



Report on study visit course to The Gambia

Autumn 2014

Young people on the global stage



Tanje Fishing Village

This course included a one-week study visit to The Gambia from 25th October to 1st November 2014. It involved teachers from the UK and Germany, and contributed to the EU-supported project “Young people on the global stage, their education and their influence.”

This document reports on the visit for an audience of teachers and educators, including our partners in Spain, who were sadly unable to join us for the journey following the 2014 ebola outbreak.

The course involved three German and three British teachers and educators, who shared an interest in international development and who wanted to explore ideas with others in some depth.

Study visit courses incorporate residential weekend sessions with our European partners to prepare for and follow up the study visits proper. The preparatory sessions took place in the UK in September, and two other German colleagues joined us for these preparatory sessions. The follow-up sessions took place in early 2015.

The project as a whole included opportunities for teachers to learn from the perspectives of fellow-professionals in other countries. The study visit itself extended this opportunity for even further, by including joint fieldwork, idea-sharing and a resource materials development workshop – all alongside a group of Gambian teachers who were associated with the country’s National Environment Agency and our Gambian partners, TANGO.

During the study visit itself, participants:

- ☐ met many of those taking a lead role in environmental protection and sustainable development in The Gambia;
- ☐ spent three days working alongside African teachers and educators;
- ☐ visited a variety of places, projects and people in South West Gambia, and reflected critically on these experiences.

Follow-up activities fed into the wider ‘Young people on the global stage’ project.

Course outcomes

The course enabled participants to:

- ☐ Understand global development issues for themselves, and especially within the context of The Gambia;
- ☐ Develop curriculum plans to support global learning and education for sustainable development;
- ☐ Think about skills and strategies in action planning for their schools and organisations;
- ☐ Plan, and start to try out and evaluate practical teaching ideas;
- ☐ Engage with a range of perspectives from The Gambia, Europe and the UK, on development and education;
- ☐ Engage in in-depth professional reflection in a supportive environment;
- ☐ Write up some of their work, as a contribution to the wider project.

Course challenges

The course involved participants learning together as a group, sharing ideas, and starting to develop individual and collaborative plans for experimental work in their schools and organisations.

The visit to The Gambia was a stimulus to that work, was sometimes also the subject of it. For example, participants included case studies from The Gambia as part of draft core materials on Sustainable Development. These served as a stimulus to, and an outcome from, the project as a whole – and they largely arose from our joint workshop with Gambian colleagues.

However, the materials were about sustainable development worldwide, and the course was about development and education as a whole: not just ‘about The Gambia.’

The course was based on the principle that reflection on their own learning can inform the way that people teach. Activities therefore encouraged participants to be self reflective in an environment which was both challenging and supportive, and which offered a rich variety of diverse perspectives to draw on. Participants spent a lot of time during the preparatory meetings, and the visit itself, in thinking about intercultural learning. This understanding aimed to inform other intercultural encounters – by both teachers and young people – during the later stages of the project.

The course responded to recent and ongoing thinking about the curriculum, including the role of teachers as curriculum makers, and the challenges of sustainable development and global learning.

The Gambia

This small West African democracy has a predominantly young, mostly-Muslim population. Its geography, and an economy based on agriculture and tourism, make The Gambia particularly vulnerable to climate change. These themes were all picked up during our visit, both in our field studies and in the materials we wrote up.

Our learning was assisted by the factors that sustainability education has a growing profile in the country, and that English [the project’s operating language] is widely spoken.

The 2014 visit built on fifteen years of partnership between Tide~ and the National Environment Agency of The Gambia. For more about this partnership, see www.tidec.org/primary-early-years/mutual-learning-sustainability-gambia-and-uk

The course process

The study visit was based at a family-run, Gambian-owned guesthouse in the village of Kololi on the Gambian coast. This is near the capital city of Banjul, and to the headquarters of our partners at TANGO and the National Environment Agency.

During their stay, participants met people engaged in projects and policy in The Gambia, especially those relating to sustainable development, and heard their perspectives on the issues. This included leading government officials engaged in coastal management, forestry protection, and wildlife management; and NGOs engaged in women's empowerment and education, renewable energy development, wildlife protection and health awareness.

Three days were spent working alongside Gambian teachers who are engaged in creative work on sustainable development education.

A PhD researcher from the University of Humboldt, Berlin joined participants for the preparatory sessions.

The course sessions

PREPARATORY PHASE

September and October 2014

The UK and German teachers had a chance to meet together with colleagues from their own countries, and to share e-mail introductions with their peers overseas, before our first residential weekend.

That weekend, which took place in the peaceful setting of an eco-barn in rural Worcestershire, aimed to establish a strong and diverse group which would be able to share and develop ideas together.

Much of the weekend was spent in exploring ways of working together, but participants also had the chance to conduct some fieldwork in the nearby town of Bewdley, looking at how issues around food, poverty and sustainability play out in a European setting.

This was in a sense a rehearsal for some of the work that the group then went on to carry out in The Gambia, and served both as useful preparation and a common reference point when looking at contrasts and comparisons. It raised questions about how places change, and whether development is always a linear process.

One of the teachers led a successful activity around the purposes of education, which she shared on her blog: jkfairclough.wordpress.com/2014/09/29/what-is-the-point-of-education/



Thinking about ways of working, Bewdley

STUDY VISIT – October 25th to November 1st

Saturday 25 October

The British and German teachers arrived in The Gambia to find the country in the grip of a heatwave. The rains had finished late, and the summer was continuing well past its normal date – wreaking havoc with the country's groundnut harvest.

It took a little time – and some adjusting of fans and air conditioning units – for the group to start acclimatising, but good traditional Gambian food from hosts Alhagie and Neneh certainly helped. The first evening was spent thinking about first impressions, revisiting hopes for the week, and settling in.

Sunday 26th October

The teachers travelled to the nearby fishing village of Tanje, for a day's orientation and local fieldwork. One mixed-national group spent time on the fishing beach, which was a hive of activity following the landing of the day's catch. The other group walked into the quieter heart of the village itself.

As with the preparatory fieldwork in Bewdley, the two groups were asking questions about how issues around food, poverty and sustainability play out – this time in African setting. Developing these ideas later, some formed the kernel of teaching resources [eg looking at the pros and cons of traditional and modern fish-preserving technologies].

The whole group then travelled on to nearby Tanje Museum, a 'living museum' which showcases traditional Gambian crafts, rural housing and natural resources. They were able to talk with the owner, including about the difficulties faced when running a site for tourists of this kind, and relaxed to the music of griots – the country's traditional musicians and storytellers.

Monday 27th October

Following introductions to project partners at the National Environment Agency's headquarters in Kanifing, and hearing about the Agency's work, the European teachers went to the nearby regional education office to meet a large group of Gambian secondary school teachers, who were working with TANGO on the project. Expectations were high, and the day formed a lesson in itself on how to build on such enthusiasm in a manageable way.

Tuesday 28th October

Mixed groups of Gambian, British and German teachers went on site visits to projects and government departments, looking into key questions about sustainability.

- ❑ One group visited the Department of Forestry Resources, and went with technical experts to look at coastal management projects aimed at protecting the capital city Banjul and neighbouring areas from flooding and damaging coastal erosion;
- ❑ A second group went to Abuko Nature Reserve, where they also met with staff from an NGO specialising in wildlife conservation;
- ❑ The third group travelled to Tanje, to see a Spanish-supported renewable energy project that is empowering local women.



Wind turbines at the MOLO women's project

Salting fish in Tanje

Wednesday 29th October

A highly productive day workshop brought teachers from all three countries together to share ideas and develop resources that formed the heart of core project materials on the theme of sustainable development. As important as the materials was the lively professional and informal dialogue between the participating teachers.



Sharing and developing ideas together at the workshop

Thursday 30th October

Some of the teachers went in to Banjul to visit a High School, following an invitation by a teacher there. The visit took in a cluster Science Day, as well as the chance to observe a geography lesson in action.

In the evening, the European teachers met together to review what they had been learning about the project's main themes, and about the intercultural learning process itself.

Friday 31st October

The morning comprised a meeting with Gambia partners for the project leader; a further visit to Banjul for sightseeing for others; and a chance to go shopping for food in a local market for the rest. In the afternoon, the group all met together in the compound of a Gambian family, in the shade of a large mango tree, and learned how to prepare and cook benachin, a traditional Gambia meal. Hosts Neneh and Alhagie and their family joined the group in the evening, along with one of the Gambian teachers, for a final evening's celebratory meal.

SYNTHESIS PHASE

November 2014 - January 2015.

Individually, and as a group, we started to synthesise the key points from our learning and started to explore its educational implications. We wrote up some activities and reflections, with support from course leaders and the rest of the group. Some of these ideas have fed in to the wider project, including the project resource.

Following the study visit, teachers and young people met in The Gambia to take forward their work on the project. Their work, too, is represented in the project resource

‘Young people on the global stage: their education and influence’
is a three year creative curriculum development project for secondary students.

Project partners are Tide~ global learning and University of Exeter in the UK, FERE-CECA Madrid in Spain, A Rocha [Kenya] in Kenya and TANGO in The Gambia.



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To find out more about the project and for a full list of those involved in it see
www.tidegloballearning.net