Global Partnerships as Sites for Mutual Learning

End of project conference, 21st-22nd June 2012
Conference Report

Figure 1: Wordle of the conference report
This report is more than just a straightforward documentation of the conference as it also offers a reflective commentary based on participants’ evaluative and reflective comments [collated from conference evaluation sheets, emails sent after the conference and twitter comments (#gpml) made during the conference]. As such we hope this provides a useful re-cap for those who attended the conference as well as a useful resource for those unable to attend (or who partially attended). PowerPoints of the main presentations are available on the project website (http://education.exeter.ac.uk/projects.php?id=486).

1. Overview of conference
The purpose of the conference was two-fold: to report the key findings from the ESRC project and to invite delegates to discuss the findings in light of their own experiences and the work of their organisation. Delegates included those involved in leading or participating in study visits, whether as part of an educational partnership or not (e.g. reciprocal visits), teachers, teacher educators, university lecturers, research students, NGOs, teacher unions and representatives from those organisations participating in the research. Four questions guided our thinking about study visits across the two days:

1. How do we relate interculturally?
2. What does transformative learning look like?
3. How do we live with difference?
4. What sorts of partnerships facilitate mutual learning?

Originally this was intended to be an ‘end of project conference’, but due to maternity leave the project will now be completed by the end of January 2013. Thus its purpose was not to provide a completed picture of all the findings but to engage in dialogue with ‘stakeholders’ in how we may go about interpreting and disseminating findings.

The first day consisted of a Keynote presentation by Vanessa de Oliveira, followed by presentations from the research team of key findings from both Southern and UK perspectives. The reminder of the day was spent in smaller workshop groups, each focusing on one of four key areas (Educational Partnerships; Intercultural learning; Southern Perspectives; and Transformative Learning). The second day built on and developed ideas from day one with a continuation of the workshops, where ‘buzz groups’ enabled the sharing of ideas across groups. The conference ended with a plenary panel, which responded to questions brought by the workshop group, and some concluding reflections by Professor de Oliveira.

1.1. Participants’ reflective comments
At many conferences it is usual for delegates to be asked to complete an evaluation at the end of the conference. On this occasion participants were invited to write reflective thoughts and comments as various points over the two days. These could be evaluative or thoughts that were uppermost at their mind at the time of writing. As a research team, gaining insight into delegates’ responses to the various phases of the two days
will help us to think about how we communicate findings from the project in the future, and to identify which parts of the conference seem to be most relevant to the various contexts in which delegates worked. These reflections are woven throughout the report and are highlighted in green text boxes (with direct quotes shown in italics). We have also incorporated tweets from the conference as well as to those who emailed us their reflections afterwards.

2. **Keynote presentation: ‘Ethical Globalism in Education’ Vanessa de Oliveira**
Vanessa kicked the conference off with a very powerful and though provoking presentation.

2.1. **Key points**
- Global Ethics in Education Network: focuses on perceptions, relationships and flows.
- “Use theory as a tool for thinking rather than a description of truth.”
- Universalism, dominant discourses etc are a denial of heterogeneity.
- Modernity’s ‘shine’ (economic growth, higher standards of living etc) is based on, and inseparable from, modernity’s shadow. (Drawn on work of Argentine educator Minola)

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Preservation of modernity’s shine

Improve          Supplement

Replace          Renew (without scripts)

Renouncement of modernity’s shine
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- As educators / researchers / academics we have a responsibility to look at different knowledge(s). Access to different knowledge(s) enables us to rethink our frames of reference. There is maybe a useful distinction between:
  - Replace (an idea with something you already know about) which is seen by Vanessa as a cognitive engagement, and Renewal (which has no script) and seen as an affective engagement
- Vanessa not suggesting that all out ‘renew’ – in each context would need to choose what would work best.
- Spivak- how to relate to others ‘before will’. We should be able to relate without knowing. How can I relate before will? (Be comfortable with not knowing) How to respond without being overwhelmed?
- Acknowledging that we cannot always understand is sometimes more important than trying to understand.
• Biesta, Andreotti & Ahenakew (2011) use the work of Hannah Arendht to discuss the encounter metaphor. See also Peter Alexander, Intercultural Learning. Longitudinal research on encounters.
• Reflecting on experience is one thing, but does reflexivity bring something more to our understanding?
• In Global Education / learning Vanessa proposes the use of dispositions rather than competencies.
• Backpack, tent and caravan metaphors were used to describe different ‘mind-sets’ that one might travel with when on a study visit. These were not offered as incremental or as stages in progression, rather as different positions all of which might be appropriate given the context
• ‘Soft’ partnerships may be a way of maintaining colonial advantage.

2.1.1. Reflective commentary
This was a stimulating, thought provoking session and delegates felt that the themes raised fitted with the GPML project:

- “Use of models, images and metaphors greatly enhances, and cuts through, dense academic language!”
- #gpml Vanessa de Oliviera outlines a pedagogy for developing dispositions of global mindedness that equip less and disarm more.
- #gpml Vanessa notes that GPML is a ‘courageous project’.
- “To move from absolute to provisional certainties- I fine that relatively easy for myself, but how do I teach it, or even make colleagues understand what I mean?”
- “The idea of renouncing modernity’s shadow is powerful, but also painful/traumatic. How to do this effectively?”

3. Research findings

3.1. Overview of research & theoretical perspectives, Fran Martin
Fran began with a brief overview of the project. One of the main points to note was that the questions the project was asking now weren’t the same as the ones we were asking at the project’s outset. Rather than a focus on teachers’ understandings of development and global issues the project was now more interested in the four areas guiding our thinking across this conference (relating interculturally; transformative learning; living with difference; and partnerships that facilitate mutual learning). After this brief overview and, specifically, a discussion of the theoretical frameworks underpinning the project the research team presented findings from both Southern and UK perspectives. Given the time frame there was a focus on data gathered during Phase III of the project (relating to the longitudinal aspect).
3.1.1. Reflective commentary

- “Is there a clash or dichotomy between post-colonial theory, which is dependent upon an understanding of the past and transformative learning that describes the importance of unlearning something to move on? Or are they indeed closely linked because of this?”
- “Transformative learning: the notion of ‘unlearning’ does not sit easily with me. Memory and thought prevent this from being the case. Is transformative learning more constructivist than this, whereby new learning can be used to adapt, amend, change, deepen pre-existing learning/understanding rather than remove it?”

3.2. Southern findings: key points

Gambian Perspectives on Mutual Learning, Dr. Sidibeh
- Postcolonial theory provides theoretical rationale- new postcolonial theory emanating from The Gambia
- Regaining political independence from colonial rule, but colonial economic structures remain.
- The nature of the Tide~ - NEA relationship (establishing reciprocity, mutuality & equality) is an example of a practice that is challenging Western dominating discourses.
- The learning process is multidimensional, ‘even beyond original objectives’
- Through cultural interaction images of the other are transformed- single story phenomenon
- Increases in confidence personally and professionally for Gambian teachers
- Mutuality as understood in NEA- Tide~ partnership (give-give, receive-receive)
- Evidence of beginning of ripple effect

Indian perspectives on Intercultural relationships, Dr. Raja
- Theoretical perspectives of Sarvodaya and the Oceanic Circle- adaptation from child at the centre to ‘Intercultural relationships’.
- Rational in Gandhian philosophy and teachings
- Teachers gain language skills, self-confidence, equality in friendships ‘like a family’.
- “Two hands make a noise, two hands make nice”
- Goodwill-Canterbury: relationship not partnership.
- Intercultural experiences support deeper learning and understanding of each others’ differences.
- The interpersonal relationship has contributed to the transformations of individual, organisation and community.

3.2.1. Southern findings: reflective commentary

- Many participants picked up on the central importance of relationships and the need for human contact:
- “This wonderfully human perspective really appeals to me.”
• “The integral importance of friendship and relationships within the partnerships was a key theme in both presentations.”
• “Impact of the study visit experience/ research outcomes in Gambia and India share a focus on the significance of relationships. This came through very strongly and seems to indicate that the partnership experience draws a lot of its power from human contact.”
• Relationships – often lost in our consideration of learning: good to hear about these.
• Relationships not partnerships- yes!
• ‘The longing for love has been creatively doubled through the Canterbury - Tamil Nadu study visit relationship' Prof Raja #gpml
• Idea of emotional connection and learning being the powerful basis of transformations. Nothing can substitute for human contact.
• Study visits improve language, confidence, equality in friendships inter- & interculturally = 'like a family' for Tamil Nadu teachers #gpml
• Many found the notion of the Oceanic Circle with its focus on the individual valuable, but some questioned the criticality of such a framework.
• Some delegates noted that they would have liked to hear some rich testimonials/ specific comments from India and Gambia contexts.
• “I do wonder how much of a ‘benefit’ some of the listed benefits in The Gambia and India might be. How welcome, for example, is the ‘Time-mindedness’ that UK visitors bring, and how oppressive/disruptive? Do we need to think further about some Gambian teachers’ desire for the approval of the European ‘other’? What does this say about power?”

3.3. UK findings: key points

Learning from study visits: UK perspectives, Dr. Griffiths
• Key findings from phase II: Intercultural learning; Representation & ways of seeing; identity & self; relating to others (both in UK and in the Global South)
• Intercultural learning of UK-based teachers on study visits promoted by displacement spaces, communities of practice & reflection.
• What do we mean by ‘transformational learning’? Individual change or changing social habits of mind?
• Takes time to fully process learning: importance of longitudinal element of research
• 'Transformative learning': 'a deep & long lasting impact bubbling under the surface & occasionally coming to the surface' UK voice.
• Long term 'impact' of transformative/intercultural learning is intangible, tricky to pinpoint or measure & feeds into subconscious.
• Professional and personal impact- overlap
• Transformative / intercultural learning cannot easily be slotted back into the curriculum, e.g. in classes taught before on India.
• Moving from binary to more relational views of how we relate to others
Phase III report, UK findings, Dr. Wyness

- Quesitonnaire, interviews and focus groups with past participants (2002-2008)
- International 'study visit' participants refute accusations of superficial learning & 'jollies'. Learning is often moving & urgent.
- Sense that study visit had become part of life’s biography- hard to trace back changes
- Disposition for steering teaching/ practice away from stereotypes.
- Greater awareness of difference.
- Importance of ‘having been there’- experiential learning
- Appreciation of study visits as more than professional development as dispositions develop that affect whole lives & ambitions of participants.

3.3.1. UK findings: reflective comments

- “Wonderful to see some beginning teachers entering profession recognising complexity and prepared to keep learning through uncertainty & diversity. How will they cope with majority of technicist colleagues?”
- People felt that the presentations perhaps focused too much on the positive elements of transformations:
- “What about the negatives? Was anybody negatively disturbed/ challenged?”
- “Were there teachers for whom there was little impact or who decided they would never go back again?! More on challenges would have been useful.”
- This focus was noted by the research team in their own reflective comments:
- “Which data do we chose to talk about? Need for balance is tricky.... in-depth participants positive, but equally need to look at those for whom experience may not have had much impact. Not shying away from tricky issues- could look at this in much more detail. Made me realise just how much data we have and how there are so many different angles we could take, so need to think carefully about how we represent.”
- More on leadership skills was mentioned several times:
- “Interested in the role of the leader in supporting and facilitating this change & the discomforts/ difficulties that arise.”
- Some delegates would have liked to hear more about the study visits themselves- how they were run, what makes them successful etc.:
- “Make distinction between the value of different approaches- set quotes in more context so not taken generically of any ‘study visit’ experience.”
- As a research team it is easy to forget to foreground the project, particularly when only a limited time is available to present findings. However, we must not lose sight that our audience are not ‘inside’ the project like we are.
- Many were able to relate to the point about having difficulty in articulating the impacts of study visits: Identifying the way in which study visits have ‘transformed’ or led to change in personal and professional practice is clearly very difficult for teachers. They ‘feel’ it, know it has been significant but find it hard to analyse/ express it.”
- “Study visits are about deep learning far beyond parameters/ outcomes dictated by funders.”
• “Permission to be confident in not being able to explain rationally/ eloquently what the outcomes of participation in a study visit ‘experience’ have been.”
• The longevity of ‘impacts’ was also picked up: “it’s good to remember how long some of these experience on study visits take to be digested by participants. Good to reminded of the danger of over-simplifying these experiences.”

4. Workshops
Before the conference all delegates received research summaries relating to the four areas guiding the workshops (Educational Partnerships; Intercultural learning; Southern Perspectives; and Transformative Learning). These were available in conference packs to support discussion (and are available on the website: http://education.exeter.ac.uk/projects.php?id=486). Each workshop was facilitated by two representatives from either the research team, and/or partner organisations. The workshops provided space and time for delegates to reflect and relate to each other and to the project – did the findings resonate with their own experiences at all? They also provided the opportunity for feeding back and discussing delegates’ thoughts, comments and observations on the research processes and findings so far. Each group was asked to generate questions that they would like to bring to the plenary panel on day 2. At the start of the second day Fran presented thoughts on using a relational logic as the basis for intercultural learning (see http://education.exeter.ac.uk/projects.php?id=486 for the PowerPoint). The workshops continued on day two, where ‘buzz groups’ enables the sharing of thoughts and questions across groups, with time to adjust and finalise questions in light of this and the morning’s presentation.

4.1. Intercultural Learning
4.1.1. Workshop outline
Study visits provide both visitors and hosts with opportunities for intercultural communication, and learning from each other’s perspectives. However, a focus on the individuals can hide deeper cultural, social and historical factors that affect how we ‘read’ each other in the here and now. Drawing on data from the two study visits themselves, this workshop will explore how our worldviews affect what it is possible to learn from each other, and how supportive facilitation by study visit leaders can enable participants to become more aware of their frames of reference in postcolonial contexts.

4.1.2. Key points from the discussion/ reflections
The question brought to the panel was:
What is the purpose of intercultural learning and how is it achieved?
• unlearning
• displacement
• preparation / follow up
• leadership / facilitation … by whom?
• relationships
• explicit purposes / expectations
• equity of partnership
How much of what ‘development education’ is about is questioning and how much is trying to fit the words into others’ agendas to seek funding/acceptance/credibility?

4.2. Transformative learning

4.2.1. Workshop outline

Study visits to developing countries are often reported to provide ‘transformative’ experiences for UK students. However, there are questions about what is meant by transformative, who is transformed, and the impact on the host country. Previous research has looked at what are described as ‘life changing’ experiences in the short term, but few projects have investigated whether changes continue in the longer term. This workshop discusses the nature of individual, social/relational, and organisational transformations, drawing on data gathered from participants in all three countries who have been taken part in study visits since 2002-03.

4.2.2. Key points from discussion

- Could extend the range of theories we are drawing on – e.g. Peter Jarvis theory of adult learning. Is transformational a helpful concept? It may be that we can develop our own theory, or an adaptation of TL, from the project e.g. relational transformative learning?
- Are we going to track individual journeys through case studies? This would enable people to have access to biographies behind the cases we cite.
- Is there a sense of good/bad in whether one transforms or not? There is an expectation of transformation that can add pressure, yet not everyone goes through a transformation and this is not necessarily a negative thing. Implicit suggestion that those going on study visits were in need of transformation.
- Need more detail of the nature of transformations and how they map out. What do people claim in terms of their transformations, and are these applied in professional/personal lives? How do personal changes impact on school/curriculum change?
- A study visit group may go out backpacking, but return to a tent.
- Need to emphasise the group and its role in helping think things through more.
- There are also questions about longer-term processing and whether people have access to that group on a longer-term basis or not. linked to short discussion about short-term and longer-term investment(s) that individuals and organisations make in all this activity.
- Does the research recognise internal variations in The Gambia/India sufficiently? ‘Difference within difference’
- There was some discussion of change & threshold concepts – once changes then can’t ever go back to how you were before. This may be useful in terms of TL theory.
- There is a need for recognition of space/place for feeling knowing, and not always cognitive knowing.
- Many in the workshop found the findings resonated with their own experiences on study visits. ‘The more you talk about it the more you can relate to it’.
- Someone noted that sometimes the experience itself can feel like a barrier, when the barrier is actually in your head. (‘frustrations of articulating)
- Is there evidence of whether people learn from the course pedagogy and translate/transform this into the classroom and the ways in which they work with pupils?
- Trying to introduce dispositions to students- changing teaching experience so that they can have that ‘feeling’- how to convey so that students can feel what you feel.
• The role of the educator in supporting this process needs foregrounding. How are discomforting spaces facilitated / dealt with? Can steps to transformation be short-circuited, with some steps missed out in order to enable articulation and understanding more quickly?

The question(s) brought to the panel were:
• Is transformative learning a helpful concept?
• If the key areas are transformation, displacement, processing & articulating, facilitating, barriers etc. are these applicable to host individuals & organisations as well? Or are we placing a ceiling on this?

4.2.3. Reflective comments

• #gpml fascinating discussion on ‘transformative learning’. What if you don't feel ‘transformed’? What if you didn't need to be?
• “That change does not necessarily mean transformation. How transformative can an individual be in their practice following a study visit, given restraints of the system in which they work?”
• “Communities of practice, or experience? Change doesn't always = transformation. Resistance to change is as interesting as those who seem to change a lot.”

4.3. Educational partnerships
4.3.1. Workshop outline
The study visits that have been investigated in this project both take place within the context of a long-standing, educational relationship between organisations with an educational remit: Canterbury Christ Church University, UK and Goodwill Children’s Homes, India; Tide global learning, UK and the National Environment Agency, The Gambia. This workshop will use data on the nature of those relationships as contexts for study visits to discuss whether, and in what ways, they might enable deeper intercultural and mutual learning to take place.

4.3.2. Key points from discussion
What do we mean by equality in partnerships? Discussion covered following areas:
• divergent perspectives on equality – do we mean the same thing by the same words?
• Danger of forgetting that things are always more complicated than we see at first – different opinions on controversial subjects exist in almost all cultural groups
• the dangers of charitable giving … and the universality of care
• how can the disposition to ‘care’ be understood across partners?
• how do we deal with the real inequalities? as adults? with children?
• how can we best recognise and work with imbalances / inequalities between partners?
• how can it be equitable when the southern partner cannot visit the UK?
• how can we support children in the classroom when thinking through inequality?
we need to be able to talk about the deeper reasons for inequality but recognise there may be constraints (e.g. in talking about politically sensitive issues in many places?)
practical intervention – e.g. access of Southern partners to Home Office

The following question was brought to the plenary panel:
**What does it mean to have a pocket of equality in a wider context of structural inequality?**

A supplementary question was:
**What dispositions need to be central to developing effective educational partnerships?**
- sensitivity
- willingness to talk about inequality
- not forgetting to remember (the histories behind how we relate to each other today)

4.3.3. **Reflective comments**

- “A really important thing to remember: the purpose of the Tide/NEA partnership was to support teachers in both countries in developing work on sustainable development.. and including perceptions beyond own countries.”
- “there is a need to do some new work on how to help children navigate inequality in partnerships e.g. when ‘buddy letters’ bring up issues about wealth differentials, and expectations of support or giving.”

4.4. **Southern perspectives**
4.4.1. **Workshop outline**
Research on intercultural, mutual learning through study visits from the UK to locations in the Global South has tended to focus on the gains for the UK visitors, rather than the impact on, and gains for, host individuals and organisations. This project has gathered data from participants in all three countries. This workshop will give you the opportunity to hear more about what southern perspectives hosting and learning from study visits from the UK, drawing on data from India and The Gambia.

4.4.2. **Key points from discussion**
What are the gains from a Gambian / Indian perspective? There is asymmetry in the relationship because can act as hosts only because of barriers such as:
- financial
- travel – visa etc
- cultural e.g. familiar food / language

These prevent reciprocal visits. Rest of the workshop focused on 4 conference questions:

1. **Intercultural relations: North-South, South-North (not usually), South-South ?**
Intracultural between Gambian colleagues, between Indian colleagues. Competition for opportunity to participate; jealousies … how does this facilitate mutuality, reciprocity within the host community?

2. What is transformative learning from a Southern perspective? Is this as possible? e.g. if the opportunity to experience another place is only one way?
What kind of transformation do we (southern perspective) want UK participants to undergo?
Romantic lifelong process?
Concrete ‘here and now’ transformative learning, action and behaviour change? Is TL a relative term / notion?

3. How do we live with difference?
Within asymmetrical, disequilibrium.
There was contention within the workshop group about whether to accept difference or understand difference, or whether both are needed.
Dr Sidibeh used the analogy of the horse and rider to illustrate power relations.

4. What sorts of partnerships facilitate mutual learning?
The importance of orientation (briefing) and debriefing for all – visiting and hosts.
Process – informal, unstructured, flexible, but on constructive basis. Learning by doing together. Functional learning!
Content of learning can be universal & adaptable; contextual element is crucial – place-based, location specific.

Question brought to plenary panel:
Is a good relationship possible without mutual learning?

Recognising that ‘good’ is contested, loaded with value judgements, with inherent questions of who decides and how adjudicates. ‘Mutual’ – is this truly possible when there are such questions about equality? So is it really possible to expect mutual learning / relationships when inequality is unavoidably built into the relationship as the outset? (i.e. reciprocal visits do not happen!).

5. Plenary Discussion
The questions from the four workshop groups were brought forward to the panel (which was made up of the research team) who responded. Vanessa then made some concluding remarks that were particularly pertinent:

• What new mistakes can we make to build on old mistakes
• The need to be more open to complexity and uncertainty
• Learning to be more in comfort with discomfort
• Need for a different conceptualisation of knowledge itself (different ways of knowing)
• Transformative learning: ontological and epistemological (not just changing the content of knowing)
• The more we say we are open-minded the less likely we are to be.

She also provided a list of authors that may be useful in providing theoretical perspective relevant to the research:

• Lisa Taylor
• Sharon Todd
5.1. Reflective comments

- “Andreotti’s point about the days of de-politicising and de-historicising issues was very poignant. How does ‘being comfortable with discomfort’ translate into successful partnerships that will be funded/ supported??!”
- “To recognise without resolving is an intelligent approach.”
- Equity is a huge issue – But we should still try and not give up!

6. Where next?

6.1. Reflections from the research team:
- Very exhausting, challenging and rewarding conference. Really helped by feedback/ reflections offered in workshops and excited about developing our own theory (?!)
  maybe based on relational pedagogies.
- Which of [Vanessa's] quadrants does this project relate to? Might be useful to apply this to ‘outputs’.
- Is ‘impact’ a useful term anymore? Thinking about the term differently in two different contexts: 1) In relation to study visits- Isn’t it more about learning and what difference (if any) it has made to thinking/ being etc.; 2) In relation to the project as a whole: using the term influence rather than impact i.e. who might it influence and how?

6.2. Creating spaces for exploring tricky issues
- The importance of spaces for having this type of dialogue was picked up by several participants- essential for this to continue:
  “Spaces- crucial for dialogue and to explore the issues (during study visits but also this conference itself)”
  “Really valued having the opportunity to share ideas in a ‘safe space’ – uncertainties valued and welcomed in a very supportive environment.”
  “Continued dialogue- conversational dialogue within communities, between communities and among communities must continue in an open-minded framework/ mindset that is extremely challenging to maintain”

6.3. Thinking about audience
- Some participants noted that the use of academic terminology was not always easy to grasp.
• For example one delegate said, with reference to Vanessa’s keynote: “A fascinating and very informative presentation. Though not being an academic there were moments when I wanted to stop the presenter and ask for more explanation of certain jargon phrases.”
• This highlighted for the research team the importance of thinking about our intended audience(s) during the dissemination of the project and also being clear what we mean by certain terms. Here the strength of using metaphors/ images to convey complex issues (a strength of Vanessa’s work) may help us.

If you would like to learn more about the research, please contact Dr Fran Martin Fran.Martin@exeter.ac.uk (01392 724770), or visit our website http://www.education.exeter.ac.uk/gpml

Figure 2: Wordle of delegate reflective comments