

Chapter 2

International Collaboration for Technology Enhanced Education in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This case is a case study of a collaborative project in the field of international education, within the specific discipline of teacher training. The author had an advisory role in this project which serves as a positive example of how STEP (social, technological, economic, and political) factors can be dealt with in the context of true partnership between western institutions and their counterparts in the developing world.

INTRODUCTION

Within both the academic and business worlds, and indeed further beyond into media and popular culture, there is a belief that one of the most pressing issues that must be addressed is a resolution to the growing problem of a technological gap between the developed and developing worlds, and between the rich and poor within developed societies themselves. This belief that technology can serve as the key factor in providing opportunities for learning, growth, and development can be traced back to the turn of the century, and found in references, not just in academia but also contemporary politics.

Such instances include a speech by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to the Millennium Assembly in 1999 when he spoke of “a yawning digital divide” between developed countries, such as Japan and the US, and their less developed counterparts in Africa. He exemplified this by pointing out that at this time there were “more computers in the USA than in the rest of the world combined and more telephones in Tokyo alone than in the whole of Africa” (1999); the perception being that enhanced access would be the best means of bridging the developmental gap.

Others such as Brenda Gourley (2004), speaking about the particular context of Africa, argued that there is “no simple solution (technology) to a complex problem.” Mark Warschauer (2003), in earlier

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writings about technology and social inclusion, had argued that the very notion of a digital divide is somewhat oversimplified, and that knowledge is an equally important component in the battle to bridge not just the digital divide but also concurrent and interlinked divides in such areas as income, opportunity, and information.

As a means of highlighting this from a global perspective he uses case studies from across the world, similar to those found in the work of Keniston (2001), and the aforementioned Gourley (2004). The latter author offers an excellent example from the work of Lumbreras & Sanchez (1998) where new technologies, if exploited effectively, can offer light in the darkness to those who may have previously been marginalised from society. This scenario, described by Gourley, was of teachers working in Chile on a project called *Hyperstories* which “exposes blind children to a learning methodology that uses 3D sound interactive software to help them construct cognitive structures that represents their surrounding space” and aims to move the participants from darkness to what they describe as “aural vision” (2004).

Through this example, described by its creators Lumbreras & Sanchez (1998) as one that “opens a path for disadvantaged blind children to enjoy the benefits made possible by the new technologies”, it is easier to readily envision how, if the affordances of technology can be exploited to overcome blindness, the same tools can be used to close the lips of Annan’s (1999) “yawning” divide. Yet this project did not work with such effectiveness on the merits of technology alone, but rather found its success in allowing participants to engage with it in a meaningful and beneficial manner, as envisioned by Warschauer (2003). Common sense should dictate that there is no point in facilitating ease of access to technology, which could be defined as *process*, if there is no tangible *product* at the end of that facilitation. For that reason this paper argues strongly for pragmatic solutions as exemplified by the case study described herein.

SETTING THE STAGE

The approaches used in this paper have been heavily shaped by the writings of Brown & Rodgers (2002) research framework, and White’s (2003) work in the evaluation and research of Language Learning in Distance Education. White herself draws heavily on the influence of Inglis (2001) in the selection and management of the educational domains used in distance education, Salmon’s (2000) work on e-moderating and platforms for designing online courses, and Richards’ (2001) studies in the fields of curriculum design and methodology used in the area of language teaching as a whole.

With regard to the abundant supply of contemporary literature on teacher education, influence has been drawn from authors who stress the importance of professionalism, personal experience and reflective practice, going as far back as Strevens (1974) and O’Brien (1981) to the more modern works of Ellis (1986), Woodward (1988), Pennington (1990), Richards & Nunan (1990), Wallace (1991), Parrott (1993), McGrath (1995), and Richards & Renandya (2002). Aside from this mainstream literature which has shaped my personal attitude to teacher education there is now a growing body of literature related to local contexts in Africa and Asia.

Brown & Rodgers (2002), in describing the process of embarking on research, argue that the main goal is “to report your findings to the world and hopefully to help reshape that world in some small measure as a result of your study” (p. 32). This is a view echoed by Silverman (2005) who suggests that case studies should be “exploratory” rather than “definitive”, so that they leave enough scope for further analytical opportunities. These studies should also feature “thick” descriptions of the context and the evolution of the particular project (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is around this framework of a concisely described Case Study that this chapter has been formulated. The goal is not to promote the project on its own merits but

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