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MAKING BANNERS AND BRIDGES: WORKING TOGETHER ON GLOBAL THEMES

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DRAFT

'Strategic partnerships: A key element of the University of Glasgow and GCID's international strategy is to develop strategic partnerships with a limited number of high quality institutions overseas. These partnerships will be the focus of a range of mutually supportive activities.'

Glasgow Centre for International Development, University of Glasgow (2009)

This paper is an interpretivist study of joint work between two groups of learners, one group from a Higher Education institution and the other from a small independent organisation. This collaboration provided an opening for the groups to work together from January to March in 2007 and in the same period in 2009. Before 2007, one week in the Chevening programme had been dedicated to examining community development organisations and policies in Scotland. The CD team in the Department of Adult & Continuing Education (DACE) had initially offered an annual lecture and workshop on community development and the sessions had been well received. So it was agreed in 2007 that it would be beneficial if we could include the CD students as they had much in common with the Fellows in terms of their work and studies. So both programmes were synchronised to enable the students and Fellows to work together.

In 2007 the learners included the student/practitioners of the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development (BCLD) within the University of Glasgow and the Fellows of the Chevening Scholarship programme hosted and ran by the Active Learning Centre (ALC). (The BCLD was later replaced by the Bachelor of Arts in Community Development (BACD).) The joint work had gone well in 2007 so the tutors decided they would collaborate again in 2009 so the BACD student/practitioners and a different group of Fellows shared another learning experience. The University students in both the BCLD and BACD courses attended a work-based degree programme which is for people with substantial, current practice working in the community in either a paid or unpaid capacity. The Chevening programme, which has run since 2004, included *'mid-career professionals from a variety of both Government and non-governmental organisations from all over the world'* Active Learning Centre (2003). During their time in the UK, the Fellows take part in a series of visits, lectures, workshops, roundtable discussions and placements.

The collaboration had at the heart of the work some very straightforward aims which were value driven and about the benefits of mutual and reciprocal teaching and learning, supported by meaningful discussion and dialogue. The basic impetus was for the two groups of learners to come together to explore global issues from different perspectives. The groups were also given an opportunity to learn about each other's work in civil society and governance. The aims of this partnership were simply to

- to gain mutual learning
- to bring the visitors into the host communities
- to take the University out to relevant communities
- to create sustainable relationships

The Partners in the collaboration

The Active Learning Centre (ALC), which has hosted the Chevening scholarship programme since 2004, is a small independent organisation and has close links to the University. The ALC was registered as a charity in 1994 to tackle poverty and social exclusion by strengthening rights and democracy, particularly for women and children. The core activities include supporting civil society and the empowerment of women and poor communities, offering social analysis, training and educational materials for political parties, civil organisations, women in political decision making, and trade unions. ALC have worked in several continents throughout the world.

The ALC manage the Chevening Fellowship which was established in 1983, then known as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Scholarships and Awards Scheme (FCOSAS). The

title of the scheme was changed in 1994 by Douglas Hurd, then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office Affairs. At the time he decided to rename the Scholarships after the Chevening House in Kent, the official country residence of the Foreign Secretary.

The Chevening Fellowship aims to attract *'young, high-flying graduates not only to study their chosen subject, but also to meet and network with their peers in the unique learning atmosphere that the UK provides. The ultimate objective is to build a network of friends of the UK, who will be future leaders in their countries.'* Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2008). The chosen Fellows come from a variety of projects in developing countries and in both Government and non-governmental organisations from all over the world. They are either professionals in governmental departments in their own countries with responsibilities for civil society or practitioners working in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on rights, conflict resolution and democracy. Drawing on their work experience, the participants get an opportunity to examine *'the relationship between government and non-governmental organisations through the lens of equality and diversity'* ALC (2009).

Meanwhile in DACE in the University of Glasgow, community development undergraduate student/practitioners study very similar topics around governance and democracy on the BACD. The degree course leads to a professional qualification in community development endorsed by the Standards Council for CLD in Scotland. This work-based course offers an opportunity for practitioners to enhance their qualifications, improve their practice and develop skills in critical thinking. The students of the BACD study globalisation and global issues in a number of ways, firstly through the teaching in the Local and Global Contexts course which covers topics such as globalisation, world trade, the movement of people, poverty and environmental and sustainable strategies. The workshops offer an opportunity for students to examine local settings within a global context, and the economic, social and political factors affecting them. The Popular Education course 'block week' offers an opportunity to explore popular education as a developmental approach which is applied across much of Latin America, Asia and Africa. This course focuses on both the practice elements of popular education as well as the theory of Paulo Freire. The students are also given an opportunity to undertake a fieldwork study using popular education methods. In the Practice Methodologies course they examine practice models and approaches and one of these approaches is Global Youth Work. As it is a work-based programme all of the students work in either a disadvantaged geographic community or a community of interest while they are students and use their practice as the basis of their learning.

Collaborative activities and events

In 2007 about 12 Glasgow 2nd Year students and another 10 Crichton students from the BCLD 2006/07 worked closely with 18 Chevening fellows over a series of events from January to the end of March 2007. During this time the Glasgow cohort of the BCLD and the Chevening Fellows, travelled to the Crichton campus in Dumfries to work with the Crichton cohort of the BCLD. The Crichton students had organized a number of opportunities to carry out research and survey activities in the Dumfries community. On that day they went out into the community in small, mixed groups to interview different sectors of the community and later returned to share their results.

Later in the week the student/practitioners took part in a Global Connections Gathering *'Changing Communities in a Global World'*. In the morning the workshops covered such topics as human trafficking, seeking asylum, economic migration, displacement after natural disasters, and transitional economies in Eastern Europe. Then the students resumed the workshops to reflect on what they had gained from learning together. This was then used to make the paper template for a banner which included the generative themes from the dialogue. The following week, the banner was made from material, and sewn together. On the final day of the Chevening programme they received their certificates from the Principal Muir Russell who then unveiled the banner which was later displayed in the St Andrews Building.

In 2009 in the spirit of continuing to expand the work, both the 1st and 2nd year BACD students, were given the opportunity to work with the 20 Fellows. This time they took part in a

series of visits to the regeneration area of Inverclyde, visiting different types of organisations such as community centres, carers support agencies and a youth Peace Initiative. The Inverclyde practitioners organised a social event, and ALC set up a youth work round table discussion. The BACD 1st years were studying poverty so the Fellows were invited to join them and to present their anti-poverty work in Sudan, Burma, and Pakistan. A few weeks later the Fellows joined the 2nd Year BACD students but this time to participate in two days of study around Freirean education.

The Impetus of Internationalisation

The University of Glasgow prides itself in its involvement in many strands of international partnerships and overseas developmental projects. This recent push for 'internationalisation' has been in response to recent national and global pressures concerning the knowledge transfer economy. As the area of higher education becomes an increasingly international community and competitive market place, knowledge becomes a more desirable and transferable commodity. The University has chosen to set its sights high and become 'a *research-driven institution on the world stage*'. University of Glasgow (2009)

The Scottish Government supports and encourages this work through their International Framework (2008) which sets out how international engagements and activities should support sustainable economic growth in Scotland. The Framework is supported by the International Development Fund, which recognises that Scotland has 'a *distinctive contribution to make in its work with developing countries recognising our global responsibility to work together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*'.

In terms of adult and lifelong learning from 2005 – 2008 the Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CRADALL) made links across 'a *number of African countries, sustained informally through a thematic e-mail network, Adult Education and Poverty Reduction (AEPR)*' CRADALL (2005) and continues to progress this work. Since 2004 the Faculty of Education in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has 'established a *unit of excellence, leadership and vision in the theory, policy and practice of Education for Global Citizenship*'. This global education programme focuses on supporting policies that 'encourage the study of the principles of development education, and addressed strategies for the elimination of world poverty and the development of international social justice' Global Citizenship Project (2004). Yet another international initiative is the University of Glasgow Centre for International Development (GCID) which is an attempt to bring the 9 Faculties and many centres of the university together to work in an interdisciplinary way. The GCID

'builds on the University's historical tradition of engagement with low-income countries through its unique range of expertise in the areas of human well being and animal health, the economy, the environment, learning and citizenship'.

University of Glasgow (2009)

All of these initiatives form the supportive backcloth to our joint work with the BACD and Chevening Fellowship.

Study Visits as Mutual Learning opportunities

The CD tutors and the Directors of ALC are inspired and encouraged by these types of collaborations and would argue vehemently for the benefits of most international work. In our case the opportunities only arise because the Chevening Scholarship study visit exists. There is no extra funding attached to the efforts behind the collaboration and costs are met from the budget which ALC applies for each year to the Foreign Office. Learning & Teaching Scotland claim that study visits widen 'horizons by providing an opportunity for them to look closely at different approaches, reflect on their own practice, develop a global perspective and improve learning and teaching' LTS (2009). According to Dwyers and Peters (2004) the benefits of study visits include 'exchange of ideas and experiences, sharing of best practice, peer learning and making contact and forming sustainable relationships'. This can be costly but

can also be seen as an investment in personal and community growth. They suggest that *'longer stays mean greater benefits'*. Dwyer & Peters (2004)

The European Commission, CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) coordinates a Study Visits programme for education and vocational training specialists. According to CEDEFOP (2009) the aims of study visits should be to:

- enable those with responsibility for policy development at local, regional or national levels to better understand specific aspects of education and vocational training policies and themes of common interest in other countries
- continue the exchange of advice, ideas and information between all those taking part in the programme
- enrich the flow of information between participating countries and at European level

The purpose and aims of study visits can vary but according to Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS 2009) there should be a specific focus for these visits and they suggest that *'All involved will have the opportunity to contribute to key issues which affect them in their home environment, whilst also engaging in the wider agenda of international education'* LTS (2009). This seemed to be the case for the Chevening Fellows who claimed that *'We thought about their (Inverclyde practitioners) questions long after we met them'*.

Reflections on the Collaboration

When we came to complete the research all of the interviewees from both agencies and years, including the Inverclyde practitioners were asked the same questions. The students and Fellows were asked about the positive aspects of working with the other group. Most responses were positive such as *'beneficial'*, *'really informative and enjoyable'*; *'felt privileged'*. Other comments included, *'any opportunity that gives you the chance to sit and think about your project and practice and its wider effects is always good'*. One person said, the experience *'raised my awareness of the similarities in community and youth work'*. Another claimed that they had *'a better grasp of the impact globalisation have had on particular countries through the exchange of stories'*. Some claimed there was *'a collective feeling that everyone was willing participants in the exchange and that this helped foster a feeling of solidarity between everyone'*. Only one person over two years felt the work was *'a waste of time'*.

The disadvantages were mainly sited as lack of time, as one person explained, *'time will always be a constraint and with this specific partnership involving a much larger, global, community, timing could be a bigger issue than with local networks'*. One unexpected disadvantage was that there was *'difficulty in understanding each other due to the accents although this was a two way problem'* and that *'if more time was allocated, it would enable everyone time to adjust to this'*. The practitioners from Inverclyde also stated that it was difficult to find enough time away from their usual work to dedicate to the joint venture. Other work commitments on both sides meant that the Inverclyde practitioners were only able to spend limited time with the Chevening Fellows. More time was spent explaining about their work but unfortunately not hearing enough about the Fellows work.

The highlights of the work covered all aspects. Some remembered the social side, and being taught a Cameroon dance by one of the Fellows. Some fruitful mutual exchanges and dialogues seemed to have taken place during the social times and spaces in between formal meetings. Others spoke about the practice, *'Finding others who shared the same values and beliefs from other cultures was inspiring'*. A few spoke about the academic stimulation. One Inverclyde practitioner claimed, *'I really enjoyed being asked so many questions. Some of their questions really made me think especially the women who asked me about how my own schooling experience had affected my perspective of schools. Getting to talk about the project in this academic manner is something I have missed since leaving university, and I would enjoy the opportunity to do this again'*.

In terms of changing values, beliefs and attitudes, few mentioned any significant change but one said, *'It took me out my comfort zone and also gave me a taste for doing more work with people from other parts of the world'*. One youth worker explained, that his project is *'interested in the nature of bullying in our schools'* and that *'the system of schooling in this country contributes greatly to creating a bullying culture. As schools have the same structure globally it was interesting to hear that schools all over the world create a similar culture'*. He continued, *'it highlighted for me how little I knew of others struggles, but reinforced how much we have in common'*. Another said, *'I feel more connected to each other as well as feeling almost "ignorant" of the world view'*. It was repeatedly stated that the experience had reinforced their beliefs, values, and attitude and that it highlighted the need to be continually exposed to this type of learning in order to be challenged about their thinking and practice. One interviewee said, *'It's probably given me a bit more confidence to work with people from other parts of the world'*. Yet another said, *'I felt very humbled having read about their work and I mentioned this. The reply I received sums the whole partnership up: A different perception is always refreshing'*.

The experiences although limited in time, did have an impact in relation to the students practice. It was felt that it made the global aspect of their studies *'real'* and because of that easier to relate to. It also enabled them to gain a better understanding of the cultural differences and similarities between each other. It was agreed that a *'one size fits all'* approach is not appropriate when working cross culturally. There was also a sense of having gained more confidence to take on cross cultural work as a result of the shared experience. *'I feel the experience raised my awareness of what is happening across the world'*.

The interviewees were also asked if they had any ideas as to how they could continue the collaboration. One Sudanese Fellow offered an *'internship'* or placement for a future BACD student. Mutual student exchanges were discussed and study visits to the Fellows' workplaces were suggested. One relationship did seem to have potential as a Fellow from Cameroon and an Inverclyde practitioner wanted to do follow up work with a youth exchange.

To summarise, the issues included concerns around how to increase understanding between the groups, improve longer term contact and maintain sustainability. We had been frustrated that we were time strapped due to the busy schedule of the Chevening Fellows and the fact that the BACD students could only get a limited amount of time out of their workplace. Sadly, some of the students' employers struggled to see the benefits of international contact for their projects.

The Value-based Framework for cross-cultural collaborations

At the end of the collaborations we were left with several critical issues to consider for future collaborations. They included;

- How best to get to know one another over a short period of time
- How to overcome language/accent barriers to help communication & understanding
- How to avoid unintended colonial approaches
- How to make sure the learning experience is reciprocal & mutual
- How to sustain contact after the visit

We were keen to improve practice and Drennan in Hayden et al (2002) offer suggestions and criteria for conducting good practice in International education. Drennan suggests the aims of international should be to

- Developing citizens of the world – culture, language & learning to live together
- Building & reinforcing a student's sense of identity & cultural awareness
- Fostering the recognition & development of universal human values
- Stimulating curiosity & inquiry to foster a spirit of discovery & enjoyment of learning
- Equipping students with the skills to learn & acquire knowledge, individually or collaboratively, & to apply these skills & knowledge across a broad range of areas
- Providing international content whilst responding to local requirements & interests

- Encouraging diversity, and flexibility in pedagogical approaches
- Providing appropriate forms of assessment & international benchmarking

Whaley (2000) suggests that the learning environment should be open, empowering, co-operative, egalitarian & change-orientated which will encourage learners to be more responsive & proactive. She also advocates that a safe environment should be nurtured to enable 'ideas to be contested & practices negotiated'. Ryan (2000) also argues that the ultimate objective should be to 'create purposeful knowledge'.

As we were always aware of cultural differences and wanted to identify and respect them, we were keen to address any areas of practice which could be deemed colonial in approach. Dadzie (1993) offers suggestions for anti-racist teaching and learning strategies in working with black adult learners which could equally be applied to *all* learners but which we found helpful for this work. Dadzie argues that the class environment should be '*set from the beginning with mutual contract/ground rules and clearly and overtly stating the ethos of respect, equal value & learning from shared experience*'. She suggests that the tutors should take time to explain about participatory methods if the participants are used to a more didactic style and emphasise that the content of the learning will centre and be informed on reflection on experience. The topic should be '*relevant to participants lives and mutual support & understanding*' should enable learning about different experiences, with no public put downs.

The physical setting adds to the success of the learning and Dadzie argues that '*circular & horseshoe group work promotes interaction and cross-cultural listening*', simply because the learners can actually see all of their peers. Finally the tutor should emphasise that all included in the learning process have shared responsibility for the teaching and learning. We would agree with Dadzie and we adhered to most of this when we were in control of the environment but sometimes this was out of our control. The learning could easily be affected by the physical layout of the room or furnishings. It would have been inappropriate for us to insist on changes on arrival at the venue although we thought that in future we should ask for specific requirements before the event.

Conclusion

If we use the previously mentioned criteria of Dwyers & Peters (2004), LTS (2009), and CEDEFOP (2009) to assess the success of the joint work, the collaboration does meet most of the aims. It did indeed take the University out to the community, brought visitors into the host community, and the participants claimed that the participants had gained mutual learning. It was more difficult to evidence the sustainability of the relationships and a more longitudinal study in the future might uncover the evidence for this.

Most interviewees who took part learned so much from this collaboration in so many ways. The cultural differences pushed us to think about how we take so much for granted on first encounters and how we make assumptions about verbal language, cultural norms and body language. Most involved agreed that language (accent/dialect) barriers, as was discovered by the learners in the visits to Inverclyde, can lead to misunderstandings as did the interpretation of body language. But this could be overcome fairly quickly if more time could have been spent together. The importance of ground rules cannot be overstated – even for the shorter sessions together. We learned that we needed to remain open minded and challenge stereotypes as well as bad behaviour and that the learning & sharing should be reciprocal and mutual.

If we look at other people's ideas it would appear that we did indeed create opportunities '*to contribute to key issues which affect them in their home environment*' and to '*look closely at different approaches*' and '*reflect on their own practice, and develop a global perspective*' LTS (2004). This was done in 2007 through the community survey in Dumfries, the global workshop and the making of the banner. In 2009 it was reached through the Inverclyde visits and activities carried out in Inverclyde and the Popular Education workshops over two days. There were also spaces where the students and Fellows could take part in '*discussion, exchanges and learning on themes of common interest in other countries*'. CEDEFOP (2009) through the round table for youth work and the formal CD input from the CD tutors. The joint

work only falls down under the issue of time constraints and the lens of sustainability. The time constraints did indeed affect the relationships, and the length of contact affected the depth of relationship building which might have led to the creation of mutually useful knowledge. In order to create sustainable relationships there would also need to be deeper relationships built over more time spent together.

For the authors there are clear understandings about what global education should be about. It should *involve 'learning about those problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and about the interconnectedness of systems—cultural, ecological, economic, political, and technological. It should also involve learning to understand and appreciate our neighbors who have different cultural backgrounds from ours; to see the world through the eyes and minds of others; and to realize that other people of the world need and want much the same things.* Tye, K. (1991)

In conclusion, because of this work we have made a commitment to be careful not to lose the quality and high standard of the work in our enthusiasm to get together. We agree that if we do the work next year we will consult with Chevening Fellows and the students before they work together. We will set more time aside to get to know one another, and make sure that the Fellows have a chance to tell the students more about their work. We will make sure the most successful aspects are kept in and perhaps increased, such as the field work with local people and that more 'blocks' of time are built in to the two programmes. As David Miliband the Foreign Secretary stated at a recent address to Chevening students at the 25th Anniversary of the FCO's Chevening Scholarship and Fellowship Programme, *'...internationalism ...should be about more than governments and more than trade but be about people.'* Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2008). We look forward to putting his advice into practice.

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