

# Making a MEAL out of a Global Professional Learning Community

**A transformative approach to global education**

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## **Abstract**

The implementation of global education in schools has, despite the plethora of different terms used to describe it, been defined by an approach that ensures global issues are embedded (1) in the curriculum (a subject-specific approach), (2) across all subject areas (an interdisciplinary approach), and (3) in the school's ethos (a 'whole-school approach'). The means by which each of these three approaches has been implemented, however, have been far less cohesive. This paper will argue that one potential tool is extending the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model to focus on the global (i.e. creating a Global Professional Learning Community [GPLC], also known as a Networked Learning Community). We suggest that this form of collaborative working is a vital tool in creating effective policy and shared practice for global learning. Moreover, its methods incorporate the key values of the global learning ethos: participation, inclusion, and critical and creative thinking.

The paper explores this premise through the analysis of Sazani Associates' GPLC, established over a period of ten years and incorporating approximately 40 schools in both Wales and Zanzibar. It focuses on how the GPLC has developed through peer exchange, skill sharing, continuous professional development, and a critical learning approach to evaluation in both localities. This paper explores how this GPLC contributes to the quality of education from a Northern and Southern perspective, and how it counters the tension between the aims of global learning approaches and their more prescriptive means. It also considers the role of

critical reflection in measuring a transformative approach to learning, where both educators and pupils are able to explore the global in a structured yet holistic way.

**Keywords:** global learning, Professional Learning Community, sustainable development, global citizenship, monitoring and evaluating learning

## Introduction

In this paper, we argue that global learning in schools is best achieved by extending the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model to focus on the global – that is, by creating a Global Professional Learning Community (GPLC), also known as a Networked Learning Community (Jackson and Temperley, 2006: 2–3). This form of collaborative working, with its aims of ‘promot[ing] and sustain[ing] the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning’ (Stoll *et al.*, 2005: 1), thereby raising standards, promoting pupil participation, and developing effective leadership and management, can be viewed as a vital tool in creating effective policy and shared practice for global learning.

We explore this premise through an analysis of Sazani Associates’ Global Professional Learning Community (GPLC), established over a period of ten years and incorporating approximately 40 schools in both Wales and Zanzibar. Sazani Associates is an NGO with registered offices in Wales (UK), Zanzibar (Tanzania), and Belize. It was set up in 2005 by a group of experienced practitioners in the fields of global learning and international development. This paper assesses the development journey of the GPLC, analyses the problems and challenges encountered, and then measures the impact of the GPLC on its (in)direct beneficiaries, using a Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) approach.

## Embedding global learning

The GPLC focuses on the relationship between teaching and learning. This is done through a multidimensional ‘Healthy and Sustainable Schools’ framework that focuses on pedagogical approaches and child-focused teaching methods. These include global and local issues, life and enterprise skills, and peer learning. The GPLC incorporates the key values of the global learning ethos: participation, inclusion, and critical and creative thinking (Bourn, 2012: 9). We do this as PLCs should be led by ‘an inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to enquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils’ learning’ (Stoll *et al.*, 2005: 1). We assess whether this type of GPLC can counter the tension between the aims of global learning approaches and their more prescriptive means, by creating a transformative approach where both educators and pupils are able to explore the global in a structured yet holistic way.

The implementation of global education in schools has, despite the plethora of different terms used to describe it,<sup>1</sup> been defined by an approach that ensures global issues are embedded (1) in the curriculum (a subject-specific approach), (2) across all subject areas (an interdisciplinary approach), and (3) in the school's ethos (a 'whole-school approach') (Learning and Teaching Scotland [LTS], 2011: 1). Implementing any of these three approaches individually has been far less effective than applying them all collectively; thus, aggregating approaches together has been the common strategy. Examples of measures that implement these approaches could include:

- developing themed classroom activities;
- celebrating global days (e.g. World AIDS Day, Africa Day, etc.);
- introducing the global into various school policies (e.g. promoting healthy eating, fair-trade food and/or products, sustainable transport, etc.);
- encouraging school councils to come up with pupil-led actions relating to global issues (e.g. recycling teams);
- introducing school-community-global links through exchanges and active links (e.g. with businesses, community organizations, and individuals);
- a focused assembly programme linked to school, local, national, and international events and connected to concurrent learning and teaching activities in curriculum areas;
- learning in Personal and Social Education (PSE) or equivalent;
- school fundraising activities;
- physical manifestations of the school's global ethos in posters, information displays, and art work;
- an environmental focus on the fabric and infrastructure of the school grounds and buildings; and
- modelling of behaviour and attitudes consistent with the school's global ethos by all members of staff in their approach to relationships, learning, and teaching. (Bourn, 2012; LTS, 2011; Al Kanaan, n.d.).

While it is generally agreed that embedding the global cannot be restricted to any one of these three approaches alone, it has been argued that global learning is most thoroughly embedded where there is a whole-school approach (LTS, 2011: 4). More specifically, the importance of collaborative working, such as between teachers within the school through Professional Learning Communities, fosters 'leadership at all levels' where 'teachers become leaders of learning in a collaborative environment' (LTS, 2011: 4). Similarly important collaborative working can take place in external

networks, or 'school-to-school' clusters (Jackson and Temperley, 2006: 2–3). This has been acknowledged as an effective means to embed global learning across the three approaches, and in particular to underpin the whole-school approach through a sense of ownership and participation (Jackson and Temperley, 2006: 2; Lieberman and Wood, 2003).

The above example approaches for embedding the global can be rather piecemeal: any one school might find it difficult to implement several of the examples given, let alone all of them, and it is not an exhaustive list. Indeed, this difficulty often leads head teachers to feel despondent and overwhelmed when trying to encourage global learning across the school environment. This is compounded by the 'emphasis ... [on] campaigning and action rather than making a direct connection to knowledge' (Bourn, 2012: 12) and by the fact that global issues are often seen as value-laden (Hurford and Read, 2009: 84). We would argue that any attempt to implement as many of these activities as possible would, in fact, be futile, since they tend to impose what to think and offer universal pedagogies, rather than being transformative and encouraging critical thinking (Bourn, 2012: 8; Scheunpflug, 2008; Andreotti and De Souza, 2008; Allen, n.d.: 40). For instance, it has been widely argued that NGO-created lesson plans deliver prescribed answers rather than encouraging educators and learners to develop their own personal philosophy, informed by critical engagement with competing perspectives (Hurford and Read, 2009: 90). They thus encourage the belief that 'someone out there' has the answers, rather than 'address[ing] the competences teachers need to address the challenges of globalisation' (Bourn, 2012: 8, 10; Hurford and Read, 2009: 85). This, in turn, serves only to reinforce teachers' self-assessment of 'their own ability to teach global learning in terms of knowledge about global issues [...]. They see it as being about facts' (Bourn, 2012: 7). If development education is, in actual fact, 'a pedagogy for social justice' (Bourn, 2012: 8), then it is necessarily transformative, i.e. not based on acquiring or transferring factual knowledge, but rather on being able to 'make connections between the individual and personal, from the local to the global ... [which] challenges dominant orthodoxies on education and perceptions about the world and enables the learner to look at issues and the world from a difference place' (Bourn, 2008: 18). It is therefore imperative to find a way to embed global learning through this three-pronged approach, using transformative rather than prescriptive means.

## **Global Professional Learning Communities and collaborative working**

A PLC can be defined by eight key characteristics:

1. shared values and vision;
2. collective responsibility for pupils' learning;

3. collaboration focused on learning;
4. group as well as individual professional learning;
5. reflective professional enquiry;
6. openness, networks and partnerships;
7. inclusive membership; and
8. mutual trust, respect and support (Stoll *et al.* 2005: 1–2).

Each of these characteristics is clearly compatible with a global learning approach, and together they are noticeably different from the piecemeal approaches to embedding global learning; moreover, their focus on collaborative working should enable a coherent and sustainable global learning strategy, where all are involved and answers come from within, rather than being imposed from the outside.

Indeed, one of the most common reasons that education professionals do not integrate the global into the school environment is lack of understanding, or fear of broaching potentially controversial subjects (Blum, 2012: 148). This can result from a lack of learning on this subject in the initial teacher training stage, as well as from development education resources that encourage simple reproduction (Hopkins, 2007: 60). A GPLC, on the other hand, can counter this tension between knowledge and learning by enabling shared learning and promoting capacity-building and critical thinking skills, through a mixture of continuous professional learning and reflective professional enquiry. This should in turn enable the individual to feel confident to tackle global issues sensitively and in a non-biased way by gaining skills in strategic reasoning, insightfulness, perseverance, creativity, and problem solving (Bourn, 2012: 11; Allen, n.d.: 36). This approach thus retains the transformative and potent nature of global learning that other approaches eliminate by their very nature. Michael Fullan calls this ‘systems thinking in action’:

*When you learn in context two things happen. One is that, by definition, the learning is specific to the context. The other is that you are doing so with others ... The very premise of systems thinking is that you continually expand the contexts which you experience and learn from as you seek solutions to complex adaptive challenges. Learning in wider contexts leads to changing these very contexts as one interacts with others to develop new solutions.*

(Fullan, 2004)

Indeed, Jackson and Temperley argue that cross-school collaborative learning, underpinned by moral purpose, can be energizing, since it entails four distinct learning processes (2006: 4):

1. Learning *from* one another: where groups capitalize on their individual differences and diversity through sharing their knowledge, experience, expertise, practices, and know-how.
2. Learning *with* one another: where individuals are doing the learning together, experiencing the learning together, co-constructing the learning, making meaning together. Collaborative practitioner enquiry and collaboratively learning about recent research are good examples of this activity.
3. Learning *on behalf of*: where the learning between individuals from different schools is also done on behalf of other individuals within their school and network – or the wider system.
4. *Meta*-learning: where individuals are additionally learning about the processes of their own learning.

(Jackson and Temperley, 2006: 6–7; emphases added)

By encouraging systems thinking across schools in Wales and between schools in Wales and Zanzibar, it would appear that a GPLC approach to school linking could generate a higher level of thinking.

## **Sazani Associates' experience: from school links to a GPLC**

### **Background**

Sazani Associates has for over ten years been working with the Ministries of Education in Wales and Zanzibar to build a sustainable and effective global learning network. The Welsh Assembly Government in 2008 developed a 'common understanding' document to provide a basis for effectively incorporating Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) into the curriculum, as part of its policy on sustainable development and global citizenship in education. It defined ESDGC as a model of education that 'enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). The concept was further broken down into seven themes inspired by UNESCO priorities (as part of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development), with the aim of providing schools with manageable concepts and opportunities to consider global issues.<sup>2</sup>

Sazani Associates has been supporting global learning – and, by default, ESDGC – in Wales and Zanzibar since 2005. Its work started with a cluster of three schools across South Wales, expanding into a GPLC network of 20 Welsh and 20 Zanzibari schools by 2012. The GPLC grew primarily out of two projects – Education for Rural

Livelihoods And Food Sovereignty (ERLAFS),<sup>3</sup> and Global Learners as Educators in Wales (GLEW)<sup>4</sup> – that initiated a school link project incorporating continuous professional development around global learning. This project sought to develop educators' competences in using critical literacy and to foster peer exchanges between Wales and Zanzibar. As a result of these projects the GPLC was developed and formalized, though it is important to note that the GPLC label was applied retrospectively, primarily due to the recognition of the compatibility between the PLC approach and Sazani's work, rather than because the PLC model was actively chosen and adapted (see Table 1).

Sazani's GPLC is called the Healthy and Sustainable Schools project. Zanzibari teachers, when visiting Wales, were impressed by the Health Promoting Schools Initiative and its success in engaging the whole school, and sought to implement a similar scheme in Zanzibar: Sazani Associates was able to facilitate this, by securing support and arranging a skills share from the Health Promoting Schools team at the Wales Public Health Office. With this support, district health and education administrators in Zanzibar adapted and piloted the Healthy and Sustainable Schools framework in their own area. The inspiration and structure they have drawn from the Wales scheme have also strengthened the links with their partner schools, with which they have focused on shared topics and developed shared curriculum materials. Through the Healthy and Sustainable Schools GPLC project we are increasing the understanding and awareness of global sustainability issues through education for the whole school. The overall goal of the GPLC is to ensure that children completing secondary education have life skills that link learning to livelihoods with global awareness, enterprise skills, active citizenship, health awareness, and environmental literacy. Children who complete secondary education with these skills will actively engage and will increase their involvement in all aspects of livelihood development at a community level.

The Healthy and Sustainable Schools framework focuses on supporting sustainable life and enterprise skills through curriculum enrichment. The framework has a three-pronged approach, driven through the School Management Committees (SMC), to develop a whole-school approach to healthy and sustainable living, providing professional development support to teachers through a targeted CPD programme, focusing on nine topical areas, and supporting student action groups to engage in healthy and sustainable extracurricular activities linked to these topics. The framework also ensures that there are shared learning opportunities for teachers and students. This is complemented by a school-linking programme, between Zanzibari and Welsh schools, that has facilitated teachers' and students' understanding of the global forces and pressures that affect livelihoods in both localities.

**Table 1: Processes for developing a PLC – assessment of how Sazani’s network fits with the PLC model**

PLC processes (from Stoll et al., 2005: 2)	Characteristics of Sazani’s GPLC network
<p><b>1. Optimizing resources and structures to promote the PLC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time, space and funding are found to support the development of the PLC.</li> <li>• The idea of the PLC is included in policy documents and development plans.</li> <li>• Staffrooms, staff work rooms and learning spaces are used for community-building and learning.</li> <li>• ICT is used to promote effective communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members are supported by their SMCs/ head teachers through provision of time to be involved in the GPLC (e.g. time off either side of reciprocal visits and to attend CPD sessions); schools and Sazani offices utilized for meetings; funding from various sources found to support the development of the GPLC.</li> <li>• Staffrooms, staff work rooms and learning spaces (e.g. the Sazani training room) are used for community-building and learning.</li> <li>• Emails and resource-sharing websites are utilized for peer exchange and communications.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Promoting professional learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development is coordinated to promote the learning of all staff.</li> <li>• Performance management or appraisal, induction, professional development profiles, and mentoring are consistent with the values of developing a PLC.</li> <li>• Sharing practice and creating common understanding are emphasized.</li> <li>• Support is given to help develop learning and teaching strategies and skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum of three CPD sessions are planned annually.</li> <li>• Sazani Education Officers and other team staff provide mentoring; associate members provide mentoring to school links members.</li> <li>• Sharing practice and creating common understanding are emphasized through CPD sessions.</li> <li>• Support is given to help develop learning and teaching strategies and skills through CPD sessions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Evaluating and sustaining the PLC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development and progress of the PLC is regularly monitored.</li> <li>• There is explicit discussion of the PLC, its purpose, and development.</li> <li>• PLC values are considered when choices are made about hiring and deploying staff.</li> <li>• Attention is paid to dealing with issues that get in the way of PLC development.</li> <li>• Critical friends are invited to provide an external view.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual monitoring and evaluation are conducted, as well as quarterly reviews.</li> <li>• There is constant discussion with members about the purpose and value of the GPLC, as well as how to improve and develop it.</li> <li>• Any issues that get in the way of GPLC development are raised through the quarterly review process.</li> <li>• Academic reflection enables comments from external viewpoints.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Leading and managing to promote the PLC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders are focused on learning for all.</li> <li>• Trust-building and celebrating success are prioritized.</li> <li>• Leaders are enquiry-minded and encourage this in others.</li> <li>• Leaders model learning and coach colleagues.</li> <li>• Leadership of learning is distributed throughout the school, centre, or college.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders are focused on learning for all.</li> <li>• Regular events attended by prominent figures in the education and ESDGC/global learning field are held, to celebrate the success of the GPLC projects.</li> <li>• Members are encouraged to run with their own ideas and take ownership of various aspects of the GPLC.</li> <li>• Associate members provide mentoring to school links members; when visits include two teachers over a period of three years, one teacher who has already been to Zanzibar will go with a new teacher, who will then be the one to take another new teacher the following year, and so on.</li> </ul>



Indeed, one of the core elements of the framework is its focus on enabling teachers to develop a global-minded approach to their classroom delivery and general work ethic (Al Kanaan, n.d.). This is important as it means that the members are not just focusing on ensuring global issues are an integral part of school life, but are also able to go on a journey themselves; key to the CPD sessions are critical thinking activities that enable teachers to feel confident about delivering sessions on global issues. This has been achieved through shared curricular topics and mutual exploration of global issues such as climate change, tourism, and poverty. We make use of existing assets and practices set up by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) or the community, which we are in turn able to support and strengthen. For example, environmental clubs already existed in schools as a Ministry initiative; the pilot projects have utilized this concept and helped to ensure that these clubs are more active, interactive, and interesting for the young people. In order to achieve active engagement with young people, to increase their involvement in all aspects of livelihood development at a community level, we support students to initiate mini-projects by establishing topical action groups within the schools with which we work. For example, as part of a Water Sanitation and Health (WASH) approach, we helped student action groups to place waste bins around the school grounds for rainwater harvesting. For a project on avian biodiversity, action groups planted flowers and trees in their local communities to attract more birds. A student enterprise group made and sold porridge to fellow students. Through various such activities, it has been clear that students are extremely enthusiastic about participating and actively engage in activities that relate to their realities (MacCallum, forthcoming), are pupil-centred and pupil-led, and are clearly effective in terms of student learning.

Peer-to-peer learning, as facilitated through the Healthy and Sustainable Schools framework, also enables teachers and students to share ideas and methods on best practice and to discuss how certain issues can be tackled. During monitoring visits to schools we are able to garner an understanding of the challenges and successes that various schools have encountered as a result of the pilot projects. We then initiate peer workshops, allowing the schools involved to discuss these issues and to find solutions together.

### **Effectiveness and sustainability: a question of impact?**

Stoll *et al.* argue that the key output of a GPLC is an enhanced quality of learning and teaching (2006: 3). This output can be further broken down into three key criteria for assessing the effectiveness of a GPLC. Firstly, one can assess the GLPC's impact on pupil learning and social development and on staff morale and practice. Secondly, one can assess the potential that the GPLC has added for developing leadership capacity. Thirdly, and building on the two previous criteria, one can determine

whether key characteristics are in place and processes operating smoothly. The GPLC should be part of 'the way we do things' (Stoll *et al.*, 2006: 3).

The Healthy and Sustainable Schools framework's approach to monitoring and evaluation takes on an alternative paradigm to conventional educational models and therefore aligns more closely with learning, practice, and the realities of how people create knowledge, make sense of their situations, and adapt to change. The fact that the project framework focuses on individual, group, and organizational change makes this participatory and reflective learning approach all the more effective (Woodhill, 2007). In order to ensure that the approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL) does not fall short of what is required to assess the learning impacts of the network, we have developed a framework that incorporates a variety of different MEAL tools and methods. We use these tools and methods in a cyclical process to monitor and evaluate the change in the learning community. The reflexivity of this approach is what distinguishes it from other forms of evaluation. Reflexivity consists both of reflection *on* action and reflection *in* action. Consequently, reflexive practice provides a meaningful way for participants to gain genuine understanding through processes, while allowing participants to evaluate the significance of their experiences within their context (Gustavsen, 1992).

The focus on shared group experience provides the platform for learning while participating in the process of change (Gustavsen, 1992). This is achieved by documenting what is achieved from the perspectives of both those delivering and those participating in the programmes. Feedback from each CPD session, workshop, or activity within schools is used for this. The information gathered is analysed using a spider Likert-scale template, following the eight parameters agreed during the baseline study. This enables evidence to be gathered regarding the effectiveness of focus shifts and outputs in terms of the objectives, the outcomes, and the goals. Project outcomes are to have teachers and SMCs who are more confident and effective at engaging students, schools that are more effective in student learning and pupil-centred approaches, and students who actively participate in village economic, social, and political life in a sustainable way.

'Plan, do, review' evaluation methods, such as stakeholder workshops, are utilized, in order to cultivate a culture of critical inquiry, reflection, and adaptation within the Healthy and Sustainable Schools framework. We use participatory approaches with a learner-oriented focus, which provide us with valuable information about the change in learning achieved as a result of the project. These 'getting to outcomes' (Wandersman *et al.*, 2000) methods are also complemented by the Healthy and Sustainable Schools Award scheme. The Healthy and Sustainable Schools Award is a way to acknowledge a school's commitment to the GPLC, to ensure learning takes place, and to monitor the level of learning. To qualify, a school needs to be actively

embedding topics learnt into lesson plans, making cross-curricular links between topics, and achieving a whole-school approach where topics covered are embedded into the school ethos and into every aspect of school life. In order to achieve this there needs to be communication between students, teachers, SMC members, parents, and community members. In order for the project to succeed there must be communication between those who receive training and other beneficiaries.

The three-pronged approach ensures information is disseminated accordingly. Topics taught during CPD sessions are embedded into the curriculum through the subject-specific approach. Cross-curricular links are made across all subject areas through an interdisciplinary approach. Lastly, topics are embedded into the school ethos and into every aspect of school life through the whole-school approach. To illustrate this, schools that have received enterprise skills training through workshops and CPD programmes are encouraged to set up in-school enterprise clubs, so that more teachers and students can, through participatory learning activities, learn valuable team-building skills and improve numeracy and literacy skills by developing business plans. These clubs are then given 'awards' in the form of technical advice and financial assistance to start mini-projects. Currently, ten schools are running successful flower and vegetable gardens, growing produce for students, teachers, and community members and for sale in local markets. Eight schools are running breakfast clubs, which make porridge for students. All these activities have helped to improve students' literacy and communication skills as group members prepare short reports and presentations in English to communicate with foreign experts.

The enthusiasm and level of interest from the teachers and students with whom we work is the main reason for the success of the project to date. Through the various processes of monitoring and follow-up we have also been able to determine that, although many schools need to improve on the dissemination of information and achieving the whole-school approach, the GPLC has been very successful in getting community members involved in projects. Older members of the community and parents are very keen to get involved in the various projects, such as the avian biodiversity project, and to tell stories on how certain birds are no longer seen in their community, leading to discussion with students about reasons why. Bird data are collected on a monthly basis and workshops have been held with the schools to discuss the data they have collated. These workshops have also led to discussions on fluctuations in bird numbers, bird habitats, and the importance of conserving the environment.

Throughout the Healthy and Sustainable Schools project we will continue to facilitate dialogue, learning, and exchange of ideas between these groups through the evaluation and planning workshops and peer-to-peer sessions. Ultimately, as a matter of accountability, what matters most within the learning community

is whether the GPLC has enabled learning, whether members have applied this learning to lessons, and whether this has made a difference to both teachers' skills and learners/students in relation to the outcomes and objectives.

Through the Healthy and Sustainable Schools' MEAL framework, we can see that the GPLC fits in with the eight required characteristics of a PLC.

### **Shared values and vision**

The focus of the GPLC includes a shared focus on pupil learning and engagement and on the members' learning and engagement with global issues. Students, teachers, and community members all have high expectations for themselves, and a culture of improvement is evident: members believe that 'everyone shares the same values and vision which obviously brings continuity to the experience [...] and gives us a good focus on what we are trying to achieve' (Teacher 1, Wales). To that end, the GPLC demonstrates the type of holistic link described by LTS: it is 'not just an international link, but [offers] a global perspective, where partnerships support the curriculum and sustain a whole school vision' (LTS, n.d.). This is underlined by the shared action plans developed by members during joint CPD sessions, detailing their annual objectives and how these can be achieved through collaborative working.

### **Collective responsibility for pupils' (and members') learning, and collaboration focused on learning**

It is clear throughout all the GPLC's activities that members take joint responsibility for pupils' and their own learning, and that there is peer pressure on those who do not do their fair share:

*We are working well as a cluster and we have shared ideas and best practice. This has had some impact on our pupils' learning.*

(Teacher 1, Wales)

*We now have an extended network – plenty of people to ask for help and advice through our shared experiences here and whilst visiting Zanzibar.*

(Teacher 2, Wales)

This in turn impacts positively on the collaborative approach to learning within the GPLC. A key feature of every training session is a review of where, why, and how ESDGC and global learning are critical aspects of learning.

### **Group as well as individual professional learning**

In addition to this focus on collaborative learning, team planning and teamwork are also common features of the GPLC. There are creative curriculum project opportunities every year, based on a theme jointly agreed by the members; these

feed into peer-led workshops (i.e. team teaching) that focus on reviewing and developing member-authored teaching materials and resources. This gives a sense of ownership, demonstrated by the fact that all members registered on Sazani's global learning exchange website regularly access their uploaded materials.<sup>5</sup>

Through the pilot projects students have been involved in health promotion activities within their schools, including setting up small projects that help to improve the health and environment of the whole school. Each of the action groups' focuses and activities are also supported through curriculum links to facilitate numeracy, literacy, communication, and critical reflection. For example, the avian biodiversity project combines an appreciation of the importance of a range birds in a healthy environment with identifying and counting the different types, analysing data, monitoring change, and producing reports, investigating how and why numbers change and identifying activities to encourage more birds. Learning becomes more exciting, informative, and participatory, and the activities devised and delivered achieve the overall objective of linking learning to lives and livelihoods with environmental literacy, global awareness, and active citizenship. To this end, the GPLC focuses strongly on group as well as individual professional learning. All members are involved in and value professional learning, whether teachers, learning assistants, governors, or others. The impact of this involvement and the high value given to the GPLC has meant that members 'feel that we as a group have had to look carefully at how we teach and are thinking about the best sorts of practice to share with the partner schools' (Teacher 1, Zanzibar). This means that members are able to learn individually, as well as with and from each other, which in turn enables them to take collective responsibility for promoting and supporting each other's learning.

### **Reflective professional enquiry**

The GPLC enables a high level of reflective professional enquiry, where reflective practice is valued and research and enquiry are encouraged to inform teaching and learning. For instance, at the end of every visit and CPD session, in-depth critical reflections are carried out. The baseline surveys also provide an annual means of self- and group evaluation. The data are then analysed and used for reflection and improvement, with input from members highly valued. For instance, throughout the project the importance of learning has always been linked to the need for action; all teachers who participate in the project reflect on their role as individuals in working towards poverty reduction, and actions that result from this range from fundraising, to becoming a skill-share volunteer, to sourcing equipment and materials ethically and reducing their carbon footprints. Furthermore, members clearly feel that this network enables them to 'reflect on [their] learning and teaching. It is good to take time out to look at what [they] do and find best practice as well as improving learning for the pupils [they] teach' (Teacher 2, Wales).

### **Openness, networks and partnerships**

One of the clear strengths of the GPLC is its emphasis on openness, networks, and partnerships. Individual members are part of school clusters (based on their geographical region), a national network (Wales or Zanzibar), and an international network (between Wales and Zanzibar). This allows for a great deal of creative thought and input at all levels, with members being actively engaged in their external partnerships and learning networks with other schools. Risk-taking, creativity, and innovative thinking are encouraged: the GPLC sessions are regarded as ‘essential in putting aside time to consider global issues and spurring each other on’ (Teacher 3, Wales).

Partnering with individuals or organizations to deliver CPD sessions has also given teachers the opportunity to learn from a variety of different sources. For example, a CPD session on environmental awareness and climate change, delivered in partnership with a conservation and environmental education team, provided participating teachers with new skills and opened up a range of new opportunities for their respective schools. Sharing ideas on bringing ESDGC into the classroom through increased awareness, knowledge, and enthusiasm results in a real sense of purpose, as demonstrated in the initiatives member schools have taken to put their learning into practice. A focus on health promotion in schools has also become important, as a result of demand from teachers in both Zanzibar and Wales to use the health curriculum as the basis of a skills-share project.

### **Inclusive membership**

As previously mentioned, the GPLC has a strongly inclusive membership base, as it includes a mix of teachers, SMC, governors, and support staff. All are valued and contributing members of the GPLC, with everyone agreeing that they are part of one large community, rather than just lots of small communities. This has developed a sense of trust between members, with members feeling that they have a strong ‘network of schools [...] which we can approach for help and advice’ (Teacher 2, Zanzibar). Furthermore, members have expressed that, since the GPLC has been formalized, ‘this venture gives us a collective purpose and focus, which we at times have lacked’ (Teacher 3, Zanzibar). This also demonstrates a sense of mutual trust, respect, and support.

### **Mutual trust, respect, and support**

Finally, the success and impact of the project has further been demonstrated in the enhanced learning and teaching that takes place, as well as in the project’s sustainability. Overall, feedback from teachers has highlighted an increased confidence in their understanding of global issues and use of creative approaches to

learning (e.g. the use of podcasting to capture the learner's voice). The sustainability of the GPLC has been achieved mainly through a clear sense of active learning:

*If this was only a school link, the interactions between the two [partner schools] would be quite passive, as they could only be conducted via post and the internet, and I don't think the school has had much back from its partnered school. However through the GPLC there's the great opportunity for both partnerships to physically experience what each has to offer and therefore [it] provides the [opportunity for] greater learning opportunities to take place.*

(Teacher 1, Wales)

A series of focus group sessions at an annual Sazani Associates conference in 2013 showed that the GPLC had become a valued and established entity, and that all members were keen to continue with it. Clusters and families of schools have continued to work together, developing and sharing resources that focus on global learning, and initiating peer exchange.

We would therefore argue that this GPLC clearly substantiates Jackson and Temperley's theory that contextual relevance 'focuses activity on some sort of change' (Jackson and Temperley, 2006: 7), shown by an improvement in student learning, achievement, and attainment and – in the case of the GPLC – improvement in professional learning and teaching practices. Other, wider benefits to this type of networked learning include improved confidence and self-esteem, enhanced motivation, and a greater sense of professional efficacy and identity. Indeed, the 'value-added' of the GPLC is clear:

*I feel that the learning focus provided by the GLPC provided a purposeful and creative framework to work within. I felt able to focus with greater determination and was really motivated by the enthusiasm of the network. I believe that I would not have achieved so much from linking with a school on my own as I would not have been able to benefit from the huge support that working in this network has given me.*

(Teacher 4, Wales)

To that end, we would argue that the Healthy and Sustainable Schools project is transformative as it orientates change in reflexive practice and thinking, for both participants and learners (Jackson and Temperley, 2006).

## **Global Professional Learning Communities: a unique and effective approach?**

The GPLC has had a measured and demonstrable impact on pupil learning through increased access, engagement, and quality. The morale and practice of participating

teaching staff have been positively influenced, and leadership capacity developed. Furthermore, the sustainability of the Healthy and Sustainable Schools project has become part of 'the way we do things' at member schools; this indicates that the characteristics of a GPLC are in place effectively and that processes are operating smoothly.

Indeed, this paper has demonstrated how a focus on peer exchange and support, rather than philanthropy and/or top-down answers, can provide an opportunity for innovative and creative learning and teaching practices, and how it can engage schools, strengthen development awareness, and build the necessary skills for understanding the importance of (and building connections with) global poverty reduction.

In conclusion, a GPLC such as the Healthy and Sustainable Schools project is a unique, creative, and sustainable way for the whole school community to engage with global issues through collaborative working. It can, moreover, encourage a higher level of thinking and 'effective learning' through its transformative and holistic nature, by 'assist[ing] the process of decision-making under conditions of a relative lack of knowledge.' (Bourn, 2012: 10).<sup>6</sup> Educators are thereby enabled to tackle complex and often controversial issues, not because they feel they 'have all the answers', but because they have the tools to assess and analyse potential answers. This is an important difference from the current, preferred development education approach, and we would argue it is imperative if critical thinking is to be truly at the heart of global learning.

**Sazani Associates** is a not-for-profit association of international development and education professionals working together to develop innovative and participatory approaches to global learning and sustainable livelihoods.

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## Notes

1 e.g. ESDGC, global learning, development education, the global dimension, etc. Please note that in this paper we use the terms 'development education' and 'global learning'.

2 The seven themes of ESDGC were (1) consumption and waste; (2) choices and decisions; (3) health; (4) climate change; (5) identity and culture; (6) the natural environment; and (7) wealth and poverty (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

3 ERLAFS (Education for Rural Livelihoods and Food Sovereignty) was an extension of a UNESCO flagship programme, ERP (Education for Rural People), that developed contextualized curriculum materials to increase the relevance of learning by associating it with rural realities, with space for critical reflection on a range of local and global perspectives to ultimately inform decision-making processes.

4 GLEW (Global Learners as Educators in Wales) sought to support education practitioners in Wales to adopt a globally minded approach to their education and training delivery. It focused on (1) the peer exchange of knowledge and experiences across Wales, the EU, and countries in the global south; (2) the coordination of learning pathways that built on the capability and skills of educators as global learners and peer educators through shared dialogue, critical enquiry, and in-depth exploration of the global relationships between food, trade, climate change, poverty, and interdependence; and (3) the development of creative curriculum project opportunities.

5 See [www.sazaniassociates.org.uk](http://www.sazaniassociates.org.uk)

6 Cf. Boud: '[autonomy is] an integral part of learning of any kind. No learner can be effective in more than a very limited area if he or she cannot make decisions for themselves about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it: teachers cannot ... guide every aspect of the process of learning' (Boud, 1988, quoted in Read and Hurford, 2008: 43).

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