

Creating a Legacy: Developing Trainers for Media and Management Training in Transitional Educational Contexts

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An explanation of the layout

In this piece of writing I have used a Learning History approach of two column reflection where the participants' voices are heard alongside mine, as researcher. For clarity the colour schemes are explained here:

-  Historical quotations and reflections recorded outside the research process or from the literature or desk research.
-  Participant quotations.
-  My responses and reflections as researcher and co-participant.

Items which are framed and highlighted in this way are data gathered in the Learning Histories conversations or part of the processing of those conversations and subsequent reflections.

Key words: power, good enough, community of practice, learning and development, adult education, cross culture, management, transitional education, media training, learning history, autoethnography

Introduction

The handing over of responsibility to the next generation of learning and development practitioners working in transitional educational contexts is a pressing issue as the so-called baby boomer generation of expatriate workers moves into retirement.

The space within which this inquiry has been undertaken is largely in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. It attempts to identify ways of preparing the next generation of learning and development professionals working in our network by the provision of resources to enhance their own learning and to identify the issues that remain and need to be addressed to successfully handover the training tasks. The process has drawn from Communities of Practice in the South that have naturally arisen. The position of the researcher in this process has been both as an insider and outsider to the various groups involved.

The project output is a wiki-based Field Manual¹ and lessons have been drawn from the process followed and plans offered to take this forward.

The research approaches adopted have borrowed heavily from Learning Histories, Autoethnography and Writing as Inquiry building upon a series of cases.

Arising from the research process recommendations are offered to address the questions that have arisen around what it means to deliver *good enough* learning and training, lessons that can be learned from the operation of Communities of Practice in transitional contexts, as well as addressing power relationships and the unintentional existence of structures which are institutionally racist. Recommendations are also offered to support the work of trainers that often find themselves isolated because of the nature of their work and professional support structures.

¹ https://www.icti.org.uk/field_manual/

Offering a way forward

The intention of this project has been to provide a resource to hand on to future learning and development practitioners working in the nations of the South (Independent Commission on International Development Issues, 1980) drawing from the lessons learned but not previously recognised or articulated. Locating the inquiry process within the work of the International Communication Training Institute (ICTI) has placed me as both an insider and outsider as a researcher.

This insider-outsider position brings benefits and challenges. As we noted, the insider position arises because ICTI is my place of work. It is also an agency which provides space for the participants in the inquiry. Alongside that, much of the data arises from the participants own location in their own organisations. ICTI serves these individuals and their organisations as external consultants and suppliers. In that sense the research has been located as an outsider. We walk together offering independent counsel. We are alone-together.

The participants in the inquiry process indicated that ICTI has a particular capacity as a convenor. This ability to draw together participants from across organisations has been valued. ICTI has the capacity to further encourage and nurture collaborative work recognising the need for wisdom and caution as it speaks into the challenges of the future for its own work and that of its members.

The Institute also has a catalytic function. The kenotic approaches (Adams, 2003) adopted have been instrumental in taking some projects forward. Participants commented upon this in the learning conversations and valued the results. Providing a forum where members can engage with wider issues is essential. Members are invariably busy and overstretched. ICTI is able to encourage critical engagement with developments in the media landscape so that training responses are relevant and current. The development of appropriate pedagogical responses to changes in society and the media industry is also identified as an appropriate area to continue to address.

The catalytic, convening capacity gives the opportunity to encourage and nudge members and partners to adopt and respond to the challenges presented and, themselves, reflect upon the issues their participation has raised.

The journey continues

The Learning Histories style approach adopted to capture and report the data in this inquiry has been particularly useful in privileging the voice of the participants in the process. In outsider research the researcher has considerable power and even insider research can privilege the researcher over the researched (Fontano et al., 1979). Learning Histories offer an opportunity to address this. The accounts of the participants provide a starting point for the themes that emerge. It is as if these emerge only once the accounts have been recorded. Offering cycles of conversational inquiry to produce actionable knowledge the process has not come to an end. The challenge faced is to distinguish the events, differentiate the networks and ultimately

to rebuild and reconnect them so that it becomes clear how they gave rise to one another (Fontano et al., 1979).

Even though there is an inevitable full stop to the research project, it is expected that the participants and the researcher will continue to engage with one another to develop responses to the findings. Plans are already in place to disseminate the results and to work with partners to develop responses. Presentations and 'papers' will introduce the issues and approaches made to individual agencies to engage with specific themes.

Drawing from the work of Paulo Freire, Giroux (2009) posits the call to teachers and intellectuals to become 'border-crossers'. That is those who leave the cultural, theoretical and ideological borders that enclose them. Border-crossers reinvent tradition outside the classical, submissive, reverent mode of power and offer transformation and critique.

Becoming a border-crosser engaged in a productive dialogue with others means producing a space in which these dominant social relations, ideologies, and practices that the specificity of the voice of the other must be challenged and overcome.

(Giroux, 2009)

In noting the call to become a border-crosser, I also note that I can cross borders as a coloniser rather than as an exile. As a Northern professional I come from a position of privilege and associated power. I can encourage critical conscious awareness but when the oppressor recognises his position he may not find solidarity with the oppressed. Rather it may lead to further paternalistic behaviour which continues the cycle of oppression (Freire, 1970). As I noted in my journal reflecting on Freire (1970):



Instead of pious, sentimental gestures we need to risk acts of love. There is nothing I can do to 'free' those I work with. I can only be free if those I oppress wage the struggle on both of our behalves. If we cross over to support our 'oppressed' colleague, our 'generosity' may be nourished by a need to maintain an order which is needed to justify that 'generosity.'

Journal reflection

The rapid changes in mass media delivery and practice that are seen in the North (Legrand, 2015; Ellis-Petersen, 2016; OFCOM, 2017) will soon, if not already, affect media houses in the South. The arrival of the mobile phone has transformed communication in the South. Previously the telephone was the preserve of the wealthy city dwellers. Since mobile phones arrived the universal availability of phone service has enabled easy communication. Audiences can connect to their favourite media outlet and interaction has become simple and relatively inexpensive. The arrival of 3G and 4G data services is similarly transforming access to wider ranges of media. Broadcasters need to respond to these changes before their audiences move

on to an alternative provider. Trainers need to be ready to assist practitioners to develop new outlets, understand new formats and be ready to embrace trans-media practices. No longer does radio exist in a silo. Audiences in the North expect a media experience that embraces their senses as fully as possible. It is reasonable to anticipate that Southern audiences will do the same. In some places they already are. Internet penetration in Kenya is already extensive yet in neighbouring Tanzania significantly less so. The influence on Tanzanian audience expectations from their Kenyan neighbours will drive change (BBC Media Action, 2017). Trainers need to be ready to guide and encourage media practitioners to be ready to embrace this new paradigm.

The research also highlights the importance for media practitioners to think ahead and to grapple with the new opportunities. The South will possibly leap-frog some developments in the same way that it leapt forward to embrace mobile phones. Basic skills will remain but creative media demand creative-thinking practitioners and the ICTI network should prepare for that future which has already arrived and the one which is to come.

Similarly, the research has shown that trainers need to stay ahead in their understanding of developing pedagogical thinking and practice. When the ICTI Training of Trainers course was first launched online learning was an idea that had little practical presence. Many education professionals spoke of the wonderful future, but few had been able to offer anything to learners online. In the first course we could not find anyone with significant knowledge or insight to present the field to the course participants. That is far from the case now. Many participants have joined in some form of online learning but there is still only simple understanding of the pedagogical changes that online delivery requires. As noted, two ICTI members are on a third iteration of one online platform and still the content and delivery options are very provisional.

The ICTI Communities of Practice can provide a space for members to work together to develop and improve training practice, knowledge and understanding.

Developing a Field Manual²

The delivery of a Field Manual as an artefact that can be passed on to future leaders in Learning and Development has relied upon the Internet based delivery options. Printing a conventional manual was too costly for the project and distribution would have been problematic. ICTI partners, AbR Media, has attempted to distribute manuals in Sub-Saharan Africa covering broadcasting in emergencies. Getting the physical books into the hands of the target audience has been a very slow process hampered by even modest charges.

The Africa Media Trainers group was more successful in distributing a radio production manual in French, but this was paid for by members of the network making it possible to distribute without charge through a few trainers working in Francophone Africa. The production process still took three years and a further nine years distribution.

² https://www.icti.org.uk/field_manual/

The rate of change in the field made the use of the wiki approach attractive and easy in terms of production. The challenges of working with an online, wiki-based, approach were not fully recognised in advance. The biggest challenge was the ability of potential users and readers to access the resource when their main Internet access devices were smartphones. Those with wired Internet access were able to engage but the end-users of the Field Manual are only just gaining access to smartphone applications which can simplify the process.

Engaging fellow writers and editors for the initial content was easy in theory with 29 individuals agreeing to take part. However, far fewer actually participated when the initial drafts of content were made available for review and consideration. It became evident that this was due, in part, to the workload each carried in their normal activities with the additional fact that this was not their project that they had commissioned but was 'Andrew's project and we'll give him a hand.' Additional work is required in order to help partners gain their own sense of ownership of the Field Manual content.

The Field Manual content is, at this stage, a basic document covering issues and themes that arose within the Learning Histories conversations and subsequent reflection. No claim is made that the Manual is comprehensive. It is rather an eclectic mix of the issues of the day. It remains a living document in the form of a wiki and can be added to or amended at any moment. This builds on the strength of the wiki approach (Ebersbach et al., 2008). There is scope to continue the development of the wiki after the end of this research project.

Becoming Good Enough

The question of what might be *good enough* arose in the Learning History conversations as participants expressed the difficulties they had in responding to requests for training help. Frank opened the conversation of what it means to be *good enough*. Is adequate still *good enough* or should we be aspiring to a quality of *good enough-ness* that responds to the deeper needs of the groups with which we work?

In the computer software industries being *good enough* varies depending upon the application. *Good enough* software to operate a hobby unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) is likely to have an entirely different quality to the software built into a fly-by-wire commercial aircraft. Society would rightly expect significantly higher standards in an Airbus A380 to a hobby drone. Indeed, hobbyists might resist paying for the quality of software that would go into an Airbus for the drone that they will enjoy for a few hours each month. Yet there is a quality which can be seen intuitively - a quality that we have a sense of when our practice is *good enough* (Bach, 1997).

Achieving *good enough* outcomes requires commitment of resources to avoid hand-to-mouth responses to learning and development needs. We have seen that to move beyond adequacy to *good enough-ness* requires our organisations to develop agile, flexible structures that can respond to challenges and requirements facing it at that time and location. There is no universal standard of what it mean to be *good enough* (Negandhi, 1983) but this research has pointed the way for ICTI members to develop longer term plans which respond beyond the immediate and the urgent. There is an identified issue with short-termism in much of the planning that currently exists.

We have noted that learning interventions are products of a particular time and context. *Good enough* interventions need to be prioritised, questioned and located in individual situations faced by trainers (Grindle, 2007). The Institute has a role in encouraging and developing critical thinking and planning through its existing offering to members to help identifying learning and development needs. Individual trainers can be encouraged and equipped to become more strategic in their responses to requests for help. Asking partners to assess, in advance, what will be the measure of a learning intervention having been *good enough* and to evaluate whether those measures have been achieved places the onus on the individual trainers to engage with their clients for longer and more strategically. It also places the onus on trainers to engage with the learners to ensure that they, too, expect and receive opportunities that are *good enough*.

Finally, we identified a simple measure of what external funders would see as being *good enough* practice. If our work is *good enough* it will not bring harm to the least advantaged, nor to our partners in the areas in which we work. *Good enough* practice will also not increase harm in already challenged and challenging environments (Collins et al., 1994; Rawls, 1971). Collins further suggests that we ask the honest question of whether our practice would withstand the spotlight of publicity if it were to become the focus of newspaper or broadcast reporting. ICTI can introduce the topic of what it means to deliver *good enough* training into its Training of Trainers curriculum alongside evaluating training.

Power and culture in Learning and Development

Cross cultural work relationships are invariably challenging, and this was evident in the learning conversations that were recorded. Intentions were never anything but good, but the accounts were littered with examples of problems that arose both explicitly and by inference. Daniel and Amir from Egypt summed up the frustration that partners from the North 'didn't understand' the Egyptian mind-set. Mike and Frank expressed similar frustrations in reverse. Ian and his European counterpart in East Africa found themselves locked in frustration and disagreement because they could not understand the position of the other.

These frustrations underline the distance between the cultural positions even where some of the protagonists have spent a lifetime living alongside their colleagues. The temptation to draw conclusions based on my own cultural background and story is hard to resist. Even in the theological sphere which is relevant to most of the partners worked with the position of Southern colleagues on many issues is different and significantly so.

Expatriate trainers do their best to listen and learn but the performance of the other is largely measured against the values and beliefs that we have grown up with. As a result, there is often an indication of tension between partners which has to be managed and worked with. It is interesting but not surprising to note that the most disarming tensions arise when the differences appear with those who are most like ourselves. We, perhaps, expect to have to work to understand the cultures of those who come from a different racial background, wear distinctly different clothes and speak a different language. When the other person has the same racial background, speaks our language and is in all respects very similar, such cultural challenges can

be difficult to accept. In my own career I have on occasions found it harder to work with North Americans and white South Africans than Latin Americans and Xhosa or Zulu. The measures that are used to evaluate success shape expectations of failure. Northern trainers confessed to the feeling the need for another Northerner to take the lead for projects to succeed.

A major controlling element in the power relationships is access to money. The continuing dependence of almost all Southern projects participating in the research raised many questions about the autonomy of those projects. Walter's dilemma about the curriculum for his training arose when the Northern donors attempted to promote a wider agenda. Walter found himself struggling to know how to say no for fear that the funding might be withdrawn. He also, no doubt, struggled with saying no out of respect.

Harriet highlighted that our motives are not always pure. In order to retain income from national governmental donors, some NGOs structure the success criteria of training to be measured by the number of participants on the basis of numbers attending. They then pay participants to ensure completion of courses. There was no indication that ICTI members were paying participants but pressure to deliver demonstrable results to satisfy funding agencies should be challenged and responded to by means that are responsible and honest. To borrow from the lessons learned by asking what is *good enough* our actions should not bring harm to the least advantaged, nor to our partners in the areas in which we work. Neither will we increase harm in already challenged and challenging environments.

The experience of Studio Bravo is helpful. Placed in a position where it had to stand on its own, Charles was able to lead his team to a position where they had their own local funding streams. Anything which came from the North became a bonus allowing Studio Bravo to turn away projects that did not fit with its mission and vision. It has also allowed them to develop their own staff and leadership structures. Surrendering control of finances also allowed Radio Universal to develop its own leadership and direction as Northern colleagues were withdrawn.

Where Northern agencies fail to withdraw fully, retain influence on mission and vision and hold onto financial control we have seen that this perpetuates a situation of dependence. This needs to be recognised for the institutional racism that it is. There was no evidence of malign intent in this failure to fully surrender control, but the systems bequeathed still presume Northern values and accountabilities. The system is unintentionally keeping control in the North even when the individuals and agencies concerned do not intend that to be the case.

We have also noted the complex cultural relationships between local project leadership and national agencies that are placed between the external funders and the project managers. Managers at all levels may, and some do, seek to maintain control of projects in order to maintain their own status. This work leads to a direct call for trainers to listen well to their colleagues and to hear from their experiences and insights. To hand-over responsibility for local projects rather than merely delegate and hover ready to step back in if and when the project fails. As Macpherson noted (1999) "It is incumbent on every institution to examine their policies and the outcomes of their policies and practices to guard against disadvantaging any section

of our communities . . . There must be an unequivocal acceptance of institutional racism and its nature before it can be addressed."³

All parties need to grasp the differences which lead one party to value consultative, collaborative leadership while others inherently lean towards receiving and accepting clear direction (Hofstede et al., 2010; Baker and Campbell, 2013). Some value the strength of being able to disagree and debate while others cannot say no to more senior partners (Chen and Starosta, 2005).

In seeking to assist locally identified projects we can ask 'Whose project is this?' and act appropriately in our support. We can recognise that local wisdom and knowledge will mean that we know less than local colleagues. We can choose to adopt a generous spirit which gives rather than controls (McLaren, 2006) accepting 'no' as a response to our ideas whilst still offering insights that we have. We can listen to the ideas posed and reflect on whether we can learn, change, think and act reflectively.

Communities of Practice

The International Communication Training Institute exists, in part, to encourage and develop Communities of Practice. The learning conversations have shown that the success of these communities has been mixed. There are lessons to be drawn from the successful example that has operated in sub-Saharan Africa for 14 years as well as from the less successful examples from Asia and a media practitioners group reviewed.

It was evident that the need for skilful coordination is paramount. The groups which were left to develop their own leadership were the ones which floundered. A firmer hand upon the tiller of the ship is required. The bridge of a ship is a simile of the leadership of the Africa Media Trainers Community of Practice which has succeeded because despite the annual change of captain, the coxswain has remained constant throughout the group's life. One person has held onto the detail and been able to advise the annually appointed convenor. Future Communities of Practice should give attention to the skilful leadership required and note the key success criteria identified (Watson and White, 2009).

There was evidence that a number of Communities of Practice that rise to the surface have a valuable place for only a short period. These pop-up Communities of Practice should be supported as much as needed. They may not be identifiable as a Community of Practice in the first instance. Those that develop beyond social interaction should be identified early and provided with the necessary support for practice to be improved.

Lone Travellers

Many of the learning and development practitioners working with or as members of ICTI operate in significant isolation. This arises for a range of reasons. Most often the training function that they provide is thinly resourced and lacks staff who are

³ Paragraphs 6.49 and 46.27 of Macpherson (1999)

committed and competent to train others. Most of the situations where courses need to be delivered are remote from the home base of the trainers.

We have seen that these trainers have a 'revelationary' role with the client organisations and often function as tempered radicals within their own organisations (Myerson, 2001). Given the discomforted position of the tempered radical, the ability to continue in their roles stems, in part, from the vocational call that they have.

ICTI has attempted to provide a space within which these trainers can be encouraged and developed. This contribution has been valued. The Institute should continue to invest in these activities and actively investigate additional ways to support and develop trainers in their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

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