

Focus

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AS SITES FOR MUTUAL LEARNING

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Introduction

This article presents the findings of one strand of a three year, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research project titled ‘Global partnerships as sites for mutual learning: teachers’ professional development through study visits’. The project ran from October 2009 to January 2013 and had three main foci: first, to investigate the nature and development of two educational partnerships with a view to understanding the context they provide for annual study visits for UK student teachers to India and biannual study visits for UK teachers to The Gambia; second, to investigate the learning for all who participate in study visits, visitors and hosts; third, to investigate the impact of that learning on personal, professional and organisational practices over a period of time. The article focuses on the findings that inform the first strand, and in particular on the nature of the relationships that have developed and how the concept of ‘mutual learning’ is understood in each context.

Background to the research

As a result of government education policy in the UK, since 2000 there has been a steady rise in the number of educational organisations developing North-South partnerships. The rise has been particularly evident in schools, but also in other organisations with an education remit such as development education centres (DECs). As the number of partnerships has risen, there has been increasing awareness, both academic and practitioner-based, of the need for teachers and other educators to have deeper understanding of development issues in order to enhance global learning for their students.

Professional development activity that meets this need falls into two broad categories – training within the UK (such as was provided through the

British Council Developing Global School Partnerships programme¹) and 'study visits' to a country in the global South, which involves explicit intercultural encounters with the 'Other' (Said, 1985). There is a broad spectrum of experiences that could be included within the overarching concept of 'study visit' such as the 'study abroad' phenomenon in higher education (HE), international volunteer programmes, and long-haul geography fieldtrips. At school level increasing numbers of teachers are taking part in study visits, where there is an emphasis on learning about a different place and culture, and gaining intercultural experiences that serve to raise awareness of development issues.

Partnerships and study visits are framed at a policy level within a neoliberal discourse (Martin and Griffiths, 2012). This is evident in the economic goal of maintaining the UK's position on the world stage (DfES, 2004), and the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000) which are, in education, encouraging a focus on the eradication of extreme poverty (MDG1) and universal access to primary education (MDG2). Educational policy on global learning largely promotes these goals uncritically as being a 'good thing' (DfES, 2004, 2005), yet there is also a growing body of literature problematising such policies, showing that they can unwittingly lead to activities that are both exploitative and paternalistic (Hutchins and Smart, 2007; Martin and Griffiths, 2012).

Issues of power and representation underlie many intercultural learning programmes (Martin and Griffiths, 2012), and are masked by a discourse of enabling participants to become 'global citizens' – developing the skills to be successful in a globalised world and, in the context of education, preparing teachers to teach in an increasingly diverse society (Cushner and Brennan, 2007; Stachowski and Sparks, 2007). Looking at other contexts, in the United States (US) the 'study abroad' phenomenon has been criticised for

¹ Continuing professional development, both face to face and online, was provided under the Global School Partnerships programme until 2012. This then became part of the Connecting Classrooms programme. Online materials and activities are available at:

<http://connectingclassrooms-learning.britishcouncil.org/>

'harvesting' resources and knowledge from Southern countries and using it to strengthen the country's political and cultural hegemony (Zemach-Bersin, 2007). In addition, the trend for intercultural experiences to be part of 'service learning' in North American contexts, points towards the provision of a service to the Southern country, with all the dangers of donor-recipient dynamics that that entails (Kiely, 2011). Similar concerns are being raised about service learning within the UK (Bamber and Hankin, 2011).

This discourse competes with that of developing students as 'global citizens' who are aware of their place in an interdependent world, and able to challenge 'negative and simplistic stereotypes' about the global South (DfES, 2005). However, research has shown that in many cases intercultural experiences can serve to reinforce existing stereotypes and beliefs (Hutchins and Smart, 2007; Disney, 2008; Edge et. al., 2009). There is a danger for teachers taking part in study visits that they return to the classrooms with stories that focus on what is lacking compared to the UK, rather than challenging the dominant discourse about the global South as poverty-stricken and in need of 'our' help. There is also a concern that these 'frozen narratives' (Said, 1985) are perpetuated through their teaching.

Very little research has been conducted into the impact of study abroad or study visits on teachers' worldviews, and none that we are aware of on the long-term impact of participating in such an experience. In addition, there is a lack of research bringing Southern perspectives to this area of work. Although the need for Southern voices has been recognised, these have yet to be genuinely included in global and development education. Finally, there are a number of study visits run from the UK that are framed within a broader educational partnership with an organisation in the host country. There is anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of such a long-term relationship on the potential for learning, but research has been limited and under-resourced into whether this is actually the case. This research has aimed to address these gaps.

Theoretical framing

Previous experience of participating in a number of study visit courses to The Gambia led to our interest in investigating the impact of the study visits in a rigorous and systematic way. On the basis of academic experience, Fran Martin

(2005) was aware of the deep-seated and implicit neoliberal discourse that underpins so much educational activity related to global citizenship and North-South partnerships. In the course that she co-led with a colleague at Tide~global learning (www.tidec.org) a key aim was to challenge this discourse and to model, through the partnership that helped to frame the course, alternative ways of relating North-South partnerships based on principles of mutuality and equity.

Since the Tide~ partnership was with an organisation in The Gambia (The National Environment Agency, NEA), it was hard to avoid the fact that the two countries have a former colonial relationship with a legacy that continues today (Abbott, 2006; McEwan, 2011). For these reasons, postcolonial theory was chosen as a theory that offers a suitable critique of the Western world, in particular of the knowledge systems that have come to dominate on a global scale. There is not enough space to go into detail here (for an excellent account of using post colonial perspectives in education research see Andreotti, 2011) so we limit ourselves to a brief overview of aspects of the theory that have proved particularly productive in the research.

Postcolonial theory has often been criticised as a destructive rather than constructive theory, in that it offers a means of deconstructing texts and activities and revealing the hegemonic, Western discourses that pervade them (Andreotti, 2011). While this is the case we have found, taking Andreotti's lead, two elements of postcolonial theory that offer 'actionable' alternatives when taken together: unlearning privilege (Spivak, 1990) and 'Third space' (Bhabha, 1994). Spivak discusses how, in order to unlearn privilege, one needs to go through a process of 'learning to unlearn', 'learning to listen', 'learning to learn' and 'learning to reach out'. When this is done through intercultural dialogue, Bhabha argues that often individuals occupy their own cultural space, even if in another spatial location, and that this can provide a barrier to understanding each other, due to the (usually unconscious) positioning based on one's cultural norms. He proposes that each in the intercultural conversation need to be prepared to step out of this space into the space between them, leaving cultural baggage behind, if learning from the dialogue is to take place. It is incumbent on both parties to do this and to create a 'Third space' in which new meanings, ideas and understandings can emerge. We will now describe the

project and discuss how these theoretical perspectives informed the research design.

Overview of the project

The research project had a dual focus that aimed to investigate: (a) the nature and development of two global educational partnerships (UK-Gambia, UK-India); and (b) the learning that takes place for teachers involved in study visits run by the two partnerships. With regard to the latter, the study visits are what we term study visit *courses*, or *supported* study visits, which have preparatory, study visit and follow-up phases and in which the learning is supported and facilitated by course leaders. A further aim was to gather data from both organisations involved in each partnership, and from both visiting and host individuals involved in the study visits. In this way we aimed to fill a gap in research in this area conducted from within the Western academy that privileges the activities and learning gains of those in the West.

The key research questions guiding the research were: 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? They were investigated through a focus on the following supplementary questions:

1. How have two North-South partnerships developed and what context do they provide for educational study visits?
2. What do teachers from both North and South learn about development and global issues from their involvement in study visits?
3. What are the key factors that prompt any changes in knowledge and beliefs?
4. How does this learning inform their practice over time?

In a project of this nature, the methodology employed is pivotal. The four organisations involved had developed long-standing relationships based on principles of reciprocity and mutuality. In the early consultation with the

organisations, it was agreed that the research design had to mirror this, and that a researcher as an ‘objective observer’ was not going to be appropriate. We therefore adopted a collaborative, participatory approach (Bennett and Roberts, 2004) – which has been an attempt to ensure a voice for all partners in the research and to embody the right of research participants to influence how the research findings are portrayed. Due to the research design and methodology the research team has been engaged in ongoing critical reflexivity alongside the participants, as is discussed further below.

Table 1: Overview of research design and methods

Research question	Methods of data collection and research phase	Research sample	Researcher
	Phase 1		
1	Documentary analysis Semi-structured interviews.	Those in lead role in each organisation	UK PI Gambian and Indian research consultants
	Phase 2		
2 & 3	Multi-sited ethnography – participant observation, research diaries, semi-structured interviews pre, during and post study visit.	UK study visit participants	UK RF
2 & 3	Participant observation, research diaries, semi-structured interviews pre and post study visit, some focus group interviews.	Gambian and Indian hosts of study visits	Gambian and Indian research consultants
	Phase 3		

4	Questionnaire Follow-up focus group and individual semi-structured interviews	UK study visit participants between 2002-2009	UK PI UK RF
4	Questionnaire Follow-up semi-structured interviews	Gambian and Indian hosts of study visits 2002-2011	UK PI with Gambian and Indian research consultants

The research was conducted at three levels: strategic, pedagogic and longitudinal (Table 1). At the strategic level we investigated how two North-South partnerships have developed over a period of time, and the contexts they provide for educational study visits (Q1). At the pedagogic level we explored what teachers from both the North and South who took part in the study visits in 2010 learnt about development and global issues (Q2 and 3). Longitudinal data were then gathered to enable us to explore the ways in which the impact of taking part in the global partnership and study visits were enduring for both individuals and their organisations (Q4). The research team consisted of a UK principal investigator and research fellow, a Gambian research consultant and an Indian research consultant.

In addition to the research focus, we aimed to identify and explore innovative participatory approaches to research between the North and South, explicitly working with the idea of ‘Third space’ – focusing on the ‘inter’ of intercultural learning as the opportunities arose. For example, there has been a meeting of cultures between researchers and research participants, as well as between four researchers from three different countries. This has provided us with challenges of unlearning academic privilege when working in our own country contexts, of the UK researchers unlearning Western privilege, of striving to find alternative ways of working that do not put Western academy at the centre, and of the research team working knowingly together with a pedagogy of dissensus (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008). Although we have used

similar methods for data collection, how these have been developed and employed in the field has varied according to the local context. This contradicts some conventional research wisdom, that tools should be administered equally if findings are to be valid, so we have had discussions about what claims to validity we can make that are based on situatedness and complexity (Sharp, 2009) rather than trying to generalise across the project as a whole.

Learning from difference

When a research project is investigating contrasting global partnerships and contrasting courses there has sometimes been, when we are presenting our work to others, an expectation that we will be making comparisons that are evaluative and drawing conclusions that enable us to make recommendations to others about 'how to' ...develop a meaningful partnership/run a study visit course. However, the differences between the partnerships and courses are evident at so many levels and thus so numerous that any attempt to compare in this way would be meaningless and, we argue, unethical. This does not mean avoiding the differences and the challenging questions these raise for us; it means being attentive to what those differences are, the contexts within which they emerged and the ways in which they are expressed from a variety of perspectives. This approach is based on a relational ontology and, as we perceive it, keeping with the postcolonial teachings of Spivak and Bhabha (Andreotti, 2011; Martin, 2012).

Before presenting some of the findings it is therefore necessary to outline some of the differences that are found across the research site:

- Different country relationships: The Gambia and India are both former colonies of the UK, but have very different historical and cultural backgrounds and each related to the UK politically and economically in quite different ways.
- Different organisational relationships: the UK-Gambia partnership is between Tide~, a development education centre in the UK, and the NEA, a government department in The Gambia. The partnership developed out of a shared concern to support teachers' professional development around educating for sustainability. The organisations

have been working together since 1999 on a range of activities, which are centred on a biannual study visit.

- The UK-India relationship is between Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in the UK, and Goodwill Children's Homes (GCH), a charitable organisation based in the UK that provides homes and schooling for orphans and semi-orphans in Tamil Nadu, southern India. GCH has an Indian management group and it is with this part of the organisation that CCCU has developed what they describe as a 'strong link', rather than partnership. Members of staff in the Education and Geography departments of CCCU and staff in GCH Tamil Nadu have been working together to coordinate and facilitate a yearly study visit since 2000.
- Two different models of 'study visits': Tide~ runs a seven month course from October/November – May/June. There is a selection procedure, preparation phase of three full-days (one a month) – based on reflective learning cycle, group forming, understandings of culture, and the idea of mutual learning. This is followed by a week-long study visit to The Gambia, which entails a range of activities planned with the NEA including joint fieldwork with Gambian teachers, cultural activities, and a day conference at the NEA. A follow-up phase consists of two further days and the opportunity to contribute to Tide~'s annual conference in June.
- CCCU runs a three-week 'supported study visit' (not part of the formally accredited work of the university). There is a selection procedure, and a preparation phase in the spring that focuses on organisational aspects of a study visit. There is a three-week visit to Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The first 3-4 days spent in Kerala act as a preparatory and orientation phase. The group then travels to Tamil Nadu and spends a few days in two urban centres, and 8-10 days in the Pilani Hills living in one of the children's homes, interacting with children in informal and formal settings including doing some teaching in the on-site school. The emphasis is on learning about

India (environment, culture, religion) and education. At the end of the three weeks the group returns to Kerala, bringing participants ‘full circle’.

- In both ‘courses’, UK participants are encouraged to keep learning journals during the study visits which, together with regular reflective sessions, enable them to critically reflect on, and learn from, their experiences.
- Different people involved: the Tide~ study visit course is for qualified teachers and educators of varying levels of experience, from newly qualified teacher to headteacher and university lecturer. The group is between 8-12 people, including leaders. It is co-led by a Tide~ member of staff and an assistant headteacher. The Gambian hosts are members of staff at the NEA who co-ordinate an Education for Sustainability (EfS) teacher sub-committee. Gambian teachers who work with UK teachers during the study visit are members of this committee.
- The CCCU study visit is for a mixture of students on a three year education programme, many of whom will go on to become teachers, and students on a one year PGCE programme. It is co-led by between two to three CCCU staff, and the group often consists of one or two other members of staff who are accompanying the group for the first time as part of their professional development and who may go on to co-lead in the future. The group is usually between 14-18 including staff. The Indian hosts are members of the GCH management committee in Tamil Nadu, and staff at two GCH centres in the Pilani Hills. Staff of GCH includes teachers, house-mothers, and development workers.

Findings

As members of the UK part of the research team, we cannot avoid our positioning as people working within the Western academy, who also had roles as a former leader of the Tide~ study visit (Fran Martin), and a previous

participant in the Tide~ study visit (Lynne Wyness). We acknowledge this not to absolve us of any responsibility to bias, but to raise awareness of potential biases that we have tried to remain conscious of during our analyses and interpretations of the data. In this regard, while data gathered from the Southern organisations have been analysed by the local research consultants, we have made our own selections from those analyses and thus introduced a further potential for perspective bias. However, since all stages of any research project involve a process of selection, we do not see this as being necessarily problematic as long as our purposes for selection are clear. The purposes of the whole project have been discussed above. For this article, as the title suggests, we have selected from the data analysis those findings that inform the nature and development of two global ‘partnerships’ or ‘links’ and then discuss, with reference to data from the study visits, these relationships as sites for mutual learning. We finish by providing a postcolonial framing of the findings and considering some of the implications for global, intercultural learning through partnerships.

Tide - NEA partnership

The partnership between Tide~ global learning and the NEA 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. As the current Tide~ director suggested in May 2010, ‘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.’

The more formal arrangement grew out of a shared desire to increase the capacity of each organisation to support teachers in the teaching of sustainable development. This reflected each organisation’s own remit: Tide~ of being a teacher network for professional development about global and sustainable development issues; the NEA of working with teachers through an EfS sub-committee on embedding sustainable development education within the primary school system. From the outset, the two organisations discussed a shared goal of working together in ways that were underpinned by principles of mutuality, reciprocity and equality. In this, there was an explicit focus on what ethical engagement meant in the context of a North-South partnership, and

there was a commitment to work in ways that challenged the neoliberal, donor-recipient patterns of relating that are common to many North-South educational partnerships (Martin, 2008; Edge et. al., 2009). For example, the question of funding came up at an early stage and it was agreed that neither organisation wanted to enter into a financial arrangement, but that each would find its own resources to support and enable joint activities to take place:

“We are not making money demands nor are we offering you money” (former Tide~ director, November 2009).

“Basically the whole purpose was to talk about environment and development issues in terms of environment education and this has led to a lot of useful things for both the Gambian side and the UK side and what happened is this is a partnership we are, we do what we call mutual learning ... So it’s not like conditional, it is anything that is done is done on mutual basis” (NEA section director, January 2010).

The unconditional nature of the relationship mirrors what Andreotti has referred to as ‘a pedagogy of love’ (2012), and was expressed by both partners as central to their understanding of mutuality. The commitment to working together in ways that were not conditional was a principle that required continuing communication, coming together over joint projects and building up trust. 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~ stated explicitly 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*’ (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 Martin: “So a dependency in the sense of?”

“Well you know that we are not seen as a formal relationship that requires accountability about funding” (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. There is sometimes an assumption that equality means that things have to happen in the same way on both sides. The Tide~-NEA partnership challenges this idea by adhering to a concept of equality that is built on non-hierarchical, democratic processes and where the expectations for involvement come from within each organisation rather than being imposed by either one on the other, and that these expectations are then openly discussed and joint decisions about what is feasible are taken. For example, early in the partnership work was done on a joint publication (Tide~/NEA, 2002) that was the result of creative work done by UK and Gambian teachers working together during study visits in 2000 and 2001, with a launch of the publication in The Gambia in 2002. Resources in terms of time, expertise and access to fieldwork sites in The Gambia and the UK were shared equally, financial resources for producing and printing the publication were provided by Tide~, while the NEA provided the resources (venue, meals, transport) for the launch event. The publication was then distributed free of charge to a range of schools in The Gambia, while it was available for sale through Tide~’s online shop in the UK.

Similarly, each organisation puts its own resources into the biannual study visit of UK teachers to The Gambia. From the UK side, the teachers pay for their study visit course, and Tide~ supports the cost of the course by providing the leaders; from the Gambian side, the NEA organises the programme of fieldwork during the study visit, and both the NEA and Tide~ share the costs of a day conference. Two days of joint fieldwork followed by a one day conference provides the ‘inter’ cultural space in which Gambian and UK teachers, together with staff from the NEA and Tide~, work collaboratively on their understanding about sustainability issues and the pedagogical approaches best suited to teaching about them in their respective educational

settings. Preparatory work by Tide~ course leaders, and by NEA leaders of the teacher ESD sub-committee explicitly focuses on mutual learning and this is modelled for teachers during the study visit itself. In some respects, this supports the creation of a 'Third space' during the intercultural conversations, with each in the conversation being teacher and learner, and thus enhancing the possibility of new understandings arising for both.

However, it was mentioned by many of those interviewed that working within the principles established was an ongoing challenge and one that they kept having to come back to and remind each other of: *'If you are serious about mutual [processes] then both sides have to prepare for it'* (study visit course leader, May 2010). This came after the study visit in February 2010 when there were questions raised over whether the UK took too much of a lead during the day conference: the NEA waiting for Tide~ to take a lead, Tide~ wanting to make the most of the time for the UK group's professional development and so each unwittingly repeating a colonial pattern of behaviour. This then became the subject of discussion between Tide~, the NEA and the research team who were able to offer further insights due to their participant-researcher roles. The next section explores in depth the challenges, benefits and outcomes arising from the partnership between Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK and Goodwill Children's Homes in Tamil Nadu, India.

Canterbury Christ Church University - Goodwill Children's Homes link

The members of each organisation who play a lead role in the relationship describe it not as a partnership, but as a strong link that was first established in 1997. Rather than being a formal arrangement between organisations, it has developed on a personal and individual level as members of CCCU were seeking to provide student teachers with an experience in a 'developing' country that was not in a tourist area but that was in a safe setting. The Dean of the Education Department at the time was a member of the trustees of Goodwill Children's Home, a UK based charity with an Indian committee that manages day-to-day matters in Tamil Nadu. The children's homes in Tamil Nadu were suggested as a suitable experience, and so began what has become a long-term connection between a number of CCCU staff and staff and trustees of GCH in Tamil Nadu:

“Yes. I mean, I felt very much that we were... what we wanted to do was to give students overseas developing world fieldwork experience and that’s really where it comes from. In that sense we weren’t looking at a partnership.... [W]e’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” (CCCU study visit leader, June 2010).

“Canterbury Department of Education College had an idea to make a visit to the developing country to understand the reality.... [A] developing country like India could be useful to the students to know the multi-cultural situation and also the emerging, developing countries point of view to the students of Canterbury for experience learning” (GCH member of staff, July 2011).

However, although the initial motivation was one of finding a safe location for yearly study visits for UK students, it became quickly evident that education as a focus would be mutually beneficial to both organisations:

“Mainly the relationship was educational relationship between the students. When the students from the Canterbury group came here they joined with our children and they were really happy. Naturally the relationship helps their education also. Whenever they come here, they went to the school and they talked to the children about their UK experience, because the children don’t know the western culture” (GCH former headteacher, July 2011).

It was from this base that friendships developed and that took the relationship beyond that of running and hosting a yearly study visit. When interviewed, staff in CCCU and GCH most often describe the link as ‘deeply human’ and ‘like a family’. As an outsider, it is possible to interpret this as being reflective of the paternalistic, donor-recipient relationship that exists between the two organisations. However, in their interviews staff expressed the value they found in the deeply personal nature of the relationships they have developed:

“The relationships which support the visit... are very strong, very important” (CCCU study visit leader, July 2010).

“Education is the main focus. The main focus leads us to very good friends. Two hands make a noise. Two hands make it nice” (GCH project leader, July 2011).

The study visits provide professional development for GCH staff through learning about UK culture at first hand, and communicating largely in English (Tamil is the first language for the majority of GCH staff) and thus enhancing language skills. Goodwill children improve their English, but GCH staff also see that the yearly visits become something that the children look forward to, and that the interactions raise their aspirations to go on to higher level study and enter into valued professions:

“They shared their feelings and taught English language to the Goodwill Home children. English was difficult for our children to understand earlier. Really it is a chance to learn the culture of Canterbury and also they learn something while they are sharing” (GCH office staff, January 2011).

“The multi-cultural understanding and how they understand, that kind of thing was real learning. How a thing can be perceived differently by different people, having different cultural background” (GCH member of staff, July 2011).

“I want to see some children must be a doctor. Some children must be an engineer. They must learn and achieve the top level in their life” (GCH project leader, July 2011).

The fact that GCH is a charity and is financially reliant on donations from the UK (organised through the UK board of trustees and a GCH field officer) brings a number of challenges. It is understood that the relationship cannot be symmetrical, but this does not prevent it from being mutually beneficial:

“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. It’s not symmetrical, but there is a balance and it’s a bridge” (UK study visit leader, June 2010).

Part of this trade-off is a straightforward exchange of payment for accommodation and subsistence for the visitors. An additional donation is also given as recompense for enabling the students to do some teaching in the primary school on three or four occasions during their stay. As GCH is a charitable organisation dependent on donations from the UK, discussion about funding and requests for additional support are integral to the relationship between CCCU study visit leaders and GCH staff. There is recognition that ‘paternalistic ways of relating’ are problematic, not least because of what they model in terms of the learning of CCCU students:

“I’m not very comfortable with child sponsorship...quite a lot of our students have...continued the relationship with Goodwill on that level and that undoubtedly brings huge benefits to children in the homes” (CCCU study visit leader, June 2010).

So whilst there is a desire to develop ways of relating that are alternative to dominant donor-recipient models, the reality is that in this particular context this is a big challenge and that, rather than stop the relationship, the ethical thing to do is to explore, through intercultural conversations and critical reflection, how to continue to work together in ways that enhance the learning of all involved. For CCCU students it was evident in our interviews with those who had taken part in visits between 2004-2009 that they continued to struggle with the desire to avoid reinforcing stereotypes in their teaching but, where they were involved in a school partnership, not knowing what other alternatives to fund-raising existed.

“... if you want to see real change without generations and generations going by where things aren’t happening, what’s the alternative? [...] There is no alternative is there, there’ll always be a place for charity,

because [India's] never going to catch up quick enough" (Teacher who took part in CCCU study visit in 2006, interviewed 2012).

This highlights how, if viable alternatives to a dominant practice are not discussed as part of study visit courses, then it is difficult for teachers to move away from the existing discourse embedded in schools that we have argued above is based on neoliberalism.

Mutual learning

Many of those interviewed from the four organisations talked about their understanding of 'mutual learning'. The term 'mutual' was part of the vocabulary used during the pilot studies (Martin, 2007, 2008), with the term 'mutual learning' being explicitly explored with participants during the Tide~ study visit course (Martin, 2008). It was also evident that both partnerships were, within their specific contexts, working out what mutuality meant to them in practice on a day-to-day basis during the study visits themselves, and at a more strategic level between visits. In the activity that can be called North-South educational partnerships there is much guidance on how to develop a partnership that is based on principles of mutuality, reciprocity and equality (UKOWLA, 2012). These are contested terms and we aim, through our findings, to share the ways in which the concept was not only understood within the partnerships, but also how working together over a period of time led to a deeper understanding of what it meant in practice. It is our view that it is the process of coming to deeper understandings of principles through learning inter-culturally that is central to the development of ethical relationships:

Tide~NEA perspectives on mutual learning

Mutuality was a term used frequently by Tide~ staff who were interviewed, not surprising since they had been developing a discussion paper on mutual learning as part of their ongoing work leading study visits.

"Mutual learning has been at the heart of the partnership with our Gambian colleagues...and the way we have worked together as groups of teachers, both in The Gambia and within our own groups" (www.tidec.org, 2012).

Mutual learning was expressed as one aspect of developing a mutual relationship between Tide~ and the NEA, other aspects being mutual goals, mutuality over organisational focus on a common issue, and mutual benefits gained from the partnership. It was clear that for the partnership to work, adherence to the principle of mutuality had to be evident in all aspects of practice, and that this was connected to working in an equal way:

“We work in an equal and open way...we match what we give with what we receive” (Tide~ course leader, 2010).

and that this was reflected in the study visit course:

“People come on the course knowing that working as a group is part of it ... you should be interested in the idea of mutual learning and this is explicit in the criteria at both application and interview level” (Tide~ course leader, 2010).

Mutual learning is given a high profile in the study visit course because, as modelled through the partnership, it is an alternative way of working and relating between the global North and South to the more stereotypical ways so often portrayed in the media and through campaigns such as Make Poverty History. It is also important that UK teachers who go to The Gambia for a week and work with teachers in the NEA subcommittee do not behave in ways that would disrupt what has taken some years to develop. In this respect, the preparatory phase of the Tide~ study visit course is essential for developing the group’s understanding of mutual, intercultural learning and the processes involved.

The former director of Tide~ was also clear that mutuality meant striving for equality, but that while there were obvious discrepancies in each organisation’s access to financial resources, this did not prevent the relationship from being mutually beneficial. Thus, when there were reciprocal visits from The Gambia to the UK, these tended to be key personnel from the NEA rather than teachers, although some teachers did come to the UK in the early days. However, ‘this has not weakened the partnership or the sense that there are still

mutual concerns to be explored together' (Tide~ director, January 2010). And this is confirmed by the NEA's sector director:

“This North-South partnership is very unique. It is not a matter of one part giving and the other receiving. It's a give-give, receive-receive mutual exchange between organisations, individuals and agencies, and in a sense is a model for sustainable development and bridging North-South.... All partners contribute equally as nations, organisations, individuals. We have learnt a lot at an educational level, an environmental level, even a cultural diversity level. It is very important and we would nurture it at any cost” (NEA Section director's welcome at conference in The Gambia, February 2010).

It was striking how the way in which mutuality and mutual learning was conceived by individuals across the partnership was remarkably similar although, as noted earlier, it remained a challenge to apply these principles to their relationships in practice.

CCCU-GCH perspectives on mutual learning

The term mutual was not used directly by many of those interviewed in CCCU and GCH, but people interviewed across the partnership talked about things that could be interpreted as concerning mutual learning. The way in which it was discussed related to mutual respect, commitment to long-term relationships, mutual exchange of ideas, and the aim to be equal in what each gained from the relationship:

“We respect our hosts, they respect us...we enrich their lives in different ways just as they enrich our lives in different ways...so it's predicated on some sort of balance. It's not symmetrical, but there is a balance and it's a bridge [across cultures]” (CCCU study visit leader 1, June 2010).

“When foreigners come here, we all feel good that our work is being recognised by other foreign friends. It is, if once they are familiar then it is easier to explain our activities and whatever they raise questions by

that expand our ideas and action through understanding with each other” (GCH project leader, January 2011).

“Visitors interact with the children in a way that is beneficial for everybody” (GCH former field officer, July 2011).

A concern – ‘are the scales balanced...people here, what have they gained.... I don’t know whether it’s a fair and equal exchange?’ (CCCU study visit leader 2, June 2010) – was articulated by Canterbury staff but not by Goodwill staff who were clear that ‘it’s an educational relationship, it’s a family relationship’ and that in this respect one would not expect things to be exactly equal all the time.

The history behind the link was evident in how the relationship had developed over time, and this was of concern to several people. GCH was set up in the 1970s by a Scottish man and at the time the model on which the children’s homes were based was that of a Western boarding school, with ‘a very paternalistic feel about it’ (GCH chair of trustees, UK). The study visit leader who had been involved as leader since 2000 acknowledged that there continued to be ‘problems of paternalistic ways of relating’, and that these were hard to move away from when the relationship between CCCU and GCH was blurred with the relationship between GCH UK and GCH Tamil Nadu. This was partly because, at the beginning, staff at CCCU also had roles as trustees in GCH UK, and CCCU study visit leaders sometimes expressed the feeling of being a mediator between GCH UK and GCH Tamil Nadu.

However, many interviewed stressed that while there was an undoubted charitable relationship, the thing that they valued most was the benefit gained for all through coming to better understand each other’s cultures and through the development of deeply felt, long-term friendships:

“The attachment lasts through time and space, and there is mutual benefit to...the children and to the students.... We each give a gift of affection as well as a gift of learning” (CCCU staff study visit participant, July 2010).

“Many come and go and do not maintain the relationship. Canterbury is different, you stay with us [8-10 days] and return each year” (GCH staff, July 2010).

The length of time of the visit means that there is the chance for relationships to go beyond surface level, students, staff and children interact every day, sometimes eat together, play together and students spend time learning how to teach in an EAL context. They have to work hard at trying to understand each other – Indian English is not the same as British English and it becomes clear that language is about more than the words spoken, it is also about the cultural understandings that underpin it. In this way the commitment enables a relationship that is not based on educational tourism, and in turn this enables more mutual ways of relating to develop over time.

Discussion and conclusion

In summarising and discussing the findings, our intention is to note patterns across the two cases and to relate the similarities and differences between them to their specific contexts. The research aimed to address gaps in knowledge about whether study visits framed in a long-term global partnership enable deeper and long-lasting changes in worldviews about the ‘Other’ (Said, 1985), and gaps in Southern perspectives on this phenomenon.

It is evident that both partnerships have endured due to the common nature of their key goals (sustainability education for Tide~/NEA, cultural and school education for CCCU/GHC), the commitment of both sets of organisations to continue to work together towards those goals, and to do so in as ethical a way as possible. With regards to the latter, the principles underpinning the relationships are those based on mutuality and equity, with both sets of organisations demonstrating an understanding of equity that is situated – in other words, that things do not have to be done in the same way on both sides of the partnership. In this way common goals are interpreted as appropriate at a local level, and the practices and activities that enable their achievement relate to local environmental, social, political and economic factors.

In both cases there is also evidence to suggest that the long-standing educational relationships between visiting and host organisations enable deeper

mutual, intercultural learning to take place. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in how each partnership started, and the type of relationship that underpinned the original agreement. In each case this has affected the nature of the relationships that have subsequently developed at two levels: the long-term relationships between those in a lead role in the partnership; and the short-term relationship between those who take part in a study visit.

Tide~/NEA knowingly, from the outset, wanted to develop a working relationship based on mutuality, reciprocity and equity. This was an explicit part of the early conversations and agreements, and is evident in the common understanding of mutual learning across the interviews. In order to achieve consistency between the long-term (partnership) relationships and the short-term (study visit) relationships, the preparatory phase of the Tide~ course is crucial in framing the study visit as an activity in mutual learning, and in going through the process of ‘learning to unlearn’ (Spivak, 1990). In terms of the necessary conditions for ‘Third space’, this process is part of becoming aware of the cultural and historical influences that affect how the teachers in the partnership ‘read’ each other, which enables them to suspend, or step outside, these cultural references into a space between cultures. This provides a sound basis from which, during the visit itself, participants are able to ‘learn to listen’ to, and ‘learn to learn’ from, the multiple perspectives found in the numerous intercultural interactions afforded by the visit, and to do so without unwittingly using one’s own norm as a basis for judgement. To successfully enter into the inter-cultural, or Third, space it is incumbent on both parties to do the work of unlearning, listening and learning, and these processes are also evident in the NEA’s work with the Gambian teachers through their education for sustainability sub-committee. Nevertheless, the principle of mutual, intercultural learning is not always easy to achieve in practice and there are times, as the data showed, when elements of neo-colonialism are evident in the relationships in the partnership, indicating that this is a challenge that requires ongoing attention through dialogue.

CCCU/GHC, on the other hand, began what they describe as a strong link because when a lecturer was looking for a Southern location to take student groups, the Dean at the time happened to be involved with the UK charity Goodwill Children’s Homes. A donor-recipient relationship thus

already existed between India and UK GCH, and is evident in how individuals relate to each other throughout the partnership. Counteracting the strength of this legacy is something that both the study visit leaders and the hosts aim to achieve each year, yet there are other contextual factors that make this quite a challenge. The UK group's preparatory phase takes place in Kerala, a tourist area and, as Abbot argues, narratives that have their roots in colonialism are reproduced because, for local people, members of educational study visit groups are 'indistinguishable from any other set of "white" tourists' (2006: 335).

Kerala thus provides the first opportunity to experience at first-hand what a donor-recipient relationship feels like, and for many this is extremely uncomfortable, but at the same time it reinforces a view of India as a place of poverty and need which can act as a barrier to the process of 'learning to unlearn'. The subsequent experience of relating in the 'family' ethos of Goodwill Children's Home provides a further disturbance to students' thinking because the children do not look like, or act as if, they are poverty stricken. Early in the visit this provides the focus for much discussion within the group, facilitated by group leaders. It is then the length of stay, 8-10 days, that affords the time to have extended conversations with staff and children that enables deeper learning to take place, as misunderstandings and different cultural 'translations' of situation become evident and points of further discussion.

It is these differences that have been particularly productive in what we have learnt from the research. The reality is that not all partnerships begin in the same way. While there is a wealth of advice available through, for example, the British Council and UKOWLA (2012), on how to begin a global educational partnership based on ethical principles, many start out of circumstance rather than formal planning and it is only later that advice on how to work through tricky issues is sought. The two cases here provide examples of how each partnership has collaborated to embed mutual, reciprocal and equitable ways of relating and working.

In the Tide~NEA partnership they are doing this within the macro-scale context of a dominant discourse about Africa that continues to 'colonise the mind' of those on both sides of the partnership. In the CCCU-GCH relationship they are doing this within the micro-scale context of the historical

charitable relationship between the two organisations. In this respect, how people in the two partnerships articulated their understanding of mutual learning also reflected the nature of their relationship and the ‘habits of mind’ (Mezirow, 1985) they were trying to disrupt. A crucial element in the ‘decolonisation of the mind’ (Merryfield, 2000), is the time to reflect on and deconstruct these discourses about the world. It is only by recognising our own worldviews and the foundations underlying these, that we can begin to ‘learn to unlearn’ (Spivak, 1990). We argue that it is through a supported study visit course that this unlearning is more likely to take place.

To conclude, at the heart of a global partnership and a study visit is the intercultural encounter, and this is a site of relation between the visitors and hosts, providing spaces in which difference is encountered and negotiated. We argue that each needs to be framed as a relational venture – where there is an explicit focus on relational forms of knowledge about culture and identity, self and other. Too often the way in which educational partnerships and study visits are framed is that they provide opportunities for UK participants to learn ‘about’ others, their cultures and lifestyles. If opportunities for the host community are considered (which is not guaranteed) it is often in the form of what the visitors can ‘do’ for ‘them’. What this unwittingly does is to position the ‘Other’ as an object of study, and thus recreates aspects of the colonial mission. We argue that this does little to support the development of ethical relationships that are necessary if we are serious about achieving deeper intercultural understanding.

Note on terminology: We recognise that the terms North and South are not unproblematic and have a variety of meanings depending on the context in which they are used. We use them in this article to represent a spatial distinction between countries that are globally located in the northern and southern hemispheres. When we discuss hegemonic discourses that affect relationships between these two, we use the terms Western and Southern.

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