

Global Schoolroom
Sharing Educational Experience Worldwide
Report of Review Meeting
Saturday, September 26th, 2009

Colm Regan
80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World
Tel: 01 286 0487
Email: colm@8020.ie

Introduction

The objectives of the review meeting were as follows:

- To review participants' experiences of the 2009 programme and to document their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme
- To identify a set of practical and realistic proposals that will strengthen the future design and delivery of the programme
- To assess the impact of the programme on the personal and professional development of individual participants

Participant keyword description of the programme

As part of the review meeting, each programme participant was invited to synthesise their experience in one keyword, recognising that this simply provided a 'snapshot' of how they viewed the programme some months later. The keywords were then explored in an expanded format as this provided a basis for initially discussing and reviewing the day's agenda and the programme overall.

Energised	Transformative	Eye-opening
Commitment	Challenging	Rewarding
People	Focused enthusiastic	Hardwork
Inspiring	Growing	Enlightening / exciting
Amazed	Learning	

Keyword assessments explained

Eye-opening:

'I had a vision of India that was formed by tales from Calcutta, history, Gandhi etc. I found India to be a land of huge variety, Calcutta was as expected and was replicated to some extent in Silchar but Mizoram – up in the clouds – literally mountain top villages.

I found that some of the best teaching was in small isolated non-resourced schools – not necessarily in the better resourced permanent urban buildings.

The journey which we undertook from Silchar to Shillong – the constant stream of trucks carrying goods of all descriptions and belching out the fumes will stay with me. India – my eyes were opened to the scale of everything – people everywhere, a land of resources but with awful roads.'

Energised:

'My experience with Global Schoolroom has re-awakened my understanding of the hugely important role of educators. Working in the host country reveals each time the passion and

creative resourcefulness of our Indian colleagues. It has forced me to go back and re-discover the very essence of teaching and how privileged I am to have the opportunity to shape the lives of those I work with both in Ireland and India / Uganda. I return from these experiences with a very energetic and passionate love for the job, bursting with ideas and determination to effect positive change both here and abroad.

This assessment definitely needs more thought and work! Hope it suffices for now.'

Learning:

'I learned a lot about myself personally and was surprised by what I found out:

- *Maybe I wouldn't like this long-term, without my creature comforts – a surprise finding – I had thought I was more altruistic*
- *Glad sometimes and difficult sometimes to allow someone else to be a leader in my team*
- *Some of my fears were unfounded.*
- *I had no idea that so many people live in this poverty and that it is acceptable in the world and that we forget at as soon as we leave*
- *That we in Ireland are truly in a 1st world situation – I had little awareness of this fact until it was a lived reality in my life, so that I would want to do something about it.'*

Multi-cultural Awareness (learning):

- *I experienced the collision of the western view (mine) on life and education and society with that of the developing world and found that despite our (perceived) differences we had much in common*
- *The similarities between an Irishman and Indian can be overshadowed by the differences.*
- *The negative perceptions of a society tends to get better press than the positive*
- *I learnt that there are many ways to crack an egg (metaphorically) and just because I learnt my way in the West does not mean that it is the best way to do things.*
- *Learning is a two-way process.*

People:

'I chose this word because it is the people I have met since I became involved in Global Schoolroom that have influenced me most

The people I am referring to are the organisers of GS, the Irish teachers, the Indian teachers and the priests in India, whose commitment to education is amazing - where skills, knowledge, enthusiasm for learning, wisdom, good humour have filled me with energy and enthusiasm and have enabled me to learn about myself and my vocation as a teacher.

The whole experience of visiting India and meeting and observing people of a different culture and seeing other values in operation has also led to a reassessment of my own attitudes to life and living.

Informative:

'Living and working in a community for a month gives a perspective of people and their lives that you cannot get solely by visiting a country - you are better informed about people's lives. This information further helps in trying to work out what the needs of the teachers we are teaching are and helps to improve their programme.'

Focused enthusiasm:

'The purpose of Global Schoolroom is to empower professional teachers to improve teaching and learning for their pupils in the classroom. This was the responsibility of all the Global Schoolroom team in this second year of the project and from day one, I have been so impressed with the organisation, the commitment, the professionalism and the support for us team members.

It didn't take long to feel welcome into the group and to be swept away with the enthusiasm to achieve the purpose, in a focused way.'

Friendship:

'I worked in a team. The success of our team effort was based on the respect and admiration we had for one another. We could identify our own strengths and weaknesses as educators. We were comfortable with this; we trusted each other; we were friends.

Our interaction with our Indian colleagues was greatly helped by the friendship we have developed with them over the past two years. They trust us. We emphasise that we are learning like them. We have become friends.'

Challenging:

'On a personal level challenging; to go away with virtual strangers to a different place, culture, environment; to do a piece of work that I was not sure I would be adequate at because of my lack of primary / post-primary teaching experience.

In relation to the work, because it is a lot of learning to happen in a short period of time and to try to ensure people are internalising it in some way rather than just skimming the surface because we want it to influence their ongoing practice.

Challenging too in relation to the work – to feel that what we are doing is what is of benefit, is appropriate and is sustainable.'

Transformative:

- *Changed the way I think, my attitudes – try to get the balance between what is important and what is not*

- *Affirmation – that my experience, skills, expertise are worthwhile and can make a difference*
- *Hopefully change to some extent the way teachers work, plan and operate in India / Africa. Give teachers a sense of self-worth of their impact on the children in their care.*

Commitment:

- *There was a huge commitment before we went to India. There was a full Saturday a month to attend and also to raise the €1,500 and of course today (the review day) also*
- *The commitment to travel to India for 4 weeks and leave your life behind especially family and friends*
- *The commitment to do the best job you could and deliver the content to the teachers in the best possible way. To give the job 100% while we were there to ensure the Indian teachers got the best chance at success*
- *The feeling of responsibility to finish what you started with the original commitment*

Amazed:

‘Amazed for a variety of reasons:

- *How a simple idea of going to India in 2006 has grown to where it is now*
- *At the commitment of so many teachers from Ireland to be part of this idea*
- *At the willingness and goodwill if so many groups – Cornmarket and UCD*
- *At the impact our work has made in so short a period in India*
- *Finally at what you can achieve if you get up off your backside and do it’*

Enlightening / Exciting:

‘Global Schoolroom was an enlightening experience for me because it was such a positive learning experience overall. I learned more about myself as a person, my profession, Indian culture – especially in the Northeast and global development on the whole than I ever anticipated.

It was exciting for me as it was the 1st time I undertook a challenge like this – going abroad alone to work in a place and with people I knew very little about. I love to meet new people and be in new places and it was so foreign from my own life I found it a thrill – I couldn’t wait to see, smell, absorb and experience it and it didn’t disappoint.’

Inspiring:

- *Being a part of an inspiring group; I left the 1st workshop day came feeling “energised” by the people involved and through speaking with people who had been in India before*
- *Indian teachers and seeing what they had to go through, to deal with just to do their job*
- *Gave a new perspective*

Growing:

- *As a teacher through sharing experiences / methodologies / skills*
- *As a person through discovering your strengths / weaknesses = personal development*
- *As an active citizen (of the world)*

Participants' personal learning from the programme

Review participants were asked to reflect on their own 'personal' learning as a result of participation in the Global Schoolroom – each response is listed below:

- *My limits physically and mentally*
- *Adaptability and flexibility*
- *Strengths – team work and solo work*
- *Weaknesses –*
- *Cultural Learning that changed the way I see myself and others e.g. caste system (profound effect) – on how I view Irish society*

-
- *How important the support of team members was to me*
 - *I learned that for me living very basically (i.e. without 1st World comforts etc. – like electricity, showers, no contact with home) was possible for the month. However while it was possible, it was difficult*
 - *I wonder if I could have kept it up indefinitely; I really take my hat off to people who work in these conditions on a long term contract*
 - *I learned how important it is to get on with the team members. We were very lucky with ours and got on well together*
 - *Appreciation for our own comforts of the 1st world*
 - *I learned how important it was to be able to give and take with the team members and allow others to lead*
 - *Glad to let others lead*
 - *I was shocked by the differences – my senses were assaulted by everything, everywhere*

- *Some of the fears I had were unfounded*

- *That everyone's opinions are valid and important and need to be considered*
- *There is always far more going on with people than you'll ever know. Everyone has a background story*
- *That practical, 'hands on' work is what I find most beneficial (for me and for others)*
- *A smile brings you a long way in any language*
- *I like to get things done as fast as possible*
- *Overwhelmed if I think about the circumstances of the people for too long*
- *Very task orientated while I was there*

- *I value the knowledge, experience and expertise I have built up over the years*
- *Discovering new cultures and ways of looking at things*
- *A sense that, wherever you are, as teachers we have so much in common*
- *Meeting the challenges of climate, bugs, accommodation, transport etc. plus learning to 'live with and combat such challenges*
- *The buzz of excitement of new places new people, new friendships*
- *The 'groundedness' of farming and teaching*

- *How much I enjoyed the interaction with the people – enjoyed the kind of work it was – the 'teaching' / facilitating*
- *The complexities of the different culture I was in. The 'developing' world is not easily summed up. It has its different levels and contradictions like anywhere*
- *The pleasure of a simple life - though of course with basic needs attended to*
- *A sense of a whole other world out there so different from what I know and yet so similar in terms of people's nature / needs*

- *I found it difficult to accept that the “education” product is so different from what I have experienced in my life as a teacher in Ireland. I would love to engender in these young Indian teachers the notion that they are developing “creativity” in all its forms – especially in the lives of the children*
- *I realise now how frustrating it is to help train teachers when the underlying philosophy or mindset is so different to my experience – I found it frustrating to see young teachers delivering a programme that, despite my best efforts, wasn’t “creative”. My question – ‘why do they teach what they teach and in the way they do’*

- *How privileged a life I have*
- *Fresh eyes as to what true living is*
- *All the extra stuff I don’t need*
- *Level of commitment on both sides – Ireland and India / Uganda*
- *Creative ways of following with little or no resources*
- *Passion for the job despite very challenging conditions and little or no resources or training*
- *Inner contentment*
- *A willingness to accept life as it is, even where there are very large injustices in that lifestyle*
- *Our partner’s eagerness to participate – hunger for learning levels of hospitality and huge degree with flexibility*
- *The huge duty of responsibility to challenge and inform some parts of the world and also how it is very possible to live a very contented and meaningful life without the trappings of our materialistic world*
- *Greater appreciation of the small things in life*

- *A sense of myself as a leader – dealing with other people*
- *From colleagues – new ideas for use in class*
- *There is a need for different styles or to adapt my style for GS situation – task orientation v people orientation – lack of time for teasing out issues and more pressure than in my usual school leadership situation*

- *As a teacher – from colleagues – new techniques / for class work. Also enthusiasm / commitment in spiritual experience of proven of preparation for GS; causes makes me to examine my own practice and philosophy of teaching and become a better teacher*
- *From Indian Teacher – their determination, their desire to improve their pupils is also inspirational and also troubling to see what they are trying to do with vastly less resources than we have*
- *As a human being – learning about importance of education as a force for change. Humility. To appreciate what we have educationally. Admiration for the people in India who work so hard at every job to create a better life for other families.*

- *Learned about another way of life: both enabling me to appreciate what I have but also envy what others have*
- *Learned about my limitations as a person: incapable of coping without friends and family for longer periods than this*
- *Learned that happiness can be achieved without materials*
- *Learned the importance of education and how your belief and faith in a person can help them to strive to success more*
- *I always enjoy my own company but learned how I depend on people and having people around me is very important to me*
- *Value of life*

- *Personal*
- *Being a team member.*
- *Developing and delivering a teacher educating programme that is useful, practical and applicable to the context of the teachers in India*
- *Two minds are better than one – when in need ASK FOR HELP – there is no shame to not knowing everything or how to approach everything. Sharing of ideas and teasing out of ideas with someone else can be very helpful*
- *All teachers share universal problems – time! Resources! Uncooperative pupils etc. – size of classes (28 v 60/70). Stop complaining – get on with it – be proactive and resourceful – the best resource = the teacher*
- *The friendliness and welcoming nature of all the Indian teachers we met*

- *Their openness to learn*
- *Their enjoyment of giving when in many cases they had as a little to give*
- *Learning – the good in people*
- *The religious faith and belief of all, both young and old, was inspiring. Drilled in faith? Not sure. But young people my age very actively practising religion*
- *The approach to their learning – passive – teachers are a product of this system and thus cannot facilitate pupils' learning*
- *The social systems in place are like what we may have had 40 years ago – neighbour knows neighbour etc.*

- *As individual*
- *At personal level*
- *At inter-cultural level*
- *On an emotional level to live outside the comfort zone of family, friends and all things familiar*
- *To interact – breathe, sleep, eat, communicate – with a culture so different to ours*
- *The energy of friendships formed with colleagues*

- *Core learning from programme – personal, intercultural, professional*
- *Personal – role of education – my role as a teacher in the world (responsibilities)*
- *Working with variety of people / personalities / working styles*
- *Living with variety of people / personalities / working styles*
- *Being reflective in my personal life – not just professional life*
- *Being sensitive to other's needs, wants etc.*
- *Forming positive working relations / friendships with people from different backgrounds*
- *Living outside my "comfort zone" (pushing ourselves) and working*
- *The on-going process of being ok / or able to deal with what I now know*

- *Carrying on “life” using the new perspective I have gained*
-

- *Responsibilities - towards other people (less rights). Discuss with / to explain back to our own pupils*
 - *Personal Learning - sense of achievement / being active*
 - *Humble experience – how thankful Indian teachers are for the little things we do*
 - *Learn / discover your own strengths / also weaknesses – personal development – flexibility / able to adapt / positivity*
 - *Grow as a team leader – role / responsibilities*
 - *Difficulty – positions / life – see as “rich”, “corrupt” / “change” them*
-

- *Learning more about myself – growing in assertiveness and how I function in a group / team dynamic*
 - *Learning from my Irish, French, Indian peers (professional and personal learning)*
 - *Learning to value my profession and the career choices I have made to date that lead me to this experience*
 - *Reminding myself that the learning process will never end for me (one of the most important traits to have as a teacher or even as person in my opinion)*
 - *Learning more about the melting pot of smells, sounds, tastes and experiences that is India*
-

- *That I do have skills etc. worth imparting to others*
 - *How privileged we are*
 - *That I do work well under pressure*
 - *That the people we were working with have a lot to teach us*
 - *That there was very good teaching and learning taking place in our school*
 - *How our culture has lost so much*
-

- *The value of my own teacher training and teaching experience that I brought with me from Ireland*
- *I learned to appreciate – appreciate our needs in life as distinct from our wants*
- *Spiritually I felt reassured – inspired by the hard work and the hand to mouth experience and the enthusiasm and good humour they exhibit in their daily lives*

Professional learning (group responses)

- The importance of experience – our teacher training and our teaching experience
- Teamwork: the team selection vital to achieve the right balance and get the correct dynamics. There are ‘horses for courses’ for selection of venue / destination for course, as well as correct team balance
- We learned from each other – looking at each other’s teaching styles and methods of presentation
- To what extent is our programme relevant – they are locked in a system; we can introduce good practice and successful learning styles
- Have we ‘dumbed down’ our system too much? Is there still a place for “rote learning”? Our standards are falling maybe!
- Professionally the Indian education system can be used as a mirror for our own system

- Frustration – this learning style – do we retrain them? Is it what they need to progress and/or learn? Are we catering for their needs?

- Sharing methods of professional development
- Renews interest in teaching
- Resourcefulness – adaptability
- What makes a good teacher
- Responsibility to give message back to Irish students
- Frustration – they take what they need from us
- Beating children – *under the surface* – ‘only when discussed did teachers show true colours
- Children with special needs need more care and attention
- Role of school management – accountability?
- Working with other adults – flexible, positive.
- Living with other adults – self-awareness
- Out of our professional “comfort zone” – extreme conditions
- Group planning. – extent of planning that is necessary is considerable
- Learned a lot about the role of education in development
- Mixture of primary and secondary teachers worked really well in our groups
- Two-way learning between Indian and Irish teachers

-
- Corporal punishment – differing views on this issue
 - Fluency of English of teachers and how we need to adapt to this
 - Renews our enthusiasm for teaching
 - Resourcefulness of the Indian teachers
 - Learning – this never ends as a teacher
 - Responsibility to share what you have learned when you come home
 - They take what they feel is relevant to them out of this diploma – we don’t change it
 - Different system – different ages in one class – special needs ignored often or possibly excluded from school

- Infant classes – there is no real ‘caring’ role – different teachers for different subjects
- Has improved my ability when working with other adults
- Importance of positivity and flexibility.
- Importance of reflecting on your behaviour / approach professionally and personally
- Crucial element of planning every night – probably didn’t anticipate how much of this was involved before we got there
- Hierarchy in school – senior to junior classes / village leaders
- Within group the different experience of each of us at junior, middle and senior level of teaching

- Sharing methodologies / ideas is important
- Our responsibilities towards others and our own pupils (share the message)
- Renew of enthusiasm / interest in teaching – makes you think about own teaching.
- Need to take care of oneself (heat / food / illness)
- Working with different system
- Time-keeping
- Corporal punishment – a difficult and unsettling issue
- Inequality between teachers
- Remembering that for some of us, it’s our first time
- Growth as team leader

- The programme – the aims (focus) of the modules need to be specified in greater detail – before we are placed
- Need to examine the practical and theoretical dimensions and come to a common agreement
- Need more visits to classrooms
- Need to document each year’s work so that there can be continuity from one year to the next
- Knowledge of group members and their skills and capabilities
- Need more time for micro-teaching and modelling - this would also allow participants to give more direction to how the course is taught

- Is it possible to differentiate between different abilities among participants?
-

- Reminded of the value of the job we do
 - Huge responsibility of being a teacher
 - Come back to the job more energised
 - Moral duty to report back to those you meet on your return
 - The tension between what we see as Universal Rights
 - Self-affirming:
 - See the need for reflection
 - The challenge of living / working with someone else
 - Programme delivery versus a respectful process and the tension between these
-

- Need for ongoing support rather than the quick-fix of a month – peer education
 - Teaching practice: - contrived situation – is it too hard? Or are they convinced of what we taught them? Strong sense that they will fall back into previous ways
 - Content not always relevant – reflective module was
 - We are up against the system that is totally exam-orientated from the beginning – after two years classes have different reaches every 40 minutes who don't know the children's names
-

Suggestions and Recommendations *(based on the review day agenda only)*

- **Increased emphasis on preparation**

Participants at the review day were of the opinion that more emphasis needs to be placed on the preparatory dimension prior to travel and placement; more needs to be done on the following preparatory aspects:

- clearly explaining the programme, its aims and objectives in greater detail and ensuring participants fully understand it and buy into the agenda especially as regards the level of work it demands and the significant pre-placement work required
- use the training days more productively
- greater emphasis on ironing out agreements and objectives within the group as a whole and negotiating 'local' objectives; increase the emphasis on teamwork in particular
- Being clearer about expectations as regards the different locations within the programme, these vary in context and requirements quite considerably
- Ensuring the 'first-timers' are fully supported and 'up to speed'
- 'Unpick' and explore more fully the aims and objectives of modules before travelling
- Emphasise the importance of 'standing back' and reflecting more

- **Ensuring materials are available when needed**

The 'book' needs to be available when needed and should include additional lesson plans and reflection activities. Clearly the book is valued and is needed, it provides a framework for, and consistency in, the programme BUT it needs to more clearly outline frameworks and objectives and it also needs to include additional classroom friendly materials. Perhaps a focus group to assess the book beforehand could be established.

- **Need for flexibility as well as coherence and consistency**

While ensuring standards and consistency is important and a key objective of the programme, there is a need for flexibility also; a need to take the differences of the diverse locations into account as well as the actual resource (un)availabilities locally.

- **Sort out the accreditation issue**

Accreditation is not only important for the teachers involved, it is also seen to be important as regards future terms and conditions of employment etc. However, there is insufficient emphasis on the teaching dimension of assessment; more emphasis needs to be placed on assessment as regards teaching impact. Good teaching practice needs

to be rewarded; emphasise more the qualitative as well as quantitative in evaluation and assessment.

- **The issue of ensuring participants get sufficient 'rest'**

There is a need to ensure that on arrival in India, participants have a day to 'acclimatise' in preparation for the agenda and that during the placement period, sufficient time is given for rest. The suggestion of setting aside weekends for this purpose was suggested.

- **Challenge of measuring the impact**

There needs to be greater emphasis on documenting the programme and in describing and analysing its impact; this is important for the ongoing 'health' of the programme and to ensure its lessons are shared. In this context, there is a need also to re-examine and refine the evaluation sheet?

- **Emphasise the importance of the re-visits**

In shaping and refining the programme, greater emphasis could be beneficially placed on the 're-visits' as these were considered crucial in influencing the positive outcomes of the programme for local teaching skills, impact and experience. The 'micro-teaching sessions should also be emphasised as these are deemed to be very productive.

- **There is tension around a number of issues**

There are a number of issues arising in the programme that need to be addressed 'sensitively' and chief amongst these is the issue of corporal punishment – participants at the review meeting commented that these were universal rights issues and that '*we have responsibilities*' in this regard

- **The website**

Developing the website to support the programme was deemed to be a priority

- **Is it going too far, too fast?**

While the meeting did not discuss this issue to any substantive degree, there was a feeling that the programme needs to address the question to ensure that it remains positive, focused and impactful.