again, because it’s like the pens. They want something suddenly and it’s about the transfer of money and power, but that’s a completely different game. (CCCU group discussion, July 2010)

That this is an explicit part of the learning for students on the study visit is evident in the data presented in section 6.2 below.

### 6.1.2.5 Benefits for the University

One strong piece of evidence that the link is beneficial to CCCU is its longevity. Students and staff have been going on study visits since the late 1990s and there does not appear to be a shortage of people applying each year to go on the next visit. For the university as an organization there are also benefits in terms of staff development at an individual level,

> I realise personal learning initially was very strong, I wasn’t sure about my professional learning, but since then I realise that, and it’s difficult to articulate what that is, but I realised had influenced me significantly in a professional sense as well as in a personal sense, and so I felt that this was ….it’s a very rich, unique, opportunity to be able to make that …stand in that different place and learn about yourself, but also to learn about other parts of the world...another part of the world. (Interview with study visit leader, July 2010)

And that this learning has a wide range of applications in the university,

> I think one of the things that I’m hoping that this experience will help me, is, manage some of the hierarchical stuff in the University that I tend to be an ostrich about. (Interview with CCCU tutor, July 2010)

In addition to capacity building for teaching and management, there is also evidence of capacity building for research,

> we’ve drawn on the Goodwill trip professionally in a number of different levels. One is writing for Primary Geographer. There are about 3 articles in Primary Geographer and we’ve reported it at [a] Research Conference. … We’ve used it internally, in staff development and events within the 4 walls of Christ Church and then in 2009 [we] wrote the article for JET, … which came out of a conference paper. So there’s a small trail of linkages there. … [A colleague] interviewed some of our Indian colleagues as part of his PhD research. (Interview with project leader, July 2010)
In a UK context of accountability, quality assurance, internationalization and research excellence targets, these benefits are crucial to the continuation of a study visit that is not an accredited part of the university’s courses. The benefits of this are that it enables a wide range of students to take part in the visit and avoids the difficulties of having to assess across different programmes and courses (as is shown in section 6.2 the diversity of study visit groups is an important factor in enhancing learning).

### 6.2 Study visits: a UK context

As stated in the introduction, in the UK and other countries in the global North, a popular professional development activity for undergraduates and qualified members of professions such as teaching is to take part in a study visit to a Southern country. For participants in such activities the experience, even if short-term, is often described as ‘life-changing’. However, there is growing evidence that questions the extent of that transformation. It seems as if, no matter what the motivations and experiences, the outcomes are very similar in terms of global understanding and the actions subsequently taken as active global citizens. This research is concerned with what we term study visit courses\(^3\), which have preparatory, study visit and follow-up phases and in which the learning is supported and facilitated by course leaders. Whether study visit courses as opposed to mere ‘visits’ have any greater success in dismantling stereotypes has not been investigated. The research seeks to address this gap.

As mentioned in the previous section, although the focus is on two study visit courses, this is not a comparative study. The intention is not to make judgements about the merits of one or the other based on comparisons, but to throw light on what and how teachers and student teachers learn from taking part in their respective courses. The two courses provide two alternative models / approaches to running study visits to the Global South and as such raise different questions. These provide an excellent opportunity to observe how these differences afford different kinds of learning.

#### 6.2.1 Tide~ Gambia study visit course

The Gambia study visit course (GSVC) is run within an established global partnership between Tide~ global learning in the UK and the Gambian National Environment Agency. This partnership has been established for approximately 10 years and a yearly study course has taken place since 2002. The GSVC is for qualified (mostly) primary teachers and other educators and runs for nine months from September to May. Participants complete an application and are interviewed by course leaders before being accepted onto the course (here there is an emphasis on forming a diverse group with a range of experiences). The

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\(^3\) For brevity we are calling them study visit courses, but they are not ‘courses’ in the strict sense of the term because they are non-accredited professional development activity. For example, the Canterbury Christ Church ‘course’ takes place entirely outside the university’s programme of accredited courses, is optional and students pay a fee to take part. As shown in the findings for CCCU in section 6.3 we now term their ‘course’ an International Supported Study Visit (ISSV), to indicate that the visit for students is facilitated by their tutors.
focus of the whole course is for UK teachers to learn about global partnerships within the context of teaching about sustainable development.

The GSVC is underlined by a methodology based on a mutual learning process intended to model how intercultural, collaborative learning through global partnerships might be achieved. There are distinctive pedagogical approaches employed on the course, drawing on experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and socio-cultural theory. Thus there is an emphasis on reflection on learning throughout the course as outlined in the course flier which states: “the course is based on the principle that reflection on our own learning can inform the way we teach”. An essential part of this is meta-reflection on teachers’ underlying core beliefs and assumptions about the world and participants are explicitly asked to keep a learning journal to chart their changing thoughts and understandings.

There were nine participants during the 2009-10 Gambia study visit course as well as two course leaders, plus Helen as a participant-researcher. One of the participants withdrew from our research, leaving eight teachers involved in the data collection aspects of the research project.

6.2.1.1. Preparation Phase

Three full day preparatory sessions take place in the UK at Tide~ global learning (in October, November and December). Prior to this there is an evening briefing session at the end of September which acts as a ‘getting to know you’ ice-breaking session and covers logistical matters. These sessions prepare the teachers in a number of ways, including developing their understanding of mutual learning, and the nature of the partnership between Tide~ global learning and the NEA.

The sessions are a mixture of practical activities, group discussions and reflection on learning. The latter involves debriefs at the end of each session and ‘go-rounds’ at the start of the next to discuss what we had been thinking about and doing in between. There is also an element of group forming activities (establishing ground rules, identifying common interests, working together). An important part of the first session is a fieldwork activity looking at change and development in Birmingham; this acts as a precursor to similar activities that the group do in The Gambia. There are some common themes underlying the sessions, but these remain adaptable to the needs of each particular group. In 2009-10 major themes running through the course were: global learning, storytelling, education (including discussion around the Primary Curriculum Reviews that were going on at this time), development, and mutual learning. Throughout the course participants gradually take on more ownership and all are encouraged to either lead or co-lead a session at some point.

For the 2009-2010 group, after the formal sessions had ended the group continued to email each other with ideas and relevant articles. Of particular importance was a link that Ben, one of the course leaders, emailed which had a YouTube link to a speech given by Nigerian author Chimamada Ngozi Adichie entitled ‘The danger of the single story’. In it, Adichie talks about the ‘single story of Africa’ which focuses on poverty, famine and war and in which poor, needy Africans are waiting to be saved by generous, white Westerners. She concludes that ‘show a people as one thing, and one thing only, over and over again and
that is what they become’ (Adichie, 2009). This theme was taken up by the group and became influential to many participants’ learning.

6.2.1.2 Study visit to The Gambia
A week long study visit to the Gambia takes place during February half-term. The group stay in a small eco-lodge in Tanje, a coastal village 11km south of the main tourist area. During the week Gambian teachers are also involved in professional development. UK and Gambian teachers do fieldwork together in a range of locations (e.g. coastal areas, a nature reserve, Youth Parliament, the Red Cross and the Gambia Renewable Energy Centre). Each site provides a focus for discussion on issues around economic, social, cultural, historical and environmental sustainability. This is followed by a day conference when both parties discuss what has been learnt from the fieldwork and how we might teach about these issues in our respective educational contexts. Important themes that the groups worked together on included: climate change, (sustainable) development, eco tourism, mutual learning, thinking about the future, and young people and their role in all of this.

In addition to these joint learning experiences, the UK group also spend time working together, both formally and informally e.g. spending a day with a Gambian family shopping for, preparing and cooking a Gambian meal, hosting local griots (traditional West African storytellers) for an evening, going on a river boat trip, visiting and working collaboratively at a local ‘living’ museum etc. In this way there is space for both intercultural and intracultural learning.

There are daily reflective sessions, sometimes done in small groups and sometimes as a whole group, as well as time for individual reflection. At the end of the week participants are asked to write a reflective piece on a) what they have learnt from the week, b) ideas that they would like to follow up and c) advice for future visits.

6.2.1.3 Follow-up phase
Back in the UK there are two day-long, follow-up sessions at Tide~ global learning; one in late March and the other in early May. The purpose of these is to share and think about what teachers have learnt thus far and to discuss what this means for their professional practice. As such there is a focus on curriculum, whole school or organisational change with sessions on, for example, how to lead change and engaging colleagues. There is also brief discussion on how to develop school partnerships for mutual learning. Finally the sessions provide an opportunity to follow up on some of the emergent themes for the group, which in 2009-10 included storytelling and futures.

6.2.2 CCCU India supported study visit
The CCCU India supported study visit (ISSV) is for trainee teachers (both early years and primary) as well as other students and lecturers involved in education degrees. Like the GSVC it involves an application and interview process. The program does not offer any academic credit and is run separately to the university; in fact it is not described as a course, but as a supported study visit. The ISSV consists of a 3-week long visit to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Southern India during July. The focus of this supported study visit is on learning about India as a distant place, learning about the Indian education system and spending time
teaching in Goodwill Children’s Home in Thandigudi. The visit is multi-sited and organised in a specific way, with participants gaining a range of experiences.

The link within which the study visit takes place involves charity as CCCU help raise funds for Goodwill Children’s Homes. A proportion of the fee participants pay is donated to various projects that the group visit whilst in India. Such a perspective mirrors the dilemmas schools face about engaging in fundraising activities and hence provides a very useful second case study which enables us to gain insights into what types of learning take place in a charitable context.

There were 14 participants during the 2010 ISSV as well as two course leaders plus Helen as a participant-researcher. All 14 participants agreed to take part in the research project.

6.2.2.1 Preparation Phase
There are four 1-hour sessions in the UK during the 6 months leading up to the study visit; these mostly cover logistical matters such as health, visas, travel arrangements and what to take/wear. In 2010 there was also an informal social evening held a month before at one of the participants’ houses which acted as a good ice-breaker enabling students to get to know each other better. On arrival in Southern India the group spends 2 days in Kovalam, a coastal tourist resort; this acts as the orientation and preparation phase of the supported study visit. Here the group spends time getting acquainted with and engaging in everyday life (shopping, eating, using public transport), going on a riverboat trip, visiting a temple museum etc.. Throughout the visit there is an emphasis on finding out about people and places and participants are encouraged to speak to local people about their lives. Throughout the trip various ‘visitors’ (who the course leaders have built up relationships with over the previous 10 years) will join the group for meals or during the day, which present unplanned, informal opportunities to talk to people about their lives. Whilst in Kovalam the group meets every morning for a briefing session; these are not formally structured/ facilitated and are more an arena to share experiences thus far and to set the agenda for the day.

6.2.2.2 Study visit to Southern India
From the tourist site of Kovalam, the group travels for a day overland to spend three nights in Dindigul, a market town in Tamil Nadu, which has very few European tourists. This enables students to experience both a different region of Southern India as well as a more urban way of life. Accommodation is in standard Indian hotel accommodation. Here, the daily debriefing sessions become more structured and facilitated, with participants asked to reflect on their learning thus far and on things that have challenged their preconceptions. A highlight of the stay is spending time visiting the local market, where students are encouraged to collect artefacts that they can use in their teaching back in the UK. From here the group is invited to visit a couple of children’s homes (one connected to Goodwill and the other independent). As in previous years, in 2010 several group members had brought various toys and other gifts with them to donate to projects such as these.

The hustle and bustle of Dindigul provides a sharp contrast to the very rural location of Goodwill Children’s Home up in the mountains at Thandigudi. It is here where the majority
of the time is spent with the Indian teachers/staff acting as hosts to the group. Here participants are involved in teaching children aged 4-11 alongside visiting various Goodwill projects. As such, the central foci of the ISSV could be said to be: education, development, cultural diversity and finding out about people and places. In the evenings structured reflective sessions take place within the UK group. Throughout the trip there are opportunities for a range of informal experiences, such as being invited to visit a teachers’ home for tea, shopping in local markets or going to the tailors to get sari fabric made up into clothing.

From Thandigudi the group travels overland to the city of Madurai for one night which offers yet another type of experience; of a large, busy city with all the associated hustle and bustle. From here an overnight train takes the group back to Kovalam for the final 2 days of their stay. Taken together, the variety of experiences provide a rich portrait of this part of India, enabling students to relate to India on all sorts of levels.

6.2.2.3 Follow-up phase
Again, while no formal follow-up phase exists, the two days spent back in Kovalam at the end of the trip brings participants round ‘full circle’ and provides an opportunity to reflect on their experiences thus far. Returning to the first location after two weeks elsewhere enables students to ‘see’ Kovalam in a different way compared to when they arrived there at the beginning of the visit; their later experiences of India in Tamil Nadu shape how Kovalam, a tourist location, is perceived on return. Specifically the group are asked to write a short reflective piece on what they have got out of their experience.

6.3 Learning from study visits
All data have been inputted and analysed using NVivo data analysis software and this has been used to tease out the main themes and sub themes that seem to be emerging. It is worth pointing out that ethnographic research produces vast quantities of incredibly rich ‘data’ and it has been difficult to narrow things down into a somehow representative sample of findings. Sources for data are included after any citation. All participant names are pseudonyms.

6.3.1 What do UK teachers learn from their involvement in study visits?
In the original research proposal the focus was on teachers’ knowledge and understandings of development and global issues. However, as a participant researcher also visiting India for the first time, over the course of the research I became aware that this is only one small part of their (and my) learning. Two key themes that seem to have emerged from our research are a) learning about how we relate to others (both in the UK and in the South) and b) learning about self and identity. This is characteristic of qualitative research in general, and ethnographic research in particular; as researchers we need to remain flexible to emerging themes and not stick rigidly to our original ideas. If we knew what we were going to find out before we started, then what is the point in doing research?
6.3.1.1 Teachers’ understanding of development and global issues

Gaining knowledge

Without exception, UK teachers learnt a lot of subject knowledge matter about The Gambia and Southern India as places and some factual information about people who live there, their lifestyles and so on.

For the ISSV participants some was geographical knowledge – names of places, where they are located in relation to each other, the size of India (travelling for hours on a coach from Kovalam to Dindigul which on a map covers only a tiny part of the Southern India), differences between urban and rural / plains and hill areas / tourist area and a non tourist area; some of it was socio-cultural knowledge – ways in which different people live, social etiquette (e.g. good-morning greeting, driving on the roads, taking shoes off before entering someone’s home); some of it was historical knowledge – influence of the colonial past but also the influence of more recent transformation of India as it becomes a more ‘developed’ country; and some of it was religious knowledge – learning about from visiting temples and from the Christian influenced morning assembly at the school.

For the GSVC one issue that the UK group learnt a lot about was Climate Change and its perceived impact on the Atlantic coastline, which brought in the issues of tourism, development and the interdependent nature of the world. In some ways this extended their knowledge and understanding; in other ways it challenged prior assumptions, for example, that the answer is not necessarily to get ‘rid’ of package holidays but to encourage tour operators to develop more ethical and sustainable practices in ways that benefit the local community:

*It’s given me more information. And I suppose the only almost eureka moment was when Adama said about, you know, we need the mass tourism- I was expecting him to say you know that mass tourism is bad for the country, but when you put the edge on it, you know, that the farmers can get together and it raises their income by providing the vegetables for the mass tourist market. So you think, umm I hadn’t thought of that before.* (Nigel, study visit interview, GSVC)

What individual people abstracted from their experiences and new knowledge about development, quality of life and global issues varied enormously from person to person. This was partly due to the different starting points of individuals – both in terms of the amount of previous travel to Southern countries they had done, their stage in their career, and (perhaps) their subject specialism.

For example, one area the ISSV learnt a lot about was the education system in a particular part of Southern India. However, not all participants recognised that the type of education pupils received in Goodwill Children’s Home may not have been representative of what they might see in a regular government school. Maxine, who had travelled widely before and had taught English in China recognised that:

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4 Adama Bah works for the Gambia is Good (GIG) project run by the UK based charity Concern International which works with local growers and tourist hotels to increase the amount of local food used in the tourism industry. He came to speak to the group one evening about GIG’s work.
I think there is a danger that a trip like that could give....somebody, perhaps with not as much life experience as me, the idea that that’s, you know, homogenise it. So here we are, we’ve come and we’ve seen what it’s like, what all Indian schools for orphaned or deprived children are like, and I just...I don’t buy it. I could go to the next state, or I could go up to Mumbai and it would be different. It might be a different ethos, you know, religion would come into it, you know, different things [...] I didn’t come away thinking, ‘ah, yes, I’ve seen education in India’, no not by any means. I just saw a tiny, tiny, little slice of it. (Maxine, post-visit interview, ISSV)

Recognising different forms of development

By the end of the two courses many participants had begun to recognise different forms of development, moving away from a focus on purely economic development to one that recognised the importance of different aspects such as social, cultural and environmental. There was also recognition that too often there is only seen to be one pathway of development, where developing countries have to emulate the model of Western developed countries; that countries in the South are somehow ‘behind’ countries in the North and have to go through a set of stages to reach ‘developed’ status. In her end of course evaluation Melissa reflected that:

the developed world needs to stop holding itself out as a model for emerging nations to emulate... That there are different solutions to the same problem and nations need to take different approaches if the crisis of climate change is to be met. (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

Acknowledging that there isn’t a ‘one-size fits all’ solution to some of the world’s major challenges such as climate change led some participants to critically question Western-led ‘development’, arguing that problem-solving can also emerge from the South. When reflecting on her experiences during the study visit week Melissa stated that:

in The Gambia I feel the pressing need is to ensure that they have more access to the resources that we in the ‘developed’ world take for granted, such as electricity, water, waste management etc. But in such a way that it compliments and strengthens their existing culture rather than replacing it with a defunct Western model. (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

Likewise, when asked whether she had a different understanding of what the term development meant after coming on the ISSV, Maxine said:

I’m not sure if I have. I’m not sure that I ever really understood what development was other than that... the Western world assumes it’s developed and that the developing countries are developing to become more like Western countries and I suppose that has been my understanding – a bit black and white perhaps – but that’s what I’d understood. Now, I see development more as... not that a developing country has to kind of ape or emulate Western models in any way but they can just develop into what it needs to be, that is the best for its own people. (Maxine, study visit interview, ISV)
In addition a number of teachers began to develop more complex understanding of global issues. For the Gambia course this was focused around notions of sustainable development. During one of the final group discussions during the study visit week in The Gambia, Andrew and Melissa both mentioned that they had learnt that sustainable development was far more complex and contradictory than they had ever imagined. Learning about sustainable development “is as much a process rather than a body of knowledge that I can impart to my children” (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC). It shouldn’t be seen as an add-on that could be covered through studying a specific unit, but must be embedded as an ethos within her practice. For Andrew this change in how he viewed sustainable development had arisen directly from the mutual learning activities done during the week in The Gambia. He spoke about how this had given him more confidence:

Through the mutual learning my initial fear of not knowing enough about sustainable development has been turned on its head. I initially felt deflated and massively inadequate to the more worldly and knowledgeable members of the group, partnership and Gambian teachers. The block stopping me from fully understanding sustainable development was, however, short-lived. Through the workshop, further mutual learning and the experiences that I have undertaken I realised that it was fine not to know it all because no one ever will. By its nature sustainable development is always changing as is the world. As Mr. Suwareh\(^5\) said ‘You cannot fight nature, and sometimes you have to dance to its tune’. This really resonated with me and I’m dancing to its tune at the moment, whilst I find out more about it. I went from fully understanding 3 out of 10 back then to 3 out of infinity which is, strangely, massive progress for me. (Andrew, end of study visit interview, GSVC)

6.3.1.2 Intercultural learning and North-South relationships

Mutual learning
The concept of mutual learning underpinned the GSVC from the start and it was clear from the preparatory sessions (and before in their applications) that participants envisaged a mutual exchange of ideas and expertise both with Gambian colleagues during the study visit week and within the UK group itself. For example, on their application forms Andrew and Gail wrote:

I am very keen to share ideas for sustainability with Gambian colleagues and other members of the group; I believe this will be one of the most enlightening experiences of the visit. (Andrew, application form, GSVC)

The idea of sharing experiences with both Gambian and English professionals in the context of being a learner and educator and developing ideas together is very exciting and one that I know will have a marked impact both on me personally and as an educator. (Gail, application form, GSVC)

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\(^5\) Mr Jamma Suwareh is the head of the Coastal Management Unit at the NEA.
This notion was developed throughout the preparatory sessions where the group was asked to identify ‘wants and offers’ from/to the both the UK group and Gambian teachers. There was also discussion about what ‘mutual’ meant in practice, with a recognition that it did not necessarily mean the same thing for both parties. The Tide~ - NEA partnership was a good example of this: both sides gave and took according to their needs. This was then expanded to a discussion about school partnerships and how both sides did not necessarily have to do the same things for the relationship to be mutual, reciprocal and equal. The following extract from Helen’s participant observation notes summarises this nicely:

Andrew said that it was important that both sides were valued in what they were offering. Ben stressed that if both sides had something of value to offer than neither should feel guilty of ‘exploiting’ the other. Mutuality, therefore, doesn’t always mean the same. For example schools could look at a common theme or issue (e.g. climate change) differently; so in the UK look at (reducing) emissions and in The Gambia look at adaptation to climate change. Share the issue, but a different foci. (Helen’s participant observation, follow-up session, GSVC)

However, several members of the group picked up on the fact that during the collaborative work between UK and Gambian teachers, UK teachers often took the lead when it came to the joint workshop:

Maybe next trip the Gambian teachers and UK visitors could spend more informal time together learning about each other. Planning a joint workshop together would be a really important and useful process. (Gail, end of study visit evaluation, GSVC)

I felt that, individually and professionally, I got more out of the partnership/mutual learning opportunities than I was able to give back in return. I would have liked an opportunity to work together to run a workshop with Gambian colleagues. (Melissa, end of study visit evaluation, GSVC)

Geoff noted that whilst many of the older members of the subcommittee ‘had a really good understanding of the purpose of the partnership’ perhaps newer members could have been better briefed (end of study visit evaluation, GSVC). These types of observations were useful for the course leaders to reflect on in planning for future study visit courses and revealed that even in a long established partnership there are still lessons to be continuously learnt.

Becoming aware of own ‘baggage’
Some teachers began to reflect on the cultural and historical contexts that inform how we relate to other. The following extract is from Mike during one of the ISSV evening reflective sessions in which he talks about a conversation he had with Dr. Raja, the Indian research consultant:

I think when you come to places like this...it becomes a very peaceful place, a very thoughtful place and we get very, well I do, get very deep in my thoughts, which doesn’t tend to happen when I’m back at home. And, you know, it’s very easy for us to just go on with our lives and study, and do this and do that. When we come here people are a lot more peaceful and they have much deeper thoughts and the religion
itself, the Hindu religion and the other religions as well, you know, have some kind of peacefulness about the way they go about their lives. This whole love thing and happiness, it’s those two words I hear people talking about in this group every single day. The words love and happiness comes up time and time again [...] When we were talking to Raja... about British colonialism and what it did for India, and not only just what the British did, but the Portuguese and all the other nations around the world. And, we kind of made this comparison that multi-national companies... some of them are doing what Britain did in colonial times: moving in, setting themselves up to make money and not always leaving a good footprint behind them. When they’ve got what they want, they up-sticks and leave the Indian people with something to sort out. So, it came out of McDonalds and I think Raja was trying to get to KFC... it was coming in to India in quite a big way. Coca-Cola, as you can see, it’s everywhere anyway. But he acknowledges the British did good here, they gave the infrastructure which they use now all the time, but it kind of led onto that whole, you know, money is really... we come here and we can get into this happiness and love thing, and peacefulness, but actually at the end of the day when we go back home, I know for me, probably, it won’t take long for that all to go back out the window and for me to be concentrating back on my studies, my job and making money. So, I now go from here, for me personally, my experience now is to ensure that I have something... an experience whereby, I do go home and I don’t forget it, that love and that happiness, those two words. “(Mike, reflective session, ISSV)

In Mike’s case it was through an intercultural conversation that he began to think about and become aware of the former colonial relationship between India and Britain and what this meant for how we relate to others. Indeed in his post-visit interview Mike talks about reading the work of critical pedagogue Paulo Freire and said that:

*It’s all about what [Freire] calls critical consciousness... where he says, you know, that once you’ve become critically conscious of your reality and the world around you, and what’s happening and who’s in control and who’s being oppressed and stuff, then that’s when you can rise up and try and come up against it. ( Mike, post-visit interview, ISSV)*

Another example, also from the ISSV, from Megan similarly reveals that she has begun to unpack her own social and cultural background and biases to examine how this has an impact on what she does and how she interacts with the world:

*Megan: I think one of the sort of things that happened[...] is that when I stereotype, I know I stereotype at times, I know I’m prejudiced, but although I know that it’s like being consciously aware of your incompetence in that particular area- that’s been the difference. I’ve perhaps moved from being unconsciously incompetent around the terms of my prejudices and stereotypes[...] I think perhaps what it has done is stimulated an intention to reflect in action, so mental pauses while I am teaching. So for example, the other day I was with a group of students and I could not remember the name of this particular student, I knew that she was either Beyonce or she was Precious [...] I looked at her and I said, ‘I know you’re Beyonce or Precious, and she said ‘I’m Beyonce’. And immediately I knew that my stereotyping and prejudice had caused woolly thinking [...] I said, ‘I think because I said you
were either Beyonce or Precious, I’m saying that I can’t tell the difference between black people’ and I can, but I just need to work hard at it[...] And I went home that evening and I had my diary out [...] and it took me back to words like, ‘painting people with the same tar brush’ [...] and I could locate some of that sort of attitudinal [thinking] was coloured or flavoured by an attitude about people looking all the same...I located it back in my childhood [...] from my own socialisation and I have recall about somebody saying that, ‘well all black people look the same’, and they don’t [...] I know I won’t make that mistake again. “

Helen: So it’s about becoming more aware about that sort of cultural baggage that we bring with us from numerous different contexts and sources?

Megan: Yes...and I think sort of ....the stimulus for reflection I made – reflection in-action – has given me this sort of conscious, a conscious awareness to become more consciously competent about putting in breaks and checks and then going back and unpacking where those things come from. I would say that my pace is probably a little slower in the classroom because of that, because I really just want to keep that significant.
(Megan, post-visit interview, ISSV)

This highlights the importance of acknowledging the influence of prior experiences on teachers’ worldviews, for example unlearning colonial patterns of relating to the other. In this example it led to the need to act on a new perspective; so Megan changing her teaching style so that she reflects in action and begins to unpack where her attitudinal thinking stems from. Both examples highlight the need for critical reflection (see section 6.2.3.); during the ISSV this was facilitated through group sessions and keeping learning journals, something that Megan has chosen to continue with on her return.

Relating to others
How we relate to others, for example during intercultural conversations, was a pertinent issue for both groups. For the ISSV group this was a major thread that ran throughout much of the focus group 12 months after their return.

The focus group took place at the Development Education Research Centre (Institute of Education, London) and there were photographs of people from the global South displayed on the walls; these provided a focal point for one of Maxine’s insights:

*The thing that I feel has really, and I’m very consciously aware, that has happened to me is that I don’t have a sense of people being ‘over there’ anymore. So I’m looking even at these photos and I’m not thinking, ‘well they’re over there, living in their kind of countries, in their world’.... you know, over there is here, it’s here as well. I don’t have that sense of othering that I had before, you know I see people very much more as just we’re just all the same, but we’re just in different circumstances and different environments. I’m much more conscious now, as a result of going to India, I was dimly aware it before, but it’s crystalised it for me and made it much more conscious that, you know, the world is the way it is because of economic set ups and things being the way....you know, there is really no need for anyone to live in poverty, and things could be very, very different if the world was set up in a different way and I’m just very...*
conscious of that. And I just, you know, just feel more in touch with kind of just looking at people and not feeling that sense of, ‘oh, you know, their lives….they’re to be pitied because their lives are that way’. That’s, yes…that’s really happened as a direct consequence. I mean, it was process that was happening anyway[…] but India really was the kind of really sealed the deal in terms of making that really clear to me- that people are just people, you don’t have to kind of feel sorry for them, because they live the way they do. (Maxine, focus group, ISSV)

Moving from binary views of, for example us/them and rich/poor, to more relational views of relating to others was quite a powerful impact of her learning: “you don’t have to have this Western-centric view of how people are and how the world is” (ibid.). Similarly, Megan went on to speak about how it has changed how she relates to her students who come from different cultural backgrounds:

I’ve got some Nigerian students that I teach and I’ve been reading their portfolios this year and when they talk about their personal reflections, about living in the UK and studying in the UK, and they talk about their family and their culture, particular in terms of things like, ‘I’m a Nigerian woman, I’ve been brought up to have children and to obey my husband and although I’ve come to university and I’ve learnt about this, and this, and some sociology and all the rest of it, it has not changed my view about my culture is right for me’. And I think before I would have thought… ‘oh repression, repression’…. and actually now, I just think it’s exercising a choice […]I think I’m more willing to challenge that in the classroom, when a student might turn around and go, ‘oooh.. I wouldn’t put up with that’…well OK, let’s look at why you wouldn’t put up with that, and would you mind saying, you know, what is really positive about that, and why you do….it boils right down to somebody saying, ‘well I wouldn’t put up with that because of my values, and…..’ and then the other person’s saying, ‘I would put up with that, because of my values, my belief system, how my culture is and my society’, and I think[...] I’m much more able to manage those things within a teaching environment and I am more open to learning about other people’s cultural experiences and socialisations, without sort of looking at it from that sentimental and judgemental sort of point of view….more so, ‘that’s how it is, are you happy with that? Is that what’s right for you?’…. Great, you know, fine… (Megan, focus group, ISSV)

Both Megan and Maxine spoke about how their experience had made them think more about how they relate to people in the UK as well as abroad and they had begun to question whether, for example, they would give money to beggars in this country or how they felt less inclined to make judgements about people’s lives that were different to their own.

Mike went on to say that before India he kept his emotions at a distance, whereas post India he has started to think much more on an emotional level; one example being his decision to write using the first person in his dissertation- something he’d never done before in his academic work. He said that in India it was like experiencing “humanity in motion. It was people and it was life” and that “It’s everything to do with that, relating to other people” (Mike, focus group, ISSV).
It is not clear whether these sorts of insights occurred for all participants. What did become apparent through was that the in-depth participants in our research had all continued to reflect on their learning; some continuing to use their learning journal, others not. Indeed the group mentioned that the process of being interviewed for the project had played a part in helping them process their thinking, which highlights the importance of a follow-up phase to study visits.

Charitable giving & donor culture
Both study visits had made many UK participants rethink their views on charitable giving and how this could perpetuate a donor culture. Teachers from the GSVC, for example, commented that their experience had made them think about “the implications of giving to specific sponsors” and that they would “be more thoughtful about giving to specific charities” (Geoff, end of course evaluation, GSVC). Charitable giving and how to respond was specifically discussed during one of the GSVC post-visit sessions. The debate was seen as “particularly important in schools, where what we model is so important, and where we do not want to offer oversimplified solutions which might block a real understanding of the issues?” (group notes from post-visit session, GSVC). Melissa spoke afterwards about how it had made her reflect on her practice in school:

Previous to attending the course, I thought that participation in fundraising activities such as red nose day and Sports relief were okay as long as the children learned about the children they were ‘helping’ and saw them as real individuals. Now, even though I still think, on a one to one basis, reaching out to help someone less ‘fortunate’ than ourselves is commendable, unless it is handled sensitively, all it does is reaffirm the children’s original belief that everyone in the developing world is ‘poor’ and in need of help because they are unable to help themselves. (i.e., the danger of the single story)
It doesn’t, as Gail suggests, challenge the deep-seated injustice that has led to the situation in the first place. (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

Being asked for money/pens/sweets/favours by people the UK group encountered in The Gambia or India was another dilemma for participants to work through and highlighted how ingrained colonial patterns of relating to each other is in both the North and the South. For some, like Alison, although they knew that gift-giving was discouraged, they didn’t fully understand the reasoning behind it:

people kept saying to me ‘bring pens, bring pens, they love pens’, and then I sort of got the inclination from Ben that ‘oh, no you don’t give out things’, so that’s quite difficult to mesh those two together. And, you know […]I would probably adhere to somebody who’s experienced in the country, who knows lots more than I will ever know so… you know I would go along with his [Ben’s] opinion, but I don’t know if I’ve ever really had it explained to us as to why we shouldn’t be giving out things […] I presume its exploiting a sort of donor type culture and you don’t want to encourage people to do that and I understand that, that’s fine… but yeah so there’s been some tricky moments. (Alison, study visit interview, GSVC)
For many UK participants this was a tricky issue to work through and whilst the study visit had disrupted their existing views about charitable giving they hadn’t come full circle. The following extract is from an interview with Imogen where she talks about a visit to a children’s home that two Indians had set up and about the money that one of the UK students, Lisa, had raised before the visit which she donated to the home.

Helen: How do you think that coming here will impact on what you do when you get into school?
Imogen: I really want to think about this more, because when we went to Elsie and Krishna’s, the Awake Mercy place, I felt oh I really need to do something.
Helen: It’s a natural reaction isn’t it?
Imogen: Yes. And I said to Hazel, oh you know, when I’m teaching I’d really like to send some kind of donation, and I said it to Simon as well and he said, why don’t you fundraise, because then you can get so much more money... and then we had this conversation with Fran about is fundraising actually a good thing?... Well at first I felt quite reluctant to agree with Fran, because I thought well actually, I think the natural human instinct is to help and maybe sometimes you don’t have to understand completely and you don’t have to unpick every single thing...Because how come England raises millions of pounds for Comic Relief? Maybe it’s just a media thing, maybe it’s just because they show you loads of pictures of unhappy people with flies around their mouths, but I still do think there’s some...somewhere in me that I do want to fundraise, because if you look at Lisa and she raised so much money and it’s done so much... And I think sometimes you just need to look over the kind of bits in between...but then Fran was saying well what about the long term affects of being ignorant about other people in the world, thinking they’re only poor[...] I was thinking about it and I was thinking I would really like to do some kind of long-term topic work on it in school, not just a food, fashion, fund thing and I would focus on Tamil Nadu, rather than the whole of India and I think that it would be really important to get across to the children that this is only one part of India [...]I just think making things real and looking at things together and making sense of it together and not just looking at the bad, but looking at the good and maybe thinking together with the children...if we looked at the Awake Mercy Home together, actually what might we want to do and why might we want to do it? Because I think children are really keen about that kind of thing and I think would relate to it because it is children in other parts of the world. But, yes, I did look at the length that Lisa’s money would go to and just thought well actually at the end of the day, that’s really good.” (Imogen, study visit interview, ISSV)

It is clear that Imogen has become aware of her habit of mind surrounding fundraising and charity and that she is open to new perspectives and has begun reflecting on the consequences of fundraising in school and teaching about a distant place. However, she has not yet begun to accommodate new perspectives or fully revise her habit of mind. For example, by deconstructing the colonial context or by looking at the difference between human-human contact and what children might learn about India when fundraising is done at a distance (which may reinforce stereotypes of feeling sorry for ‘them over there’).
Since part of the fee students pay for the ISSSV is donated to various Goodwill projects visited during the trip, the theme of charitable giving is difficult to ignore. Indeed, as mentioned previously, some participants had brought out gifts of games, toys, footballs and t-shirts or had raised money to donate to projects the group visited. However, Mike had developed a different take on things and had begun to think more critically about the ramifications of North-South partnerships where charitable giving plays a role:

It’s very easy for us to just...if we’ve got the money, to send the money and to do that...and it kind of appeases our social conscience that we’ve done it, it makes us feel good for an instant second, after which we’ve completely forgotten about where the donation we’ve just given, or where it’s gone, or who it’s gone to...But I’m not sure, I think they get... I believe that there is a two way process... there can be a two way process, ...but I’m just not sure ...I think that sometimes we feel...that we are developed in the western world, when we’re not, but we feel like we are developed and that we don’t need to be taught anything, that we know best, and if you’re developing...it goes back to the developing to the western standard, then we tell you how to do it, because we’re from the west. (Mike, study visit interview, ISSV)

This was something that he had continued to think about on his return and he had begun to think critically about whether the charitable giving element of the ISSV had got in the way of some individuals’ learning about a distant place:

maybe it pays too much attention to- “we’ll give money to this charity and visit this one, we’ll go to that one, we’ll stay at this place for eight days, we’ll teach here, do that”.... and it bypasses a lot of what’s going on in India... And the humanity is completely lost because we’re spending eight days here in a children’s home, we’ve visited this school, we’ve visited that school for a day, we’ve given them some money as we’ve left, we’ve got smiles, we’ve got pictures, we’ve moved on. (Mike, focus group, ISSV)

Ethical engagement with others
Megan spoke about an encounter with an Indian man that had stuck with her since on her return- this was something she was still thinking about, processing and reflecting on when I spoke to her 3 months and 11 months after returning. She described meeting a man at the market in Dindigul who had approached her with cupped hands, asking her for money. She gave him the money that was in her hand. She questioned: “Was it an act of charity because of some sentimental post-colonial claptrap? Or was it, was it just an act of love between two human beings that looked at each other and recognised something?” (Megan, focus group, ISSV). Questioning the reasoning behind her actions was still something that she was working through:

Megan I felt money left hands, yeah that’s fine, but I came off better from the exchange. He got money, I got something else, but I can’t quantify it because you can’t hold on to it. I really got something else and I don’t....I don’t know what it was. Recognition as a kindred spirit?
Helen  Have you tried putting yourself in his role....his position, switching the positions around?

Megan  Yes I have and I tried thinking about, yes, and I tried to almost like...stand in a position that he was adopting and looking at me and thinking ‘what would I think about this woman?’, and I did all the stereotypical stuff that, you know, ‘she’s looking in our market, she’s got money in her hand, she’s just spent money in the market, she’s with her friends, they’ve all got big cameras’, I did all of that, sort of stuff, but it wasn’t…it didn’t answer the question. I can’t find a philosophical answer...  (Megan, focus group, ISSV)

Distinguishing between when something was an act of charity between a white Westerner and a poor Southerner, and when someone was simply reaching out on a human-human level was an issue that both UK groups discussed at various points. This was particularly pertinent given the personal relationships that some teachers developed with Southern colleagues. Indeed these relationships seemed to have a particular impact on teachers’ learning, and to afford informal experiences that might not have been possible otherwise. These person-to-person experiences made a huge difference to what students learnt because they appeared to enable students to go beyond the surface differences (for example ‘these people are poor’, ‘look at all the rubbish everywhere’) to seeing people in a very human way. So the mixture of formal and informal / planned and unplanned experiences seems to be a very important feature of the study visits in terms of the range and depth of what it is possible to learn.

6.3.1.3 Representation and ways of seeing

Danger of the single story: representing people and places

As mentioned in section 6.2.1 Chimamanda Adichie’s concept of ‘the danger of the single story’ about people and places was a theme taken up by participants on the GSVC. There was much discussion about how we all have pre-existing stereotypes (resulting from our social and cultural upbringing) and how best to avoid instilling negative stereotypes in teachers’ professional practice. Andrew recognised that, in the past, he may have inadvertently reinforced negative or dominant stereotypes about Africa in his teaching:

We did a unit at work for literacy at the start of the year – stories from other cultures – and we decided to go for like African culture and so we got loads of all these artefacts; one of the parents had been to Africa and she brought in all this stuff and it was really good, well I thought it was really good at the time [...]and then you see the single story thing and you think, ‘god, did I just promote the single story by showing all the pictures of the villages that they live in and the hut things? Crikey’ and you sort of feel a bit guilty [...] And I talked to the kids about it because in literacy, after we did it, I gave the children their books back from our stories from other cultures and looked at the main stories they produced, and we had a discussion about what that told us about the country. And just stuff like, ‘oh they live in tribes, they are all in tribes’, you know, that sort of thing and you’re thinking ‘God, that’s what they think Africa like as a continent is, because of that’. (Andrew, pre-visit interview, GSVC)
Melissa had taken the concept of ‘the danger of the single story’ and used it in her classroom practice when teaching about a distant place. Showing a range of images from India as a stimulus her class discussed how each may only be telling one out of many stories about the country. She had asked her pupils questions like ‘What had they discovered about India?’, ‘What picture had surprised them the most?’ and ‘What had they discovered about themselves?’. The concept of there many different stories about people and places struck a chord with her pupils. For example she described how one pupil said they ‘I realised that my story is not the whole story, I can add to it all the other stories’ (Melissa, pre-visit interview, GSSV).

During the ISSV issues of representation and ways of seeing became evident during a student led reflective session. We discussed examples of an image we’d held of India before coming on the study visit that had been dispelled. The following extract from Fran’s research diary reveals that some students had begun to develop more complex ideas about the representation of ‘India’:

Sarah spoke of being aware that one stereotype (of India) might be being replaced by another – i.e. we were only experiencing Tamil Nadu and other states might be very different. Becky replied saying that therefore as teachers we will need to be more critical when teaching about, for example India – and develop pupils’ critical / analytical skills as well as creative ones. Anna said we would need to do some sort of elicitation with pupils before teaching the unit. And Robert suggested that it’s not so much replacing one image with another as layering and thus images becoming more complex. (Fran’s PO notes, ISSV)

These insights were brought out during supported reflection and had not arisen prior to this. This supports our contention that study visits have the potential to be more effective if they are framed within a formal structure in which learning is facilitated by knowledgeable others.

Stereotypes: challenging or reinforcing?
Changes in knowledges and understandings were by no means universal. For a minority of teachers it appears as though their experience reinforced rather than challenged their existing views about developing countries with a focus on deprivation and poverty. Nigel spoke about looking out at streets that ‘were absolutely piled with rubbish’ mentioning that it would act as another case study to teach alongside the Kibera slums in Kenya:

Yeah, it’s just reinforcing what I’ve already seen or what I’ve already taught about” (Nigel, study visit interview, GSVC)

In the final UK workshop during the study visit week the group did an activity where they had to describe The Gambia in one word using the letters of the alphabet (Gambia is amazing, Gambia is beautiful etc) and when it was Nigel’s turn he said ‘Gambia is poor’. He appeared to have filtered his experience through his geographical lens and only ‘saw’ those aspects of life that fitted in with this image. Undoubtedly The Gambia is poor, and the streets are piled with rubbish, but these are just one aspect of what was experienced during
the study visit. Similarly, for Rachel a visit to a remote tribal village during the ISSV reinforced her pre-existing views about Southern countries being dominated by poverty:

A significant experience that has really had an impact on me and my thinking is the visit to the tribal outreach projects. Before I came to India I had the expectation that people would be poor and that there would be ‘slums’ on the fringes of the city. However, on the trip I was completely shocked to discover that people were still living in tribal settlements [...] I was astounded at the degree of poverty in the tribes, it was like going to a re-enactment of an Anglo-Saxon village or something. I just couldn’t believe that people were still living like this in this day and age.” (Rachel, Insights activity, India study visit)

On the flip side of this, there was much evidence of students’ changing perceptions of what it meant to be poor. For example many had come out thinking that they would feel sorry for the children in the Goodwill Children’s Homes, but went away thinking that the children are fortunate and have very happy lives. During one of the evening reflective sessions Ellen said that it had been a ‘massive comfort’ for her that the children didn’t have ‘horrible lives’:

I thought I’d come out here and absolutely have my heartbroken at how they live and how dreadful it was, but actually I don’t think, you know I can come away feeling that these children are being really well looked after and they’re having a really good life, and OK, some of them don’t have parents, but I don’t know, I just...I don’t feel heartbroken by it. (Ellen, reflective session, ISSV)

6.3.1.4 Identity and Self

Taking on new identities
This was a theme that developed throughout the ISSV. During the evening reflective sessions students talked about feeling as if they were taking on, or trying out, new identities. This was, for example, when they learnt to eat with their right hand and to wear clothing appropriate to this part of India (covering upper arms and legs at all times). Many students enjoyed this aspect and one or two spoke about how it ‘freed’ them from their usual identity and gave them the chance to try different ways of being. On the other hand, some felt that they had to ‘comply’ with the expectations of eating and dress codes and that they felt their identity was getting lost and this was an uncomfortable experience for them. The following extract is taken from a group workshop in which the group discussed how their five senses had played a part in their learning:

Rachel: Our group spoke about the way that you kind of have to take on a new identity, or new identities, and that you kind of have to resolve like the dissonance between the different identities... it came from our touch section, which was how we were eating with our hands, and we were almost taking on a new identity by doing that and trying to fit in, and also kind of taking on the new identity of being a kind of VIP almost and trying to balance that with what you thought your identity was at home.
Esme: It just made me think about what makes me, me and not someone else. I just consider myself in relation to other people and, I don’t know, it’s a bit confusing really... I don’t really know who I am.”

Megan: I think we had a sense that this thing of new identities emerging wouldn’t have occurred unless we’d had the sensory input... So the feelings and processing it’s a sort of continuum of this new identity developing and we all had a concern that our identity is a projection of what we think and possibly what is expected of us to fit in... it’s about the clothing thing and the eating your food [with your hands].... do we dress so as not to offend? So we override our own identities in order to fit, but in overriding that identity something new is almost emerging because we learn about ourselves?

Fran: But that assumes that an identity is something that is formed and then static, and doesn’t change, whereas I think what you’re saying here is that your learning through relating to other people in a situation which is very new... it gives you the opportunity to try on other aspects of identity for size and think, do I like this new identity?....does that fit for me?....or is it something that actually I feel so uncomfortable with, that I’ve tried it and I’m going to move away from it, or whatever. (group reflective session, ISSV)

The vignette illustrates how the group was beginning to recognise how prior experiences (what could be termed cultural, social and historical ‘baggage’) contribute to our lenses and how we interpret experiences, recognising that different people might interpret things differently depending on their context.

6.3.2 What are the key factors that prompt changes in knowledge and beliefs?

It was much more difficult for participants to identify how they had learnt (pedagogy) than to identify what they had learnt (content, subject knowledge). As Melissa said when asked to identify which specific experiences led to her learning:

I think there was no one sum part, you think... let’s go back to our Benachin metaphor or analogy- it’s about combining everything, isn’t it? So if you look at the raw ingredients of that meal it could turn into anything couldn’t it? You’ve got chicken or beef, you’ve got tomatoes and onions- that could have been a lasagne with a bit of pasta in it, or it could have been you know something very, very different, but it was how they were combined and how they were put together in the place that I think is more than say ‘yes, it was that conversation, or...’. It was a totality rather than one, that sounds a right cop out doesn’t it?” (Melissa, post-visit interview, GSVC)

However, from analysing the data three key elements appeared to play a role in UK teachers’ learning: displacement spaces, communities of practice and reflection. Of course, there were also various obstacles or barriers to learning and these are outlined as well.
Displacement Spaces

At various points during their experiences the majority of teachers had their pre-existing thoughts and beliefs troubled or displaced in some way. This displacement was sometimes physical, sometimes emotional, sometimes intellectual and sometimes spiritual. The majority of participants recognised that some discomfort was necessary in order to gain new insights and understandings. During the GSVC preparatory sessions there was discussion about:

pushing yourself into places you feel uncomfortable but that it is through these uncomfortable experiences that you are able to grown as a person [...] Melissa made a point about how the course would be a learning process and that we could learn from our development over the course and that this might be uncomfortable at times. However, this didn’t mean we should shy away from things. (Helen’s PO notes, preparatory session, GSVC)

Megan recognised that in order for deep learning to take place you have to be open to having your taken for granted worldviews challenged and be open to new perspectives:

I think all the best learning I’ve done is where I’ve somehow been very deeply affected, and you’re visited by aspects of yourself, be it, aspects of your childhood, adolescence, adult life, professional, private life, health life, dream life, whatever. That...you have to sort of explore that sort of aspect of yourself and embrace it and change it, if you feel that it needs to be... weird... changed (Megan, pre-visit interview, ISSV)

Coming on the study visit course with an open mind and being willing to step outside their comfort zone were qualities that enabled participants to get the most from the experience. In his end of study visit evaluation Geoff said that he had come to a “realisation that my comfort zone is expandable! I can move out of it, and what was uncomfortable becomes comfortable” (Geoff, end of study visit evaluation, GSVC). Similarly, in response to a question ‘how have I learnt?’ Melissa wrote:

Through being open to challenge and through acknowledging that what I think I know is subject to change (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

Geoff recalled an incident that took place during the study visit week in The Gambia which had made him feel very uncomfortable. On the first full day the UK group split into three smaller groups to explore the local area. Geoff’s group were soon accompanied by a couple of local boys who, without asking, acted as unofficial tour guides. Near the end of one of the ‘tours’ the boys asked for payment in the form of a bag of rice. Nigel, who was also in the group with Geoff agreed to this and asked the others for a contribution towards the rice. This made Geoff feel very uncomfortable as it went against the discussions we’d been having about the unintended consequences of such actions and the need to avoid the paternalistic Westerners coming along and offering monetary gifts. Looking back he reflected that he should have said no instead of just going along with it and that it was,

one of the key things that has since made me think a lot more about giving and charity and how one can support people in the Gambia, but not doing it in the wrong way, but
doing it in a purposeful way- do you see what I mean? (Geoff, follow-up interview, GSVC)

Imogen spoke about an experience that had troubled her thoughts:

Going to the first tribal village made me feel uncomfortable and like an intruder. It felt like some sort of zoo/showcase. Our tutors were inviting people into houses of the village whilst the villagers just stared, it made me feel really uncomfortable. It made me wonder what impact/benefit my presence was there? (Imogen, study visit interview, ISSV)

It is clear, therefore, that these displacement spaces can be extremely uncomfortable and there is thus a need for supportive relationships such as those provided by other participants and course leaders. Without this it is easy to become so confused that you feel a sense of hopelessness and can’t move on i.e. I don’t know what I think about anything anymore. As a participant-researcher Helen experienced moments which made her feel like her head was about to explode:

At times I have been extremely challenged by this process and have experienced moments of inspiration and a loss of confidence/hope in equal measures; because I have been so confused, I have been unsure what I can do/how I can take things from here... but, through conversations have realised that it is not uncommon to feel like this. (Helen, PO notes, GSVC)

All of this underlines the importance of study visits which are facilitated by differently knowledgeable others who are themselves open to going through the transformative learning process. It also reinforces the need for sufficient time following a study visit to process these feelings and to enable participants to arrive at a point where they regain a sense of agency through translating their changes in knowledge/understanding/perspective into alternative possibilities for action.

6.3.2.2 Communities of Practice

Role of group in learning
The development of a supportive, critically reflective, non-judgemental environment was of paramount importance during both study visit courses:

I think that this group developed its own community of practice from having to suspend beliefs, create an amalgam of beliefs, create a group identity, create a philosophy, interchangeable roles, fixed roles, the potential to be an individual, the potential to be wallpaper- all of those things started, I think, coming to fruition in Goodwill…” (Megan, study visit interview, ISSV)

The UK group was cited by many as a key factor that enabled their learning. For example, when asked how she had explained her experience in India to friends and family on her return Maxine said “the way I explained it to most people was in the context of how good my experience was with the group” (Maxine, post-visit interview, ISSSV). Imogen was
another who had really valued the support of the UK group and mentioned that “we were sort of an off mixture of all ages and all different paths [of life] and things, but that just made it more interesting” (Imogen, post-visit interview).

Many participants also mentioned that being in a group offered the opportunity to learn from different viewpoints and to challenge and/or add to their existing knowledges and understandings. For example, Hannah mentioned that:

*I think it’s quite nice to go with like a group of people ‘cos you can talk to people and like share what sorts of things... well sometimes people notice things that you haven’t noticed, so it’s quite interesting to kind of feed up on what other people are saying and you can kind of get more of an understanding sometimes. Sometimes I can be a bit slow with things[...] Someone will point it out and I’d be like, ‘I didn’t think of it like that’- I think of it more one dimension and then like someone else might have looked into it a little bit more and then as soon as they kind of say it, I’ll be like, ‘oh yes, of course’ it’s kind of like, why didn’t I sort of notice that but then it gets you to like think what ....to look at things more.* (Hannah, study visit interview, ISSV)

Here, informal experiences (such as conversations on the minibus, chats over drinks/ playing cards in the evening, walking round the market together) were just as important to teachers’ learning, with participants from both the GSVC and the ISSV mentioning how much they had valued these.

Significantly, going as a group and developing supportive group processes provided essential ‘safe spaces’ for responding to and processing difficult issues and challenges (both personal and professional) as highlighted in the following interview extract:

*Helen  These sorts of uncomfortable things... that you made yourself go into uncomfortable places- do you think that if you hadn’t felt so included in the group you would have been willing to make yourself so vulnerable, do you think that had any connection there?*

*Maxine  Yes. I think  absolutely, undoubtedly, that it gave me a kind of confidence to ...to deal with those challenges and to....and for the outcome to be positive, yes. Yes, I think, there’s a definite connection, definitely.*

(Maxine, Post-visit interview, ISSV)

**Confidence**

Many of the teachers mentioned that their experience had increased their confidence in some way- whether this was confidence in their own knowledge base around a particular issue, confidence to then share this knowledge and understanding with colleagues, to having more confidence in challenging situations and being able to step outside their comfort zone, to gaining confidence from being in a group situation.
For Melissa, her confidence in her own knowledge and understanding of global issues had increased:

_How have I changed? I’m not sure! Perhaps my confidence. To begin with I was quite overwhelmed by the knowledge and previous experience of the rest of the group and couldn’t imagine how I could make a worthwhile contribution to such an eminent bunch of practitioners! I don’t think I worry anymore about being ‘found out’._”
(Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

Role of group leader
It was clear from participants’ comments that the skills and qualities of the group leaders brought with them was invaluable. Indeed Geoff mentioned that they were ‘central to the success of the course’. Their role was more one of facilitator rather than leader, or as one of the course leaders put it ‘acting as a critical friend’. In this way they used their prior experiences to nurture, support and challenge participants in their learning. Andrew described how the leaders:

_brought a wealth of knowledge and experience and just the connections Ben’s got in the Gambia are brilliant, because we wouldn’t be able to have access to half the things we did without that... You know, on balance it’s not something we could have just gone and done on our own without that support._ (Andrew, follow-up interview, GSVC)

This quote highlights another benefit of having experienced course leaders. Due to the often limited time spent in the Southern country during the actual study visit, having already established relationships with people and places means that time can be spent very productively. It also means having access to people and places that participants wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity to meet or visit. For example, during the week in The Gambia the group were surprised that they had a personal audience with both the Ministers of Water and Forestry!

6.3.2.3 Reflection
Reflecting on your learning was a central component of both courses. This took the form of facilitated reflective sessions, being asked to keep a learning journal (although not all did) and writing reflective pieces at various points; in this way the process of reflection took place at both an individual and group level. Several of the in-depth participants also mentioned that being interviewed for the research had played a role in their reflection; this was obviously not the case for those teachers not involved in the in-depth aspect.

There were different spaces of reflection for each individual. For Imogen the facilitated reflective sessions that took place in the evening were important:

_I have really enjoyed the discussions, actually. I think they’ve been quite a big part of this trip for me._ (Imogen, study visit interview, ISSV)

Andrew found that keeping a learning journal helped him reflect on his learning:
it’s a good way to reflect and I think that I could contribute to more discussions after reflection; like every morning we’d talk about the day before and because I’d done my diary, my journal beforehand, I could sort of reflect on it more and contribute more. (Andrew, follow-up interview, GSVC)

He went on to mention that he would use his journal as a tool to look back on and process his learning in the longer term. Reflection was of central importance to making sense of the learning experience for Melissa:

It’s been through experiencing and not knowing what it was I was experiencing until later. Reflection, and having the time to absorb experiences, has also played a critical role in the way I have made sense of the opportunities that being part of the study group has given me. (Melissa, end of course evaluation, GSVC)

According to many participants, unpacking and processing learning was something that didn’t happen immediately and would occur for some time after the end of the study visit, which underlines the importance of longitudinal data. Indeed several participants mentioned that they hadn’t had time to process their thoughts and learning in-between the end of the study visit and their follow-up interviews three months later.

Both groups discussed the important role that senses and emotions played in learning. Often in the West the main focus of learning is at cognitive level, however, the importance of taking account a holistic approach to learning became clear. For example, in her follow-up interview Megan reflected:

I think going back to Fran’s visual, sensory stimuli- that is also very, very immediate and...and then you get the deeper thinking, where you have been affected at perhaps a more subconscious level and you’ve been processing that...and that discussion helps you refine it... I suppose it’s like sieving stuff and the sort of stuff that stays in the sieve is perhaps the activity-based, less meaningful change stuff, whereas the liquor that comes through perhaps, for me [is the deep learning/thinking takes place]... (Megan, follow-up interview, ISSV)

A holistic approach also recognises other ways of knowing including the role of intuition and subconscious. Maxine spoke about how:

I think it happens at quite a subconscious level and you just don’t kind of, you don’t notice what’s going on until like, for example- you [i.e. me] ask a question, and then suddenly it rises to the surface and you start to try to put some rational thinking around it. (Maxine, follow-up interview, ISSV)

6.3.2.4 Obstacles and Frustrations
During discussions on return from the study visits many participants spoke about various obstacles or frustrations that had, or could, act as barriers to them being able to implement their learning in practice. These included school life driven by external pressures; colleagues working to different agendas; having the time and space to think things through and put
things into practice due to generally getting sucked back into day-day life. This highlights the importance of longitudinal research into the longer term impact on teachers.

The main frustration for Melissa was that she did not feel supported by her colleagues at school, who she felt were working to different agendas:

*I think that I've got a clear understanding of what I want the role of sustainable development, global development in the school and I think one of the problems is that there is a big gulf of understanding between what that means to my colleagues and head.* (Melissa, post-visit interview, GSVC)

For some of the less experienced teachers, in particular those from the ISSSV who were just starting their teaching careers, having a voice in school was particularly tricky. Imogen spoke about her increasing frustration with being the type of teacher she wanted to be in practice:

*I hate having these doubts because you sometimes think it like defunctions you, and you forget what you want and I’m thinking at the end of this year I want to write down what kind of teacher I want to be and the things I want to improve on for next year. I think sometimes, when you’ve got so much whizzing around in your head, which is coming from a higher level... you know, the system* (Imogen, focus group, ISSSV)

On his return from The Gambia Andrew’s had been asked to write a list of ideas that he wanted to implement at his school. However, a combination of a change of head teacher and an Ofsted visit meant that the school had since changed its priorities and Andrew was finding it difficult to disseminate any of his learning with colleagues:

*there’s some more fundamental things I suppose like... staff meetings that I haven’t been able to do because of the time and they’re all allocated; you can literally look at the staff diary for staff meetings and they’re allocated until February 2011...I mean what am I going to do with that? Which is frustrating, especially because, you know, it’s about half way through the year and you think I’ve still not been able to do anything with it, which is ridiculous. I don’t know... all I want to do...I’d be happy for the time being if I could just have 20 minutes, just to show the Chimamanda Adichie Single Story* (Andrew, post-visit interview, GSVC)

**6.3.3 How does learning from study visits inform teachers’ practice over time?**

Again, in the original research proposal the emphasis was on how teachers’ learning from study visit course informed their professional practice over time. However, it has become apparent from the data thus far that there is an impact on both their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, it was often difficult for participants to identity how their experiences had impacted their practice shortly after the end of the study visit/course (insights from the follow-up interviews were often similar to insights during the study visit interviews). It is not until they have had day-day experiences back home that they have something to relate to. A key finding, therefore, has been the time it takes to fully process learning from the experience; underlining the importance of the longitudinal aspect to this research project. This aspect of the research is the focus for phase three of the research
which takes place during 2011-12. Further detail of phase three is provided in section 7.3 below.

7. Discussion.

The purpose of the interim report, as for the interim conference (University of Exeter, 1st September 2011) for which this report has been prepared, was for researchers and participants to share with stakeholders and beneficiaries what the research is about, how it is being conducted, and the findings such as are available towards the end of the second year of a three year project. The interim conference was preceded by a day workshop at which the research team (n=4), and research participants (India n=3; The Gambia n=3; UK n=8) effectively went through a ‘dry run’ of the conference itself. This had the following benefits:

- Participants from across the three countries and four organisations had the opportunity to get together for the first time and to gain insight into each others’ (UK-The Gambia; UK-India) contexts
- Participants were able to undertake a form of member-checking, by hearing how their experiences were being represented through the report and presentations, and were able to give feedback to the research team on this
- Participants were able to identify some key questions / issues arising from the research that they wished to be taken forward to the conference for consideration
- Participants were able to gain an overview of the whole project and to feel they were participating in the conference itself (some as facilitators of workshops) from a more informed base

Our intention was that by going through this process, we provided research participants and conference delegates with opportunities to make sense of the interim findings from their own perspectives and from the perspectives of their organisations. This then enabled the research team, participants, stakeholders and other beneficiaries to enter into a dialogue about how the findings are being interpreted from a range of perspectives. In this respect, the interim conference was structured (a mixture of presentations and interactive workshops) so that it reflected some of the processes identified by Vanessa Andreotti (2007) that are part of ‘an ethical engagement’ with others.

- **Learning to unlearn** (unpacking one’s own historical and cultural ‘baggage’)
- **Learning to listen** (to multiple perspectives)
- **Learning to learn** (taking on new perspectives, re-arranging and expanding one’s own)
- **Learning to reach out** (exploring new ways of being, thinking, doing, knowing and relating)

A great deal of very helpful feedback was received from research participants and conference delegates after the interim conference, and some of the views expressed have
informed what has been selected to discuss at this juncture, as well as how those aspects are understood.

### 7.1 Significance of the research

During the interim conference it was evident that the research holds significance for people in different ways; for themselves as individuals personally and professional, and for the organisations represented through them. For research participants, much of the significance was due to being a participant in the research itself and the opportunities this afforded. For example, teachers from The Gambia and India came to Exeter for the interim conference and for most of them it was their first visit to a European country. It was also evident that participating organisations were, to differing degrees, viewing the interim conference as a means of validating the research and supporting their ongoing aims through their partnerships:

> The fact that this conference is mid term is useful because it validates and focuses the research.

> The partnerships are working already as planned: people are coming together from around the world and working together. They are growing in confidence and knowledge. How can we expand this to continue the aims? (Notes from pre-conference workshop, 31/8/11).

The findings above, taken together with feedback from the interim conference, indicates that the research is also significant in how it will add to knowledge about the field of global partnerships and educational study visits in ways that were not anticipated at the beginning of the project. A brief indication of those aspects that currently appear to be most significant are provided below.

The richness of multiple perspectives within the research has potential to deepen understanding of terms such as ‘development’ and how varying interpretations of this term affect practice. During one of the conference workshops the following observations emerged from the discussion:

- The UK does not have a collaborative culture and the term ‘developing’ seems controversial. What exactly are we encouraging countries to develop into?
- Development is often looked at as economic development and thus still hints at superiority.
- How each country needs to develop should be determined by its context and need.

In section 2 we set out how, within the UK, linkages between UK education organisations and those in the global south are part of the broader agendas of internationalisation and globalisation. These agendas are connected to economic goals on the one hand, and development goals, such as expressed through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on the other. Within this context, the findings have shown that students and teachers are
becoming aware of, and beginning to question, assumptions about the role of charity and fund-raising in education. Dominant practices in charitable giving are that funds flow from the north to the south, and practices within education are not different (Edge et. al. 2009). Expectations that funds will flow in this way are often reinforced during the study visits. A particular example of this arose during the Gambian study visit when, while a small group of UK teachers was walking around a local village, a couple of young men joined them to act as unofficial guides. At the end of the tour the young men asked the UK teachers to buy them a bag of rice. The encounter was shared with the Gambian research consultant who reflected and wrote the following in response:

_The way the Gambian youth perceive white people is another reinforcer of the imperialistic relationship. I am quite certain that the teacher meant well in buying a half bag of rice for the self-imposed guide without reflecting or knowing the long-term repercussions for both the visitors and the Gambians. . . . It must be emphasized that hand-outs or relief assistance often increase unrealistic expectations from recipients, enhances the dependence syndrome and decreases sustainable self-efforts. What The Gambia really needs today is to encourage its young generation to look inwards for self-development, national development and toward global development with self-confidence. Not the false impression that aspirations and immediate needs are better solved by outsiders._ (Dr Sidibe, Personal Communication June 2010).

Access to perspectives such as this are central to what the study visits are about, as are the relationships that are developed that enable such voices to come forward. However, there is a danger that views such as these that seriously challenge dominant ways of thinking and acting as global citizens can be perceived as being destructive if no positive alternatives are provided. Situations such as these have reinforced for the research team the need to be clear about the complexity of the contexts within which they are enacted. For example, it may be helpful to tease out distinctions between education, development, and development education; this may support further understanding of how development is understood and acted upon within global educational partnerships.

In this respect, there is much more work to be done across the research team as a whole, and with research participants, on how all elements of the research relate to each other. This is partly a question of looking at the inter-relationships between findings from each country (UK-Gambia and UK-India, but also UK-UK and Gambia-India), but also a question of investigating how the different theoretical perspectives informing the research all relate to each other. This seems to sit well with the findings emerging from the research that not only are relationships between people central to the study visits, but so is relational understanding. The data from phase 2 provide rich examples of how UK teachers and students began to incorporate more relational ways of thinking that challenged binary, hierarchical approaches to understanding the world. Burbules (1997) highlights how relational understanding is crucial to the educational process of learning to live with difference:

_Differences are enacted. They change over time. They take shape differently in varied contexts. They always surpass our attempts to classify or define them. They do not_
assume sameness; they are the conditions out of which we establish agreements about sameness. The word "between" is itself a relational word: difference here is seen as a relation, not a distinction. Difference creates the sense of a "between." In this sense, then, difference represents a critique of binary thought and of the reification that categorical thinking falls prey to. (Burbules, 1997:12)

Burbules goes on to develop what he calls a ‘grammar of difference’ in which he analyses ways in which we understand difference and proposes that use of such an analysis should help

... us to recognize significant differences where we did not see differences before. It should help us to see them as significant, without seeing them as essential or unchanging. It should help us to see that the way in which differences are constructed or interpreted from one standpoint is just that, and that other standpoints are possible. It should help us to ask whose characterizations or categories of difference are being granted preference in particular circumstances. It should help us to see deeper ways in which difference and similarity imply and inform one another. (Burbules, 1997:19)

Taken together with transformative learning and communities of practice theories, both of which also focus on the process by which people arrive at new understandings, may be a fruitful way forward for the research.

7.2 The need for further clarity

Using postcolonial theory as a means of understanding cultural diversity in the context of science education, Carter shows how during intercultural conversations difference is too easily

‘translated in ways that make it familiar, comprehensible, and predictable’ and configured ‘as alternative forms of sameness that can be appreciated as cultural pluralism only by the dominant group in whose cultural forms the difference has been constructed and represented’ (Carter, 2004, p. 827).

We find the concept of ‘translation’ useful in this research. The research is investigating, at one level, how difference is translated both in different cultural and spatial contexts, and in the range of intercultural conversations course participants engage in during study visits. Those translations are informed by assumptions about the world based on prior experiences that have led to certain ‘habits of mind’ (Mezirow, 1985). The aim of the study visits/courses and the global partnerships that support them is to raise awareness of those habits of mind and to provide alternative ways of relating that challenge unhelpful ‘single stories’. The interim conference has demonstrated that such processes of translation also affect how the research is communicated and understood. It has raised our awareness of some of the tacit assumptions held by the research team and participants, how these affect our interpretations of the data and thus raise issues about how data are ‘translated’ into findings for public consumption. This has reinforced for us the need to be as clear as
possible about, for example, how terms such as ‘mutuality’ and ‘reciprocity’ are used and understood by the research team and participants because the same language may be used by other organisations but mean significantly different things.

For example, ‘culture’ is an important concept in the context of intercultural learning. It can equally be applied to the culture of an organisation as to the culture of a community (religious, ethnic, familial) or society. The term ‘culture shock’ was first used by anthropologist Dr Kalvero Oberg (1960), and refers to the experience of dissonance and disorientation often felt by someone from one culture visiting another for the first time. One’s own culture is not something that most people commonly consider in an explicit way; it is something that is accepted as the norm and passes largely unquestioned. However, as the evidence from phase two data indicates, when one experiences a new culture that contrasts significantly to one’s own culture, it can cause one to start asking questions about what were previously tacit assumptions about how to live in the world. Hence UK teachers and students in this study make statements like, ‘I thought I was going to learn about another place but I learnt more about myself and home’. To convey such insights to people who may never have had similar experiences will therefore be a challenge. We anticipate that an exploration of culture, informed by the data and thus the multiple perspectives represented through the research will be paramount, as will an exploration of how these understandings affected and were affected by the processes of intercultural learning.

Building on the work of Oberg, sociologist Peter Berger describes the experience of sociological discovery as “‘culture shock’ minus the geographical displacement’ (1963:6). Thus, in the case of the Tide study visit course, when teachers described the preparatory phase in Birmingham as being disorientating in that they began the process of questioning worldviews. In terms of the theory of displacement spaces, this suggests that if spaces for displacement begin when still in the UK they can create a type of culture shock – that is, they can enable us to ‘change how we perceive the world and even ourselves … so that things are no longer what they seem’ (ibid).

7.3 Phase three of the research – Investigating longer-term impact

As detailed in section 4 above, the research questions are being investigated in three phases. Phase 1 gathered data about the nature of the global partnerships and the context they provide for the study visit courses; phase 2 gathered data about the learning of all those involved (both visitors and hosts) during the study visits and the processes that support any such learning. The research team is now gathering phase 3 data to inform the research question, ‘how does learning inform practice over time’?

Findings from phases 1 and 2 have informed the design of the questionnaire used to gather initial data for phase 3. The questionnaire was also sent to all participating organisations for feedback, and a pilot was conducted with a small sample. The final questionnaire was available in an online format for UK respondents, and in hard copy for Gambian and Indian respondents. Initial analysis of the questionnaires has identified a range of responses and these have in turn guided our selection of a smaller sample of people to invite for follow-up interviews. In this regard we have aimed for the smaller sample to being representative of the range of views shown in the responses received.
8. Ways forward.

Once phase 3 data are all gathered and analysed, we will move into a phase where all the elements are pulled together. Up until now the four researchers have, to a large extent, been working separately. It is now time to engage in dialogic processes in which discrete elements of the research are seen ‘in relation’ to each other (findings from different phases, different countries and different study groups; different theoretical perspectives; and different organisational and individual perspectives that affect how these are all interpreted). We will then develop a communication strategy, recognising that representing these different perspectives will need to be achieved without falling into the trap of creating stereotypes ourselves.

We are therefore aware that in the dissemination of findings we will need to be clear about a range of things including our own positions as researchers, the differing contexts (social, political, geographical, organisational, individual) within which the research has been conducted, the different theoretical perspectives being applied and how they relate to each other, and how key concepts such as global citizenship, development, mutuality and equity are being interpreted and understood within those different contexts and from those different perspectives. With so many variables it will be impossible to make generalisations based on the findings but this does not invalidate the research. It is still possible to extrapolate insights and new understandings that we hope will be of use to project participants and to stakeholders, and we are committed to working collaboratively towards this end.

Postscript. An end of project conference will be held in Birmingham, at Millennium Point, on June 21st 2012. For further details please contact Fran at fran.martin@exeter.ac.uk, or visit the Tide global learning website http://www.tidec.org/cpd-events/secondary/global-partnerships-sites-mutual-learning-conference. The research project itself finishes in January 2013, but we are holding the conference 6 months before that so that delegates have the opportunity to help shape the differing ways in which we communicate findings to different audiences.

References


