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Exploring Historical Colonial Relationships in North-South School Partnerships

Ruth England
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Abbreviations

BASA	Black and Asian Studies Association
CCGL	Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Programme
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	UK Department for Education
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

Abstract

This small-scale qualitative research study examines the extent to which teachers involved in Global North-South School Partnerships engage with learning about shared colonial histories. Existing research in this field suggests that teachers' lack of knowledge and confidence leads to historical context being largely absent from such projects. Further, it is suggested that such omissions can fuel unhelpful stereotypes and assumptions about Global South regions and peoples. In this study, Postcolonial theory has been used to reflect on the importance of including historical colonial context for learning in Global North-South Partnerships and its potential for helping to develop historically conscious practice and a more critical view of development and global issues.

The study involved interviews with two UK-based teachers involved in school partnerships to discuss and explore the challenges and barriers they faced in engaging with historical colonial relationships in Global North-South Partnerships and also the benefits to diverse British communities.

The recommendations build on the findings from these discussions and aim to contribute to shifting Global North-South Partnerships from sites that potentially uphold, reinforce and reproduce colonial framing, to sites that critically engage with colonial history and its legacy.

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Introduction

Connecting, linking, and partnering with schools in the Global South is a long-standing practice in British education, with a broad range of reasons and interests for doing so. These are generally referred to as Global North-South Partnerships. The terms Global North and Global South here broadly refer to former colonising countries and colonised regions during the era of European state-led empires (Downes, 2013).

In an evaluative study, school leaders and teachers indicate that they are motivated to engage in Global North-South Partnerships specifically to broaden pupil's worldviews, and to better understand global and development issues (Bourn and Cara, 2013).

From a policy makers' perspective, motivations may include breaking down international barriers, developing skills to work in a globalised economy, promoting British interests abroad or increasing support for aid budgets at home (Bourn and Cara, 2013). International Partnerships through UK government programmes have increased since 2000 and have historically been funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

This research report focuses on the Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Programme (CCGL) (2018-2022), a programme that sits within this context. The CCGL programme website shares the aims of this programme:

'It will help you equip your pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to act more thoughtfully, ethically and responsibly as citizens and contributors to society.'

'There's no more authentic way for pupils to learn about global issues than by working with their peers in another country.' (British Council, 2022)

The CCGL programme is only one way that schools arrange international school partnerships in the Global South; partnerships also develop through personal contacts or support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The programme provides funding for reciprocal teacher visits and online partnerships, support to UK schools through a Local Advisor, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for UK teachers, and classroom resources. The CCGL programme focusses on countries that were formally or informally under British colonial influence and have British style education systems, often in the medium of English. It is notable that the UK school has the responsibility of applying for funding and reporting on project outcomes and spend.

While UK schools do engage in school partnerships with Global North countries, such partnerships tend to be focussed on modern foreign language learning and are framed and approached quite differently by schools when compared to Global North - South school partnerships.

This study focuses on the extent to which learning and understanding of shared histories between countries is part of Global North – South partnerships for UK teachers. I focused on the following research questions:

- RQ1: Why is it important to acknowledge historical colonial relationships when building school partnerships?
- RQ2: To what extent have teachers engaged in teaching and learning about the historical colonial relationship between the UK and their partner school country?

- RQ3: What do teachers see as the challenges and benefits of exploring historical colonial relationships in their practice?

Through the **Literature Review** I will outline and draw on Postcolonial theory to explore the first research question. In particular, examining how teachers' knowledge and perspectives on historical learning impacts school partnerships.

As a Local Advisor on the CCGL programme, my role has involved supporting, training and advising lead teachers and international coordinators in schools. In this small-scale qualitative study, I interviewed two secondary school teachers in the UK. Both of their schools received funding from the CCGL Programme to enable their partnerships, and I provided them with support as a Local Advisor. My approach and methods in this study are detailed in the **Methodology** section.

In the **Findings** section, the empirical data has been analysed and discussed in relation to the theoretical frameworks and research questions.

Finally, in the **Discussion and Recommendations** section, each research question is discussed in turn, in relation to the literature review and findings. Recommendations are then made, including suggested resources, recommended CPD training and avenues for further research.

Literature Review

This literature review explores why acknowledging historical and colonial relationships is important when building school partnerships (Research Question 1). This section begins with an outline of Postcolonial theory as it is utilised in this study to analyse the practice and approach of UK teachers in Global North-South School Partnerships. Specifically, a Postcolonial framing is used to explore teachers' worldviews, a Eurocentric framing of development and schooling, and assumptions and stereotypes about the Global South. Consideration is also given to the impact of Global North-South topics on Global South Heritage pupils in multi-racial British classrooms.

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory addresses the power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South that results from the legacy of the era of European colonialism. Postcolonial theorists argue that during colonialism, colonisers largely stayed rooted in their own culture while seeing other cultures, knowledge, and people as inferior, and therefore justifiably subject to paternalism, control, and violence. Although former colonial territories have since moved to independence, the same colonising countries continue to dominate through economic, cultural, and political forces (Young, 2003). Postcolonial theory focuses on deconstructing traditional, colonial ways of understanding and practice, and valuing different Global South cultures and knowledge systems (Martin & Griffiths, 2012). Whilst Postcolonial theory is most often utilised in the global context, it is also relevant when considering multi-racial British Society where Global South heritage British people continue to be racialised as 'other'.

In relation to Global North – South school partnerships, concerns around their framing to reproduce or reinforce oppressive power structures, ahistorical and paternalistic attitudes and negative stereotypes have long been raised (Andreotti, 2008, Burr, 2008, Martin and Griffiths, 2012). Given the focus of this study on historical learning in the context of Global North-South partnerships, Postcolonial theory is a useful lens to analyse how such partnerships may uphold or challenge 'colonial' framing and practice. The first consideration I am examining is teachers' worldviews.

Teachers' worldviews

Global North-South partnerships are typically led by one teacher in a Global North school setting and therefore this teacher's worldview in relation to Global North-South history, power imbalances, and cultural difference, is key in the overall approach to the project. Postcolonial theory informs reflection on an individual's 'colonial/colonised' thinking and can be utilised to examine how teachers' thinking influences the framing of the partnership, relationship building with Global South teachers, and what is taught to pupils.

Whilst Global North teachers typically hold more influence in the nature of the partnerships, Global South teachers can also bring colonial frames and expectations to the endeavour. There are often expectations from the Global South partner school that the partnership will bring resources, and both partners have an expectation that the Global North partner will be sharing 'better/superior' educational practices (Martin and Griffiths, 2011; Burr, 2008).

Moncrieffe (2020: 29) suggests that in a majority White British teacher workforce, '*White British traditions as "master narratives" can become reproduced as cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 2012)*'. With the vast majority of UK teachers having themselves been educated in the British Education System, either in Britain or in former colonial territories, a Eurocentric viewpoint is common (Moncrieffe, 2020). A Eurocentric viewpoint is from a perspective of Europe being 'at the centre' and the rest of the world at the periphery. It makes assumptions about who is superior, and who, inferior (Martin and Griffiths, 2011). The teaching workforce in UK schools is disproportionately White in relation to pupil ethnicity demographics (DfE, 2021).

An interesting difference with minority ethnic teachers is reflected in a YouGov (2022) survey. Asked about their perspectives on the school system and curriculum, 54% of teachers overall believed there is racial bias, rising to 93% of minority ethnic teachers. This data suggests that minority ethnic teachers may have better skills and experience at recognising potential racial/ cultural bias in school systems and curriculums.

Mohanty (1994, cited in Moncrieffe, 2020: 29) confers that the educational site is not neutral but a '*political and cultural environment which teachers and students will either produce, reinforce, recreate, or resist and transform ideas about history, culture, identity formation and nation-hood.*'

The widespread limitations on teachers' perspectives appears to be reflected in the lack of confidence and preparedness they report in addressing topics related to cultural and racial difference.

'Only 12% of teachers surveyed feel "empowered" to teach "optional" black-related topics such as colonialism, migration and identity against other competing 'optional' topics.

64% of teachers surveyed say they are NOT provided with enough ongoing training and personal development to feel empowered to teach diverse topics in their classes.' (YouGov 2022)

As suggested by the YouGov (2022) survey, initial teaching training and ongoing CPD could provide further opportunities for teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in relation to addressing such global topics. If such training is to prepare teachers to have the skills to examine, resist and transform existing dominant ideas then, as Jorgenson (2009: np, cited in Martin and Griffiths 2011: 919) suggests it must '*engage with the social-historical context and their positionality in relation to the people they engage with*'. It is only through such engagement that teachers can appreciate that knowledge is socially constructed, and they can critically examine their own Eurocentric perspectives (Moncrieffe 2020). Brock et al (in Martin and Griffiths 2011) recognise that opening up questioning of established beliefs and assumptions can be a challenging endeavour and raise discomfort.

The literature therefore suggests that it is important for teachers to recognise how their own worldviews are informed by a historical narrative in order that they can better examine and critically reflect on their own thinking and practice in their Global North-South partnerships.

European framing of Development

It is common practice for UK schools to have a fundraising element to their Global North-South partnership projects. Such activities can reinforce colonial models of dependency and donor/recipient relationship in relation to the Global South (Downes, 2013, Martin, 2007). Further, this charitable approach ignores the historical context that has led to such extreme Global North-South economic disparities.

Models of education and schooling in most Global South countries were imported as part of the colonial project. Formal schooling was seen as the site for British style education systems, and traditional forms of education were marginalised (Southard, 2017). The use of the English language is also a colonial legacy and school systems in the Global South often created a hierarchy of language where home and community languages were seen as inferior or prohibited (Southard, 2017). Postcolonial theorists argue that colonial models of education assert cultural dominance and extend economic exploitation of the colony. There are concerns that Global North - South school partnerships may continue to give an impression of superiority of current British Education Systems, the English language, and a deficit model of Global South Schooling (Andreotti, 2008, Burr, 2008, Martin and Griffiths, 2012).

Without historical knowledge of why these global dynamics exist, teachers can inadvertently uphold and reinforce ideas of development and dependency. The UK's implication in such disparities is also rendered 'invisible' when historical and colonial contexts are absent (Martins and Griffiths 2011). With school partnerships framed as opportunities to learn about 'other' cultures and lifestyles, the 'other' is positioned as an object of study, further contributing to colonial mind-sets (Martin and Wyness, 2013; Disney, 2005; Burr, 2008).

In response to such concerns, UK Government funded programmes have advocated for Global North-South partnerships which are '*equitable and sustainable*' with guidance advising a move away from paternalistic charitable approaches, and towards school partnerships based on mutual learning and exchange (Simpson, 2017). Despite these stated aims, Global North - South partnerships have continued to be funded, framed, and led by Global North organisations.

Martin and Wyness (2013) argue that, without historical context and deeper intercultural understanding, Global North - South partnerships cannot claim to be 'equitable and sustainable'. Further, they warn that in the absence of historical information, people will be '*drawn to the most obvious difference*' i.e., physical and cultural differences, in understanding global inequality.

The Black and Asian Studies association, amongst others, have long called for both the inclusion of pre-colonial African and Asian history, colonial era history, and an examination of the perspectives from which history is considered (Rüsen in Moncrieffe 2020; BASA, 2013).

A historical context which acknowledges Colonial relationships, and values indigenous knowledge systems and diverse perspectives, therefore helps to ensure a more critical view of development (Andreotti, 2008).

Assumptions and stereotypes

Stereotypes about people and countries in the Global South are pervasive. As Chimamanda Adichie states in her 'Ted' talk:

'If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think, that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and aids, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind white foreigner.' (Adichie, 2009)

Assumptions and stereotypes also need to be seen in their historical context. The promotion of stereotypes and misinformation about Global South people and countries was one way in which colonial powers justified oppression and subjugation. Contemporary stereotypes often have echoes from the colonial period and an historical understanding of this enables teachers and pupils to unpick them (Andrews, 2022).

Martin and Griffiths (2011: 908) found that in UK-African partnerships, most of which are former British colonies, the perpetuating of stereotypes about Africa and Africans, Northern led agendas and cultural dominance are widespread. They also suggest that Global North-South educational partnerships risk *'reinforcing, rather than challenging stereotypical views, perpetuating global inequalities and thus contributing to the unsustainability of contemporary Western lifestyles'*.

An understanding of the historical context for the origins of the common assumptions and stereotypes of the Global South, through colonial practice and its legacy, would better enable teachers to unpick and challenge them in themselves - and with the pupils they work with.

Multicultural, Multiracial, Multilingual Britain

As well as the historical context within Global North – South Partnerships giving us a better understanding of Britain's impact on previously colonised countries and related contemporary global issues, it also aids our understanding of multicultural, multiracial, multilingual contemporary Britain. A lack of historical context in Global North - South partnerships ignores the impact of colonialism on Global South countries and related migratory relationships to the UK. This can have the impact of further 'othering' pupils of Global South heritage who are often seen as 'from elsewhere' (Moncrieffe, 2020).

Further, with Eurocentric history reinforcing negative stereotypes and assumptions of Global South people and countries, pupils of Global South heritage are having to navigate the detrimental impacts of these environments (Moncrieffe, 2020).

This negative impact of framing of learning about people and countries in the Global South is in line with my own observations, conversations, and feedback from pupils and parents. In my role as a Local Advisor, one teacher shared with me the following quote expressed to him by his own child about his experience at school.

'When we learn about poor people, why does everyone look at me?' Year 4 pupil of Ugandan heritage

Global South cultures are often presented as static, separate, and superficial with a focus on food and festivals (Richardson and Miles, 2008). This presentation of cultures can be challenging for Global South heritage and mixed heritage pupils, who experience culture as multi-layered, porous, and fluid.

'If children in our culturally diverse classrooms are fed the untruth that diversity is new and encounter a story that suggests 'otherness' in all who are not 'white', then millions of children will not see themselves in the story and feel school history bears no relationship to their own 'rich mix' sense of British identity'. (BASA, 2013)

Historical understanding of colonial and related migratory histories, approached thoughtfully, can give children of Global South heritage a greater sense of their multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual British identity (Richardson and Miles, 2008).

And in fact, all children and young people in our schools can therefore develop a sense of themselves as part of a multicultural, multi racial, multilingual country and world community.

Summary

In summary, historical colonial context and knowledge, and inter-cultural understanding are important in North-South school partnerships in order to:

- Establish relationships that acknowledge historical and contemporary power imbalances, and are culturally inclusive;
- Understand how global economic, cultural, and political forces function;
- Value knowledge, culture, and experiences of Global South people and places;
- Identify, question and challenge assumptions and stereotypes;
- Better understand the historical context of school systems in the partner school country and its colonial influence;
- Develop a broader, more critical view of global development;
- Support children and young people of Global South heritage to feel secure in their British multicultural identities and confident in their sense of belonging;
- Support *all* children and young people to recognise themselves as part of a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual Britain and as Global Citizens.

Methodology

This is a small-scale qualitative study. The literature review above addressed Research Question 1. In order to answer Research Questions 2 and 3, I interviewed two secondary teachers in the UK who have a role as International Coordinator in their schools and have experience of working in International Partnerships.

- RQ2: To what extent have teachers engaged in teaching and learning about the historical and colonial relationship of the UK and their partner school country?
- RQ3: What do teachers see as the benefits and challenges of exploring this area of learning in their practice?

Both of these teachers' schools received funding from the CCGL Programme to enable their partnerships and I provided them with support as a Local Advisor.

As this study is concerned with teachers' worldviews, and how this construction plays out in their understanding of Global North - South school partnerships, I have taken a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth and nuanced exploration of teachers' feelings, understandings, and practice.

UK lead teachers in Global North – South partnerships are primary agents in leading, devising and setting the agenda so it is important to understand their knowledge and perspectives. These teachers influence how the partnership is framed, how they develop relationships with teachers in the Global South, and how they devise learning for pupils in UK schools.

The dialogical nature of one-to-one interviews offers the opportunity to build trust with the researcher, to understand the nuance and sensitivities of the topic, ask supplementary and clarifying questions and engage with knowledge, attitudes, and life experience.

The interview questions (Appendix 1) that guided the conversation were developed in reference to the research questions. Appendix 2 gives a mapping between the research aims and interview questions. Within ethical and security considerations the transcripts were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The emergent themes have been outlined and discussed in the **Findings** section.

The Participants

The two schools where the teachers in this study work are situated in Kent. They are both part of the selective system and are large Girls' Grammar schools with high exam performance, with Ofsted designating them 'Outstanding'. The majority of pupils in both are White British and there have been increasing numbers of Global South heritage pupils in recent years. Both schools have well below average numbers of pupils on free school meals. One of the schools has partnerships with schools in eight countries, six of which are in the Global South, the second school has partnerships with two schools, both in the Global South.

The two female teachers I approached to be interviewed were known to me through my work as a Local Advisor and I had also provided support to them in terms of applying for CCGL funding or accessing CPD. We have a positive working relationship, they were enthusiastic

about their work, and we had good communication, which I felt was important given the potential sensitivities of the discussion.

The teachers interviewed are both Secondary Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teachers. It is common that in secondary schools it is MFL teachers who are International Coordinators and lead on international partnerships as where partnerships are in Europe there is often a language learning element.

<p>Teacher A: Global South Heritage International Coordinator for more than five years Teacher for more than ten years</p>	<p>School has 1200 pupils, 8.2% on Free School Meals School has partnerships with schools in 8 countries, six in the Global South</p>
<p>Teacher B: White British Newly appointed as International Coordinator Teacher for more than ten years</p>	<p>School has 1500 pupils, 4.5% on Free School Meals School has partnerships in two countries, both in the Global South</p>

Data Collection

As a White British researcher, I was sensitive to my own and the participants' ethnic heritage and how this may come into play given that the focus of the discussion was historical and colonial relationships. I am also aware that it is common for people to have nervousness and reticence when discussing sensitive topics. As an experienced educator I am conscious that early on in my career my own limited knowledge of historical and colonial history had an impact on how I developed Global Citizenship Education practice with pupils and teachers. Therefore, in the interviews I was able to reflect on my own experience and empathise with nervousness in sharing concerns, anxiousness around feeling judged, or realisations of potential harmful practice.

The teachers and I had been working together successfully on online meeting platforms since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, so the interviews were held in this way in the Autumn term of 2021 and recorded before being transcribed. I interviewed the participants separately. In order to build rapport and make teachers feel comfortable to answer questions openly it would have been preferable to do interviews face to face, but we had built a friendly and open relationship already from working together so I felt it suitable to interview online.

The interviews were not affected by IT issues and the recording function worked well for transcribing purposes.

I had ten pre-prepared open-ended questions for this semi-structured interview (Appendix 1) and expanded these when teachers asked for further explanation and used supplementary questions to seek clarification or ask teachers for examples or to elaborate on a point.

During the interview, I found that the teachers seemed comfortable and excited about sharing with me the activities and actions they carry out within their partnership, but were more hesitant and cautious when responding to more reflective questions. They were forthcoming in describing their work, sharing stories and details about learning and relationships with teachers in their partnership and able to share their feelings.

Data analysis

The analysis of findings involved listening again to the recordings and transcribing them, examining the transcriptions and highlighting meaningful units of text that contributed to the themes of the study and research questions. I also highlighted common themes between the teachers.

After the initial readings of the transcripts, I was able to identify some emerging themes. As well as identifying these themes in relation to the research questions, I was able to record the frequencies with which particular ideas and concepts were revealed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues associated with the study were considered carefully in line with British Council guidance and my research questions and methods were discussed and agreed with my supervisor at the Development Education Research Centre, Institute of Education, University College London. The two teachers I interviewed were given research information sheets and signed consent forms that stated that the research would be anonymised, the interview would be recorded, and they could withdraw from taking part at any time.

The recording was for transcription purposes only and names of any schools were removed in order that they would not be identified. Data was kept securely on a personal computer and deleted on completion of the study in line with GDPR guidelines.

Limitations

The study has limitations in only interviewing teachers in the UK with a focus on teaching and learning in UK schools. There are other stakeholders who may have different perspectives and insight to the themes of the study that may include Senior Leaders, Head teachers, Pupils and Policy makers both in the UK and in partner school countries.

The self-reporting nature of interviews invites teachers to bring their own observations, interpretations and bias into play when describing the experiences of the partnership, the relationships involved and what pupils are learning. Young people's voices are only presented by the teachers in the interview and is therefore the teachers' own interpretation of what young people have reported to them.

Findings

This findings section details the key themes that arose in the interviews. These findings are discussed in relation to the research questions, in the next section.

The findings reveal a number of limitations in teacher engagement with colonial histories and the impact this has on their school partnership projects including the framing of the partnership, limitations on understanding of global issues, perpetuating global south stereotypes and assumptions, and reinforcing Eurocentric historical perspectives.

Teachers see a number of barriers and challenges in incorporating colonial histories in their Global North-South school partnerships including their own lack of knowledge and confidence, school history curriculums, and considerations of Global South heritage pupils

Framing of the partnership

There was some evidence from the interviews suggesting colonial framing of the partnerships. Both schools were engaged in partnerships where there was some element of material giving, in some aspects setting up a donor/recipient relationship.

Teacher B: 'We started a partnership with a different school that we had found through our fundraising and our work outside our school ... they have already visited them and given them computers and money for internet so they can get more access because they are very remote.'

The structure of the CCGL programme which requires the UK school to take the lead on applying, managing and reporting on funding also influences the shaping of the relationship between schools and engages a power dynamic with historical echoes.

A historical look at global issues

The interviews provided examples of topics explored between partner schools that were limited due to lack of historical context and understanding. 'Exploring Climate Change' was one global theme that both schools engaged with in their collaborative pupil projects.

The disparity of carbon emissions between the UK and the Global South country was a surprise for pupils, with the UK school carbon footprints significantly higher than their partner school in the Global South.

Teacher A: 'We've calculated the carbon footprint of in Nepal and here and it was a massive eye opener again for our girls, we were like, its 90% lower than ours, we can't believe that, what can we do?'

Having established their carbon footprints, pupils in both countries endeavoured to reduce their personal footprints over several weeks.

A historical context to climate change would examine the causes behind such disparities, and knowledge about the historical emissions of the industrialisation of the Global North, which in relation to climate change has a greater impact on the Global South.

Deficit model of the Global South

The colonial period established significant global wealth disparities between colonising and colonised regions of the world. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (in Martin and Griffiths 2011: 910) point out, *'the ideological position that created the situation now frames economically poor countries as lacking'*. This deficit model towards the Global South was reflected in teacher and pupil attitudes.

Some of the discussions in the interviews related to assumptions about human rights within partner school countries, particularly around gender equality. As both teachers interviewed taught in all girls schools, this seemed a particularly salient issue for them.

Teacher A: 'We do have very empowered young women in our school and in our country and I think it's very important as well that they pass that on to other countries.'

'And then our girls educated them on well, this is what works with our school, maybe that might work with your school, so they presented it to their SLT team.'

These comments reveal simplistic assumptions about gender equality in the Global South partner school. In asking secondary age children to advise the partner school Senior Leaders, there are echoes of colonial ideas.

Both schools had engaged with collaborative pupil projects and were exploring topics and themes in their own contexts, with both teachers emphasising that pupils were learning from each other. In reality, in the context of seeing the Global South as 'lacking' means that concepts of shared learning can be limited. There were some examples of this from the interviews when teachers were more hesitant in giving examples of what was being learnt from the partner school. In comparison to what they described that their school was giving their partner school, examples in the other direction seemed superficial.

'They taught our girls as well about ... for example about ... in recycling for example and in food. We are big about food waste.'

Stereotypes and assumptions

Teachers gave some examples of where the partnership had made visible or highlighted pupils stereotypes and assumptions and how these had been challenged.

Pupils had been surprised that students in their partner school had school uniform similar to theirs and that their partner school peers had taken such care and attention in an activity to prepare a presentation and that they held such pride in their culture and country. Their assumptions had been that their partner school had been lacking and their peers less interested in their schoolwork or had nothing to be proud about. These partnership activities had begun to challenge some of these assumptions.

One teacher expressed how her own assumptions had also been challenged when they had visited their partner school in Nepal, that the pupils there had high aspirations for their careers and for *'rebuilding their country'* (Teacher A). This had challenged her perceptions of young people in the Global South as only aspiring to migrate to the Global North.

Interestingly, the same teacher also encountered pupils being shocked at her self-description as *an immigrant*, apparently revealing some their own assumptions.

Teacher A: ‘... a lot of them as soon as I say I’m an immigrant they’re like (gasp, step backwards) ... let’s start that conversation so that was quite important for us as well.’

While the interactions that the partnership enabled did reveal and challenge previously held stereotypes and assumptions, there was no exploration of how and why such stereotypes and assumptions are widely held, or how they relate to historical colonial relationships.

Eurocentric Histories

Both schools in the study have a Gurkha regiment stationed nearby and children of Nepali heritage in their school community. One teacher explains why they engaged with some history learning in relation to the Gurkha and Nepali community.

Teacher B: ‘It’s mainly for the Gurkha regiment and the war and how... it’s been 200 years of hasn’t it of partnerships and mutual understanding, mutual help I think, mutual gaining from both countries from working together. So, it’s been mainly that connection to the Gurkha.’

The suggestion that the historical relationship between the UK and Nepal has related to ‘*mutual understanding, help and gaining*’ suggests a misunderstanding of the historical and contemporary power imbalance between the UK and Nepal. In addition, an awareness of the ongoing contemporary legacies of this historical period and the Gurkha community’s continued fight for equal pay, pensions and benefits with their British counterparts, and ongoing experiences of racism, is important missing context (BBC News 2021, UK Nepal Friendship Society 2020).

For some teachers who are accustomed to a Eurocentric and singular perspective on historical knowledge, the idea of including multiple, marginalized, and diverse perspectives can be a challenging idea (Richardson and Miles, 2008). This is reflected by Teacher B:

Teacher B: ‘So there probably isn’t the perfect answer is there but we need to somehow agree perhaps on a set of facts.’

Lack of Knowledge, Confidence and Skills

It was apparent that both teachers interviewed felt that they lacked knowledge of colonial history both generally and in relation to their partner school countries.

Teacher B: ‘I think as a staff there would be quite big gaps in our taught knowledge about the colonial past ...’

Both teachers acknowledged that discussing colonial histories is controversial and contentious, and that they did not feel confident in managing such discussions and learning currently.

Teacher B: ‘It would need to be handled very sensitively ... Just a slight nervousness about getting it wrong.’

Teacher A: 'So yeah, it's a sensitive topic and it needs a sensitive approach, and it needs somebody knowledgeable with you know, all the background and the pros and cons.'

The teachers showed awareness that one of the challenging aspects of colonial history is the multiple perspectives and diversity of opinions, raising a need for the inclusion of a variety of perspectives.

Teacher A: '... it's a very big issue that needs to be tackled so we don't want to indoctrinate, we just want to you know here is all the information, you can make your own choice, your own ideas but you need to have a wide variety of perspectives.'

Teacher B: 'I would want more awareness and from their perspective not just from what I could look up in a standard British textbook, that's going to give me part of the story. I'd need the other parts, the missing parts.'

One teacher highlighted the complexity and sensitivity required in exploring the diversity of perspectives within their local Global South heritage community.

Teacher B: '... we have several different Nepali communities... And they don't always have the same perspective, so that's where the sensitivity comes in, its sensitivity knowing within the Nepali community the different elements there.'

One teacher raised some of the sensitivities around exploring colonial histories in relation to contemporary debates around migration and racism, both in how such discussion may unfold in their multi-ethnic UK classroom, and between young people in partner schools.

Teacher A gave an example of what might be said or expressed if pupils view colonisation as a positive endeavour for colonised regions:

Teacher A: '... [students might say] well you benefited because it's a good thing that we colonised because you got this and that from us. And that could go wrong very very easily.'

They also recognised that such views could have a negative impact on Global South heritage pupils in the UK and in partner schools.

Additionally, Teacher A suggested that partner school pupils could potentially place responsibility for contemporary economic, political, and social issues on UK pupils.

'... and it could be from the partner school abroad, it could be a quite harsh: Well, you did this to my country and it's your fault.'

Teacher A recognised that specific training for managing challenging conversations in the classroom would be necessary before introducing such topics. A recent external training she attended on teaching about migration had inspired her with new ideas and techniques.

The History Curriculum

Though nervous about exploring histories, both teachers were interested in developing learning in this area and could see ways to connect with the History curriculum and engage history specialists with their school partnerships.

Teacher B: 'I have spoken to a head of history about it... ... we're trying to include it at least in our key stage 3 when they start history'

Teacher B: 'I think it would be really great to hear from Nepali people, to share their understanding of how they learn their history of Nepal, of their colonial past.'

While the teachers' suggestions of enriching the history curriculum may be a positive move that would give pupils a better historical context for the school partnership, it also appeared that the allocation of responsibility for this history teaching to the history curriculum was an expression of discomfort with the idea of engaging with this historical context themselves in their role in leading the partnership.

Global North-South Teacher Relationships

Both teachers had spent time getting to know and developing a working relationship with their partner school's teachers in Nepal. They described regular communication and developing friendships.

Neither teacher currently engages in any exploration of colonial history with their partner teachers, but one teacher suggested that having now established a working relationship, that she felt more comfortable to do so.

Teacher B: 'I think when we started our partnership I think it is quite tricky to get it right. If you go in straight away with that it would backfire. So I do believe that you need first of all an established partnership before you start looking at the Colonial links.'

This teacher was concerned that having discussion and exploration of colonial histories with partner schoolteachers would be detrimental to their relationship and expressed fears of 'getting it wrong' (Teacher B).

Impact on pupils with Global South heritage

Both teachers interviewed shared that their choice of partner country was influenced by the heritage of pupils in their school.

Teacher A: 'We chose Nepal because we have a very big Gurkha community in our school, and we thought it was very important for them to be back in touch with their roots and with their cultural heritage. But also, for the whole school community to be aware of the culture, of their language.'

This teacher felt that this choice would give Nepalese heritage pupils the opportunity to develop stronger connections with their heritage through cultural and language exchange.

In addition, the teacher felt that the impact on the wider school community would be a better understanding of Nepalese culture and some understanding of why significant numbers of Nepalese heritage people live in the UK.

Teacher A: 'Why are they here as well? There are so many students, so many parents, so many people in the community that, they know the Gurkha regiment is there, but they don't know why.'

There were several examples of cultural exchange activities including the planting of British and Nepali gardens, and a British and Nepalese celebration event that including food, dance, and other cultural activities.

Teacher A: 'We had a celebration evening where we invited both parts of the community, so it was the British and the Nepalese community ... it was beautiful. And I think it really cemented that relationship that you know, we're all equal and we're all in it together you know. There is more that unites us than divides us which is one of our main aims really to put that across to the girls.'

This description suggests that the British and Nepalese community are separate and distinct, and any power imbalances, historical or contemporary, irrelevant.

While both teachers steered clear from including historical context in their partnership, some historical context was explored through a talk from a representative of the Gurkha regiment, and from Nepalese heritage pupils in an assembly presentation.

Teacher A: 'For Remembrance, we brought the Gurkha regiment in to talk about it, to talk about the history, how they helped Britain in the war, and it was an eye opener, for everybody.'

It is notable that these examples suggest that colonial historical context is more relevant and important to Global South heritage people.

Both teachers did report positive feedback from pupils of Global South heritage on their sense of identity and connection with their heritage through the partnership.

Teacher B: 'What she described was that she had her culture at home and then her school life and now she understood how to blend almost what she felt like were two identities.'

Teacher A: 'One of the girls in Nepal asked our students, what is the best thing about this partnership, and she said... being proud of my Nepalese heritage again.'

These comments reveal that the school partnership can have a distinct positive impact on pupils of Global South heritage, both in terms of helping them integrate multi-layered identities, and through developing their sense of cultural self-esteem and pride.

Discussion and Recommendations

In this section, each research question is discussed in turn with reference to the Literature Review and Findings. The recommendations drawn from this discussion are then given. The recommendations are also supported by a collection of resources in Appendix 3.

RQ1: Why is it important to acknowledge historical colonial relationships when building school partnerships?

In order to address this research question, I think it would be useful to highlight the impacts of *not* acknowledging historical colonial relationships in Global North - South school partnerships, as detailed in the Literature Review. The lack of historical context leads many schools to adopt a dependency model towards Global South school partnerships. The charitable approach, the funding models, and activities that many schools take, including to some extent the two schools in this study, most starkly demonstrate this. For example, one school partnered with a Global South school where an existing charitable relationship was in existence, both partook in fundraising activities and controlled the budgets.

Further, this lack of historical context affects what pupils learn about global issues. In relation to contemporary global economic disparities between Global North and Global South countries, partnerships can inadvertently present such disparities as a result of countries lacking competence and assumptions that the Global North models of development are superior. This also invisibilises the historical and contemporary role of the UK in contributing to global inequalities. Global South knowledge is undervalued, a broad diversity of perspectives are missing, and other ways of knowing and understanding left unexplored. The findings show that collaborative pupil project themes were missing in historical knowledge and explanation. For example, asking pupils in both countries to reduce their carbon emissions despite such a wide disparity between the schools' carbon footprints and no explanation of the historical context for such disparities, limits pupils' understanding of this global issue.

As highlighted in the literature review, there is significant acknowledgement that North - South partnerships cannot claim to be '*equitable and sustainable*' in the absence of historical context. Further, this absence can contribute to children and young people concluding that obvious physical and cultural differences are markers of inferiority, thereby contributing to harmful stereotypes and assumptions about Global South countries and people. Inevitably, this can also have a detrimental impact on students of Global South heritage in multi-racial British classrooms.

In terms of the findings, it was positive that both teachers were able to acknowledge and celebrate the heritage of Global South heritage pupils in their schools, and teachers shared some examples of reported positive impacts from these pupils. However, they found it more difficult to engage in the potential for negative impacts in light of Global South countries being presented as 'lacking', having limited cultural value and in need of Global North knowledge.

RQ2 To what extent have teachers engaged in teaching and learning about the historical colonial relationship between the UK and their partner school country?

Many of the approaches and practices that were evident in the partnerships in this study were reflective of the wider landscape presented in the literature review. The teachers acknowledged that they had little engagement with the historical colonial relationships of the UK and the Global South country in their partnership work, that they lacked historical knowledge, and were nervous and lacked confidence in incorporating historical colonial perspectives into the partnership.

Despite teachers' lack of knowledge, confidence, and application of historical context evident in the findings, both teachers in the study did recognise that such historical context was salient to such partnerships. Both schools did have some exposure to historical knowledge through the local Gurkha heritage community. During a community event, local Gurkha community members shared some of their history and role in the British military. In describing these events, the teachers revealed their limited knowledge of this history, and in turn limits to understanding of the importance of this history for the local community and pupils of Global South heritage or in improving all pupils' understanding of historical migratory experiences and multi-racial communities.

RQ3: What do teachers see as the challenges and benefits of exploring historical colonial relationships in their practice?

Both the literature review and findings show that teachers' own knowledge of historical context, and its relevance to Global North - South partnerships, is a significant barrier to teachers recognising how histories are interrelated and give essential context to contemporary debates, notions of development, and shared global issues. As pointed out in the findings, this lack of historical colonial knowledge is an issue in the broader UK school education system, not just in the context of North - South School partnerships. The teachers in this study mirror the wider teaching community in acknowledging the lack of training and support for teachers wanting to engage with topics that relate to historical colonial relationships and migration.

The teachers' awareness of some of the challenges include an understanding that there is a diversity of viewpoints which can elicit conflicting and contentious views, and that there is bias in how history is presented. They were honest about lacking confidence, nervous about their lack of knowledge and skills in facilitating difficult conversations, and often chose to stay in a place of comfort by not engaging with it. In order to address some of these issues, several scholars (see for example Martin 2007, Andreotti 2008, Burr 2008, Asare 2009, Moncrieffe 2020) emphasise the need for training and reflection by teachers on their own positionality and worldviews in order to engage with genuine shared learning.

In relation to their pupils of Global South heritage, teachers were less aware or able to acknowledge their own Eurocentric worldview. The teachers were motivated to acknowledge and want to celebrate their pupils' heritage to both support their own positive sense of

identity and for the community to better understand the presence of people of Global South heritage. The teachers expressed some positive feedback from pupils of Global South heritage about how the partnership had supported their connection with their heritage. What would require further research would be how the partnership enables pupils of Global South heritage to have a sense of their British multi-cultural identity. If Global South countries are presented as 'lacking', assumptions and stereotypes can be perpetuated. Where culture is presented as static, and attention focused on limited cultural expressions such as food and language, then there is the danger of a negative impact on pupils of Global South heritage who may feel 'othered' or the need to distance themselves from their heritage.

Certain elements of North - South partnerships are, however, beyond the control and influence of teachers, but still significantly impact how partnerships are framed and conducted. For example, funding bodies may have particular agendas and structures which mean the Global North partner leads on the activities, in a language they are very confident in and with control of the budget.

Recommendations for Teachers' Continuing Professional Development

These recommendations build on the findings above and aim to contribute to shifting Global North - South partnerships from sites that potentially uphold, reinforce, and reproduce colonial framing, to sites that critically engage with colonial history and its legacy.

To support this overall aim, it is suggested that teachers should be able to:

- Establish partner relationships that acknowledge historical and contemporary power imbalances, and are culturally inclusive;
- Understand the historical context of global economic, cultural, and political forces and how they function;
- Value knowledge, culture, and experiences of Global South people and places;
- Identify, question, and challenge assumptions and stereotypes;
- Develop a broader, more critical view of global development;
- Support children and young people of Global South heritage to feel secure in their British Multicultural identities and confident in their sense of belonging;
- Support *all* children and young people to recognise themselves as part of a multicultural, multiracial, multilingual Britain and world community.

More specifically, outlined below are four key areas for teacher development that support these overarching objectives. A list of useful CPD and teaching resources to support teachers has also been included in Appendix 3.

Historical knowledge

Historical knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the UK and the Global South country and their related education systems needs to be an integral part of teachers' CPD and research in preparing for Global North - South partnerships. In doing so, teachers should take a critical approach to histories, engaging with a variety of perspectives and acknowledging historical lenses and whether or not they distort, misinform or miss important context. In doing so, teachers and pupils can be more informed about the contemporary

legacies of the colonial past and make more historically conscious decisions about the future.

Critical thinking and positionality

Teachers need to be given time, CPD, and training to develop their own critical literacy and reflective practice as well as the more practical aspects of school partnerships. Teacher reflection requires an examination of one's own positionality, worldviews, and location within a historical and contemporary context.

Andreotti and De Souza's (2008) study programme 'Through Other Eyes', for example, is a useful tool for teachers to reflect on their worldviews, recognise these in relation to the historical context and acknowledge and readdress their assumptions. This process is described as '*learning to unlearn*'.

Cultural education

A critical perspective on teaching about culture and heritage instead of simplified, stereotypical views can be developed by supporting teachers to:

- Recognise similarities *across* cultures, religions and identities;
- Recognise Britain as multicultural, multiracial and multilingual;
- Understand how Britain came to be multicultural, multiracial and multilingual;
- Understand diversity *within* nations, cultures, communities and religions;
- Recognise that cultures can change and develop, over time;
- Recognise the ways in which communities give individuals and groups a sense of belonging or not belonging;
- Understand how British food, dance and culture are multicultural, emerging from a history of Empire and migration;
- Explore our own multiple, layered, complex and fluid identities and communities;
- Understand exclusion and marginalization.

(Richardson and Miles, 2008).

Facilitation and pedagogy

Both the literature review and findings acknowledged the complexity, challenges, and discomfort in engaging in discussion on historical and colonial histories. Teacher CPD requires not only development of teachers' historical knowledge and multiple perspectives, but is more complex and requires pedagogies and facilitation skills that can hold and manage complexity, uncertainty, and challenging conversations in the classroom.

Facilitation and pedagogies which support teachers' engagement with reflection, critical thinking and shifting mind-sets also need to support emotions and feelings which arise from conflicting, contentious, and uncomfortable discussions. In turn, teacher CPD then also needs to develop teachers' skills in supporting their pupils' engagement in these discussions in the classroom.

Appendix 3 recommends resources which are exploratory, and enquiry based, helping teachers and students to develop critical thinking and support community dialogue, rather than oppositional 'debate'.

Further Research

Through this research process, the following areas of interest arose for suggested further research.

In regard to Global North – Global South teacher interactions and relationships, there appear to be some assumptions as to Global North teachers' intercultural skills and their ability to create equitable partnerships. As both Fiedler and Brock et al. (in Martin and Griffiths, 2012) suggest, such interactions may benefit from facilitation or supervision. This can support participants to '*critically engage in meta-reflection that will enable them to examine (and readjust) their beliefs, attitudes and dispositions*' (McAllister, in Martin and Griffiths, 2012). Further research into such practices and their impact would be valuable, particularly in relation to exploring colonial histories.

The impact of Global North - South partnerships and Global Learning on UK children and young people of Global South heritage has been touched on throughout the paper. It is often assumed that there will be a positive impact on engagement with global perspectives and learning about global challenges. Yet, as has been raised in this study, there is also a danger of further 'othering' of UK children and young people of Global South heritage, or of their complex identities being simplified or patronised. Examples given in this study have been through the lens of the teachers, however, and further understanding of pupils' experiences through further research would be valuable.

Chetty (2020) suggests that Global South heritage pupils can particularly benefit from exposure to Global South academics from outside Europe who are well placed to challenge dominant discourses. By linking European colonisation to migration, Global South heritage pupils may be better able to situate their families' experiences within a wider context of power relations. Research into such learning and its impact would be interesting both from the perspective of impacts on Global South heritage pupils, and also in terms of how such learning could be incorporated into Global North - South partnerships more broadly.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your school partnership. How long have you been partnered and how did the partnership come about?
2. What were the learning aims of your partnership?
3. Can you give me some examples of collaborative pupil projects you have undertaken together where you have explored issues from the perspectives of each school and country they are in?
4. How have you explored the disparities between the two countries?
5. What causes of these disparities have you been able to explore with pupils?
6. Have you explored the historical connections and shared histories between your countries? How have you done this? Can you give examples?
7. How have you discussed or explored Colonial histories between your countries?
8. How confident do you feel to explore learning about Colonial Histories in your partnership?
9. What concerns do you have about learning about shared histories with your partner school?
10. What opportunities do you see for understanding the causes of contemporary global issues within a historical context?
11. What more would you like to know or what training/support might you need in order to do this?

Appendix 2: How the interview questions relate to the research questions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ2: What do teachers know and understand about colonial histories of the UK and their partner school country? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me some examples of collaborative pupil projects you have undertaken together where you have explored issues from the perspectives of each school and country they are in? • How have you explored the disparities between the two countries? • What causes of these disparities have you been able to explore with pupils? • Have you explored the historical connections and shared histories between your countries? How have you done this? Can you give examples? • How have you discussed or explored Colonial histories between your countries?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ3: What do teachers see as the benefits and challenges of exploring this area of learning in their practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How confident do you feel to explore learning about Colonial Histories in your partnership? • What concerns do you have about learning about shared histories with your partner school? • What opportunities do you see for understanding the causes of contemporary global issues within a historical context? • What more would you like to know or what training/support might you need in order to do this?

Appendix 3: CPD and Teaching Resources

Historical Knowledge

- [Colonialism, Slavery and the Industrial Revolution](#)
This history teaching pack explores the relationship between Britain's Industrial Revolution and colonialism in the Caribbean, Ireland and India. The pack is organised into four units: Britain's Industrial Revolution which explores the wealth that Britain obtained by trade and colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries; Britain's connection with the Caribbean and West Africa; the Relationship between Ireland and India and the Industrial Revolution in Britain; the final unit draws a number of the main themes together and examines the Great Exhibition of 1851. An extremely useful resource that covers a number of very complex and difficult areas very well. The use of a range of source material in particular is very effective.
- [Confronting injustice: racism and the environmental emergency](#)
This report shows the role of British Colonialism in the current climate crisis. It is intended as a resource that will help to consolidate anti-racist thinking and provide an overview of the role that systemic racism plays in the outcomes of environmental emergency today.
- [Decolonising the curriculum: BBC Bitesize](#)
A group of sixth formers from London are campaigning to change the way British colonial history is taught on the National Curriculum. They all have family connections to the British Empire and feel that their past is not being taught properly in school History lessons. While colonialism is taught in some schools, it's not a compulsory part of the curriculum and these young people feel passionately that it should be
- [Global Histories: Reading International Solidarity Centre](#)
A teaching resource for KS2-4. These teaching materials aim to enable pupils to better understand the context and impact of colonial history on contemporary society, and its relationship to stereotypes and discrimination in 21st century Britain.
- [Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain](#)
This website presents the often untold stories of the generations of migrants who came to and shaped the British Isles. While it is primarily designed to support teachers and students studying migration to Britain, its aim is to be a useful resource for anyone interested in Britain's migration history. Includes section on Industrial and Imperial Migrations 1750 – 1900.

- [Doing Justice to History: Transforming Black History in secondary schools](#), Abdul Mohamud and Robin Whitburn
Doing Justice to History challenges everyday racism in society and offers counter-stories to the singular narratives that still prevail among national historians and in school curricula.

Critical thinking and positionality

- [Learning to Read the World Through Other Eyes: Introducing plurality and complexity in global education](#)
This programme of study and cross-cultural exercise invites learners to examine the origins of their own perceptions and cultural logics (their values and assumptions), to develop self-reflexivity, to re-evaluate their own positions in the global context and to learn from other local ways of knowing and seeing.

Cultural education

- [Critical Multiculturalism: Theory and Praxis](#), edited By Stephen May and Christine E. Sleeter
Critical Multiculturalism: Theory and Praxis brings together international scholars of critical multiculturalism to directly and illustratively address what a transformed critical multicultural approach to education might mean for teacher education and classroom practice.
- [Research to reflect on: developing a culturally responsive pedagogy: National Education Union](#)
A culturally responsive pedagogy can be defined as a teaching philosophy that is premised on the idea that valuing the cultural world of our pupils is central to learning. Staff need to take time to understand the sociocultural worlds of their pupils, listen to them, value them and incorporate their cultural identities and histories within teaching practice.

Facilitation and Pedagogy

- [Philosophy for Children \(P4C\) Sapere](#)
P4C helps learners to be critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinkers. SAPERE promotes, encourages and supports the exploration of challenging and controversial issues through questioning and facilitated philosophical dialogue within communities of philosophical enquiry.
- [Open Spaces for Dialogue and Inquiry: Critical Literacies in Global Citizenship Education](#)
A central aim behind the use of a dialogue-based approach to engaging students with controversial issues is to draw out critical literacy and independent thinking. The rationale behind this is that learning to live together in a global, diverse and unequal context involves young people developing skills that can support them to negotiate and cope with change, complexity, uncertainty and insecurity



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About Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is a free and flexible programme for schools around the world based on learning, knowledge sharing and international collaboration. Connecting Classrooms supports teachers to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to act more thoughtfully, ethically and responsibly as citizens and contributors to society.

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is funded by the British Council and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and runs from 2018 through to 2022. For more information go to: www.britishcouncil.org/connectingclassrooms

The CCGL Practitioner Research Fund

The CCGL Practitioner Research Fund runs from 2019-2022 with the aim to support educators to conduct research related to global learning and overseas school partnerships within schools. DERC was contracted by British Council to support educators in the research and writing process.

About the Development Education Research Centre

The Development Education Research Centre (DERC) is the UK's leading research centre for development education and global learning. The DERC team conducts research on development education, global learning, and global citizenship education, runs a Masters' degree course, supervises doctoral students and produces a range of reports, academic articles and books. DERC also runs a highly successful free online course Global Education for Teachers which is hosted via Futurelearn. DERC is located in the UCL Institute of Education, the world-leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science.