

## **Global Schoolroom**

### **Evaluation of Irish teacher volunteers experience of 2011 placement.**

Global Schoolroom (GS) ‘seeks to promote the sharing of educational experience between communities worldwide to help eradicate poverty, promote economic development and build sustainable communities.’

The main activity of the organization is the sharing of teacher educational experience and training between Ireland and India <sup>1</sup>. Trained volunteer teachers from Ireland deliver a four week, face-to-face element of the Global Schoolroom Diploma in Teacher Education. For the Irish teachers University College Dublin (UCD) offer an MA qualification built around their mentoring experience. For the Indian participants the course builds over 3 years to a Diploma qualification.

A key element of the experience is the exposure and insight gathered by the Irish and Indian teachers of issues which affect both education and the wider global issues which are the focus of Development Education programmes in schools today.

2011 was the first year of a new 3-year cycle and involved 10 centres in India. This is a significant growth from the first 3-year cycle and is reflected in the increased participation from volunteers in Ireland and centres in India. Organisational growth also brings new challenges and some of these are highlighted in this evaluation.

This evaluation constitutes part of the wider organizational learning process, which GS carries out each year and focuses on the learning and feedback from the Irish volunteer teachers. This report is the result of a one-day process which took place in Dublin on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The day was facilitated by the author, Patsy Toland (PT), GS staff members and also included input from Mags Liddy (who is carrying out a research project with GS). The initial session of the day took place without GS staff present and focused on a needs analysis of the group and identifying the key issues for discussion during the day. Although this process was requested by PT, the group were happy to have GS staff present at all times, indication of a very open and transparent organizational engagement.

The over-whelming view of the participant teachers was that this was an excellent project and the course was supporting the improvement of teacher professionalism and education for all in India. They all felt very well supported by the GS team – both in the preparation, travel, delivery and post-course phases. Much praise went to the dedication of the GS staff and experienced volunteers.

#### **The strengths of the project identified include:**

- a. A project that delivers a key element for the improvement of educational delivery in India. Irish volunteer teachers’ motivation for participating in the project focused on its place within solving Global Inequality through education.
- b. An excellent Diploma course for teacher professional development. The quality of the course, the accredited Diploma through UCD, the teacher

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<sup>1</sup> GS carried out a pilot scheme in Uganda in 2010 but has suspended further developments there, at present focusing on its India partnerships.

handbook, etc, were all highlighted by participants. Participants also valued the opportunity to review and improve content and methodology through the evaluation process. Both the course and the delivery on the ground are elements that participants review and try to improve.

- c. There is unanimous praise and confidence in the GS team of staff and senior volunteers. Participants praise the logistical planning and information provided to prepare them for their India 'experience'. Most issues regarding travel, accommodation, resources are dealt with on the ground by team leaders and visiting GS staff.<sup>2</sup> The feedback process is thorough and useful for immediate experiences and also for long term planning. Feedback is also gathered from the Indian teachers and feeds into the review process to compliment the Irish teachers evaluation.
- d. There is a strong sense of ownership by the volunteer teachers and they know that their input into the evaluation process is taken seriously and often leads to significant learning and change within the programme. The high level of participation in the evaluation day reflects this 'ownership' and confidence in the learning process of GS.
- e. Volunteers are engaged in a very comprehensive and professional training and preparation process. Expert speakers compliment the GS staff during the 5 Saturday and one weekend timetable. The content is comprehensive and addresses both the micro teaching needs of the course delivery as well as the wider cultural and relationship issues that characterise most 'development aid' projects.

GS is a learning organization and the various elements of feedback and review feed into a continuing adaption to changing circumstances and improvement of the key elements of the programme. The key focus of this evaluation was to give the participant teachers an opportunity to voice both the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as they experienced it during their summer sessions in India. Entering into a new 3-year cycle provided challenges for the organization and delivery of the programme and the learning from year one would be essential for the success of the expanded programme.

The first session was an open feedback from participants, which was then prioritized by PT on a Maslow framework of needs. This framework, from basic needs to self - growth, provided the structure for the afternoon sessions. Participants motivation for engaging in the project was also investigated through a team ranking exercise. A personal 'course confidence' exercise was given to the group and they were asked to complete this at the beginning and at the end of the evaluation session.

GS has an excellent continuous engagement during training, during the course delivery and post-course with all participants. On site visits and leadership support is available through a number of GS staff. This process deals with many of the immediate logistical and personal needs of the group (accommodation, travel, etc), allowing the focus of this evaluation to have a more long-term, organizational focus.

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<sup>2</sup> Only one administrative/logistics issue was raised during this evaluation - more information was sought regarding long term health insurance cover for issues arising post trip.

Timetable for the day:

1. 11.30am

– Introductions and ice-breaker.

a. Evaluation activities schedule for the day – focus on evaluation for learning and improving the project.

b. Participant ‘needs analysis’ – what do people want addressed during the day and what realistic goals should the group agree for the day.

*Key issues identified and prioritised from a & b – see 6 below Maslow Framework.*

2. Evaluation Tree exercise – personal reflection. (Handout B).

3. 12.30pm

Research session with Mags Liddy.

4. 1.30pm

Lunch.

5. 2.00pm

Rate your experience exercise – (Handout C).

Key Issues agreed and presented within Maslow framework - ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ and identify priorities within this framework (focus on higher levels). (Handout D)

Discussion.

6. 3.00pm

Diamond Ranking group exercise (Handout E).

Discussion.

7. 3.30pm

GS staff time and next steps/recommendations.

8. 4.30pm END.

*Handouts attached in appendices.*

## Findings.

### A. Motivation for engaging in the course.

Participants were divided into groups of 3 or 4 and asked to rank a series of statements on their motivation for joining the project and the value to them of the experience. (Appendix 1). The following are the results from that ranking :

Ranking Position	Statement(s)
1	An opportunity to be part of a long term project to improve education provision. An opportunity to share my teaching skills
2	A way to promote 'education for all' in the World.
3	Helping to combat poverty and injustice.
4	Help to improve my own teaching skills.
5	A way to experience a different educational system. An opportunity to see the 'real' India.
6	A chance to bring a 'developing world' perspective to my own school. An opportunity to expand my cultural horizons.
7	An opportunity to travel.

It is indicative of the quality of the participants in this project and a reflection of the training programme involved , that the motivation for engaging is at such a high functioning level. The main motivation reflects a wish to share in the overall mission of GS, rather than any personal agenda. This was also reflected later in the evaluation with reflections by some of the group on the responsibility of the project to long-term sustainable support for education in India. Many participants voiced a concern over possible support available throughout the year for Indian teachers during their school term time as their study progressed.

## B. Training and Preparation process.

- The adoption of weekend training sessions suggested in the 2010 evaluation proved to be very welcome and had widespread support. Training was done over one weekend and 5 Saturday sessions. Time spent on travel, etc was less than the one-day sessions. Participants felt that the residential weekend enhanced team-building within the full group and also within each team. Time was available for pooling and sharing experiences, resources and ideas over the weekend.
- With 6 training sessions it was felt that there was a lack of continuity from one session to the next. It was suggested that the training programme should include a reporting/feedback structure. Study groups and shared email exchange would be welcome. This could include tasks or 'homework' assignments for the teams and thus encourage continuity in the training and also more opportunity for sharing the expertise within the teams and group team-building. The role of the 'team leader' within this structure might be examined as a key element.
- Following from this 'participant' expertise suggestion, most participants felt that the expertise within the 'teaching experience' of the group members could be exploited more – eg. Special needs teachers, Primary literacy teachers, etc. This was coupled with a more 'adult learning' methodology approach – using the expertise of the participants and active learning, rather than lecture delivery formats.
- To enhance the value of the training sessions it was suggested that a reading list be supplied at least one month before the session. To support this an online source and availability of readings, etc, would be helpful.
- On the overall structure and content of the Training Programme that initial sessions should focus on theoretical issues. But as the training approached the last session, an emphasis should be on practical and logistical preparation. Of critical importance it was suggested that the focus be on delivery of the first 2 days of the course in India. Many participants agreed that they approached the course delivery without 'urgency'. This led to a delivery 'lag' whilst logistical matters were being sorted and a corresponding lack of time to complete the course delivery towards the end. Teams need a clear strategy and timetable for the first 2 days of local delivery.

### Training course content.

- As the delivery expands both in locations and in overall numbers, the question of English language ability within the Indian participants was questioned. To deal with this it was suggested that a past participant might be employed as translator. The participants also suggested investigating the TEFL approach to language teaching might be beneficial.
- Some specific training sessions were highlighted:
  - The medical advice by Dr. Graham Fry is excellent.
  - The session on ‘Images Code’ was too long.
  - More preparation on infant language readiness and preparation.
  - A longer session on the relevance of this course to the wider Development Assistance within India and Globally.
  - More feedback from the past Indian participants included in the content.
  - More ‘informal’ input from past volunteers – input from Jenny & Siobhan was excellent.
- More input in ‘active engagement’ methodologies and questioning techniques was suggested. Some participants felt they needed more development of these skills to reflect a more ‘adult education’ approach to the delivery of the course. Some participants felt that the training was too academic and needed to be balanced with more practical advice and methodology advice. This also highlighted a need for the training process to offer a critical awareness of our own teaching style and how it matched the course delivery style.
- The Educational Psychology content was mentioned on 2 levels:
  - 3 different psychological models was confusing in delivery and maybe the course should adopt a main model of teaching and learning.
- The selection of Western psychologists was also questioned and the adoption of a relevant non-western approach included eg Rabindranath Tagore.
- A session on awareness of the local curriculum and how to integrate this course within local needs and structures was highlighted.

### C. Course content and delivery.

- There should be a clear structure for the initial 2 days of course delivery to help both trainers and participants to settle in and gain confidence in the process.
- More attention to the location, resources, local management support and number of participants is needed so that the focus is on course delivery and not local logistical issues. Although excellent general information was given during the training course it was suggested a specific local leaflet be prepared for each location, with input from former experienced volunteers.
- The debate on quality v. quantity in participant selection proved to be a critical issue. With the acknowledgement that the success of the project is attracting more locations and more participants, there is a shared concern about how to deal with the growth without sacrificing quality course delivery. Part of this approach should address local school management awareness and their support and selection of participant teachers for the course. It was acknowledged that some participants are chosen by local management to attend, even if they have low personal motivation for professional development. These participants may not engage fully but at least will have a high level of awareness of their colleagues efforts to improve teaching within their school. A balance needs to be achieved between the course delivery needs and the needs of local school managers.
  - Larger centres might need the presence of 2 teams of trainers.
  - Irish tutors were not averse to high numbers of participants, but they needed to be prepared and resourced to deliver to large, mixed ability groups.
  - Observing teachers in their classes was becoming a time allocation issue.
  - Mixed ability teaching was a necessary element of the delivery.
  - English language issues need more attention or the use of a translator.
- More attention and awareness to local cultural norms is needed. This impacts directly on the expectations of participants in the course and afterwards in their school settings. Mention was particularly directed to the expectations of female teachers and the lack of equality they face within the system.
- Participants might benefit from an annual work-plan with ongoing support from GS. This highlighted the need to support participants beyond the delivery of the course. Could GS support other forms of visiting trainer support during the school year? Could suitable retired teachers be engaged to do this work?
- Some participants felt that the course was weighted too heavily toward theory and that more classroom methodology practice and practical teaching skills should be emphasized. Again this issue highlighted the ability to deliver on this with a growing number of participants.
- More class-observation (at least 2 for each participant) and micro-teaching opportunities could enhance the course but were time-consuming.

- A number of the above issues would benefit from more participation by former successful Indian teachers – translation, local knowledge, class observation, support for new teacher participants during term time.
- Strong emphasis on a workshop/observation/workshop/observation /.. practice process was supported. Tutors again emphasized the need for more practical teaching skills practice and input to the course delivery.

#### D. GS Team Issues.

There is a well developed structure within the GS team and the group participants. Discussion and information is transparent and there is a clear willingness among all to share successes and also concerns. The support for all involved is excellent and participants voiced a unanimous trust in the GS team. The ranking exercise referred to at the beginning of this paper illustrates the deep and unselfish engagement that all participants had in achieving the high level goals of GS. But as the programme grows issues relating to team-work and communications need to be addressed so that this level of ownership and engagement can continue at all levels.

The following issues were voiced by participants:

- Group or team leaders – should they be pre-selected or evolve during the training process? With the growth of the programme it will become more important to have a participative process for team selection and leadership. GS staff will have to depend on team leaders for many logistical and group issues as the programme expands.
- Handover of local knowledge and experience from previous teams and participants would be desirable. This should be done both at a macro level but more importantly at the local micro-level where local knowledge in the first few days of the delivery has been highlighted as a key concern.
- Some issues concerning communications to all individuals and all teams were voiced. A clear structure for communication during the team-training phase needs to be articulated and set in place.
- The role of the team and team leader needs to be defined vis-à-vis local school management concerns. Participants varied in their beliefs about what the relationship was with the local education system and who should engage on issues with local principals and managers.
- Local conditions vary but GS should have a standard communication procedure for all locations, including mobile phone access.
- With varied locations and participant engagement it is essential to have clear knowledge of local needs and issues that might hinder course delivery. This reiterates the need for ‘local knowledge’ handover and a local leaflet with essential information collated from past participants.
- Local media were engaged by a number of teams and it was promoted as a useful tool for gaining local support for the course and recognition for the Indian trainees.

Recommendations:

1. Build on local knowledge and input to 'situate' the course within the local school system and local cultural norms - helping towards a more sustainable programme.
2. Review the course delivery with an emphasis on practical skills and more student observation.
3. Include an assignment element into the training process to enhance continuity from each session. Support this with an online resource or reading list.
4. Have clear expectations and guidelines for the number of students participating so that quality and quantity are balanced for both tutors and students.
5. Provide a clear guide to the first 2 days of course delivery and support that with adequate resources and leadership advice – especially for first time tutors.
6. Produce a 'local' information leaflet based on the experience of past volunteers and local student input.
7. Review the appointment and role of team leaders within the training programme. Support this with clear communications strategies for dissemination of information and sharing during the training phase.