

**Title Page**

**Enhancing school leadership through an international study visit.**

**Single author: Dr Andy Cramp**

**The University of Wolverhampton**

Institute of Education  
Walsall Campus  
Gorway Road  
Walsall WS1 3BD

01902 323233

andycramp@wlv.ac.uk

### **Key Words**

**Schools; Leadership; Reflection; International; Community.**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the outcomes of a school leadership study visit to India. The research critiques the competency based frameworks common in English leadership development programmes and argues instead, for an approach that challenges assumptions in a fresh context for learning and considers leadership as a process of humanisation. Using Mezirow's 'perspective transformations' as a starting point, the paper briefly outlines what was learned on the visit; but more importantly, the paper focuses on how that learning took place. Activities that proved particularly valuable are discussed. Importantly, the research found that informal opportunities for learning sliding into the spaces around formal events, were often responsible for unexpected and influential perspective transformations and that these opportunities for learning are often undervalued. The research concludes that international study visits where participants agree their own collective agendas and develop a trusted validating community group are more valuable than transmission models of leadership learning. Finally, the paper briefly returns to the notion of leadership as a process of humanisation and suggests that seen in this way, the pursuit of community becomes a more highly valued outcome for leadership learning.

(185 words)

## **Introduction**

This paper is an in-depth case study of a leadership development programme based around an international study visit. It prioritises how learning about leadership took place, just as much as what was actually learned.

Detailed explorations of how leadership learning takes place is under-researched, particularly where an international context is involved. This paper does not focus on an exchange perspective (though that did form part of the broader aims of the programme) which as Burstow (2009) points out has many challenges. Instead, the paper leads with the idea that international study visits can provide important critical reflection opportunities for groups of leaders to form new understandings about themselves and the settings in which they work.

Leadership development for schools in the England has been dominated over the past 15 years by government agendas, often set through The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), an executive agency of the Department for Education. The NCTL has led a competency based standards agenda where school leadership qualities are sometimes reduced to bullet points (Leithwood et al 2008) and in one example, linked to private business and military services (Leithwood et al 2004). The NCTL recently commissioned The Future Leaders Trust to 'deliver' programmes underpinned by the Future Leaders Trust Competency Framework (2014). Interestingly Walker and Dimmock (2004) refer to the 'international role' of the National College for School Leadership (the NCSL, as it was then) but the Future Leaders Trust Competency Framework does not refer at all to an international or global perspective as having any significance to school leadership development. In their review of leadership competency frameworks, (which includes the framework created by the NCSL) Bolden et al (2003) comment that competency frameworks overemphasise the importance of the individual leader, provide very little information about how they were developed, lack empirical grounding and promote a clique effect where leaders are selected because of their similarity to other leaders 'thus neglecting those individuals who don't fit this mould' (p.38). More

recently, Gagnon and Collinson (2014) argue for an organisational lens, rather than individualised and decontextualised approaches to leadership. They apply critical identity theory and note that identity processes in leadership are significantly under explored. Watkins (1989 p. 26) reminds us of the importance of Forester's (1982) comment that policy initiatives often discourage critical discourses (1982, p.46). This is where we seem to stand now on national leadership development in the England. What are regarded as facts, have been established as unquestionable common sense while critical discourses are pushed to the margins. Hoyle and Wallace (2007) remind us that leadership is a device for understanding complex experience which draws attention to some aspects of social phenomena, while inevitably downplaying others. Marshall (2004) is clear that social justice issues are significantly downplayed in leadership development. Furthermore, Gunter (2010) believes that the politicisation of leadership is downplayed too. She relates her experience of working with teachers on Masters and Doctoral programmes where, when participants engage with critical approaches to leadership, 'they get angry that they have been denied access to this knowledge in their training and professional development' (p520). To address this imbalance, Collinson (2005) prioritises the 'complex and shifting dynamics of leadership' (p.1422) and considers, for example, the roles of masculinity and femininity in leadership and further ideas around conforming, complying and resisting as leaders. Collinson goes on to note that the concept of leader-follower is generally uncontested in mainstream leadership training and that 'followers' have often been regarded as 'unproblematic and predictable cogs' (p.1424). He also notes the important behaviour of leader resistance (disguised and explicit) which brings 'a more dialectical approach to leadership dynamics' (p.1424). This discussion suggests that the promotion of critical discourses around leadership could offer the creative and ethical leadership development which appears to be missing from national competency training. It is also important to acknowledge that leadership and leadership development are social and emotional practices too, and to leave this dimension out of the leadership debate is to defy the idea that learning about leading is a process of humanisation.

## Leadership Development - An International Study Visit

In this paper I explore the meaningfulness of a leadership study visit to Delhi which took place in February 2014. The visit was conceived and organised by the Transcontinental Schools Innovation Alliance (TSIA), working in partnership with the Global Education and Leadership Foundation (tGELF). There were twelve participants from England, including three head teachers three deputy heads (primary and secondary) and representatives from a tertiary college and a university. The education institutions represented are part of a regional cluster of organisations in the West Midlands (England) with a history of working collegially on a range of strategies and projects so importantly, there was already a 'professional community' (Grossman et al 2001) in existence, ready to take further advantage of working collaboratively. It is important to note at this point, that the visit was part of a larger scheme involving mutual exchanges of teachers to and from India. So the England based participants that form part of this paper were also involving in hosting Indian teachers. The benefits of this mutual activity are not the focus of this paper. However, it is significant to mention because mutuality helps to contextualise the spirit of these visits and points to a balanced and thoughtful approach to cultural interpretation. TSIA and tGELF have extensive experience of working ethically with a strong understanding of the sensitivities involved.

**Comment [a1]:** Policy tourism issues - see end of paper too.

The visit provided opportunities to explore notions of leadership by visiting Indian schools identified by tGELF. These schools were all fee paying and unfortunately it was not possible to visit government schools in Delhi. Limited resources in government schools meant that managing international visitors on top of the school day was an unreasonable expectation and would have created difficulties for everyone. However we did meet teachers from government schools during the study visit and I will return to this later in the paper.

There were three broad aims to the study visit. Firstly, the international perspective should create a safe space for critical reflection around immediate and more general ideas about leadership. The second aim was to sustain and strengthen existing leadership relationships and the third, to build international links within and across schools in the India-England partnership. This paper focuses on the first aim. Each participant, as part of a small study group, visited 5 or 6 schools in the Delhi region. Schools varied significantly in size, structure and strategic disposition, from an urban school forming part of a private education chain, to a school whose very clear mission was to educate the rural poor.

In line with the first aim above, the intention of this study visit was to offer participants a range of school based experiences along with the space and time to reflect carefully. TSIA provided the structure of the visit which included a formal framework of reflection opportunities before, during and importantly after the study visit. This was a crucial part of the programme designed to ensure participants' thinking influenced their own practice and that of their colleagues, when they returned to their work settings. Interestingly, this formal structure for group reflection, encouraged deeper thinking during the visit about **how** best learning about leadership takes place, as much as **what** was learned. These reflections led in turn, to a qualitative exploration of the value participants found in particular events, activities and experiences in relation to them as people and leaders. The research questions for this paper are therefore: firstly, how can activities within the school visits themselves best enhance understandings of leadership? Secondly, outside the school visits themselves, how did other formal and informal activities and experiences develop further understandings of learning about leadership?

## Research Design

This paper is an exploratory case study taking the form of a reflective enquiry. More specifically, the nature of the enquiry was influenced by Mezirow's 'perspective transformation':

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world. (1990, p.14)

Mezirow suggests that this transformation can be validated by a community:

To seek a consensus, we turn to those we feel are best informed, least biased, and most rational to critically assess the evidence and arguments and arrive consensually at the best judgment. (1990, p.9)

This approach to validating transformative learning through a trusted learning community

is an important aspect of the study visit and this paper's methodology and helps to define

the approach here to leadership learning. It is also important to note that the methodology

is framed by the words of Stake (1995): 'subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be

eliminated, but as an essential element of understanding' (p.45). This comment is

particularly significant in the debate around the subjectivity of 'insiderness'. As the

researcher and a participant in the study visit, I occupied an 'insider' position but as Acker

(2000) reminds us, this position is more complex than the term allows:

We are none of us always and forever either insiders or outsiders. Our multiple subjectivities allow us to be both insiders and outsiders simultaneously, and to shift back and forth, not quite at will, but with some degree of agency. (p.191)

This shifting is particularly important in the researcher's relationships with participants and

will influence data collection as Mercer (2007) comments:

Insiderness depends... upon the intersection of many different characteristics, some inherent and some not. The researcher's relationship with the researched is not static, but fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum of possibilities, from one

**Comment [a2]:** I have amended this sentence so that it does not suggest that I return to Mezirow in detail.

moment to the next, from one location to the next, from one interaction to the next, and even from one discussion topic to the next (p13)

This fluctuation of the extent and nature of insiderness is important to this paper. For example, participants were from different educational institutions to the university setting in which I work so I was an outsider in this context. However, I was an insider (at the same time) in terms of being known and trusted by participants through the collaborative work we had already been involved in. This worked well with regard to access to participants and the openness of their responses. However, I knew some participants better than others so, the 'shifting back and forth' to which Mercer refers, was clearly in evidence and did influence the nature of responses, particularly in tone and detail. So the subjectivity that Stake refers to above was indeed an essential element of the research and this brief insider/outsider debate can be nicely framed by Skeggs' comment that 'we cannot know ourselves so how can we expect to be the absolute knower of others, though we can be vigilant, responsible and critical' (1997, p.30). In other words, researcher positioning and the subjectivities surrounding this are rendered more valuable when framed by a responsible and ethical approach to qualitative research.

Data collection was designed to merge the boundaries between researcher and participants and to involve participants as fully as possible in research design and processes. To this end, we agreed I would take field notes during the study visit which recorded as Tjora (2006) describes: 'events, people, things heard and overheard, conversations among people, with people and physical settings' (p.434). Tjora also refers to Coffey's description of field notes as 'encoded with the author's conscience, understandings and interpretations' (p.434). This comment tracks back to the words of Skeggs above and highlights the richness of these data, the subjectivities they carry and the responsibility required to handle these data ethically. The second data collection method we agreed was the participants' reflective responses once they

had returned to England. These took the form of written answers to a series of broad, open questions based on the research aims. Questions were answered by six of the twelve participants in the study visit. The six responses were then drawn together under each of the questions, anonymised and emailed to the participants again to validate and elicit any further comment. All participants validated their answers but none offered any further comment. This was probably because much of the data collected via this method had already been discussed during the study visit itself. Field notes supported this probability. The findings were explored to reach 'the most likely interpretation, given the existing information' (Alvesson and Skoldberg p.103). The final interpretation was reached by weaving together the field notes with the participants' written responses.

## **Findings**

### **Context**

Before the study visit took place, participants met for a preparation day. It was important that the focus on leadership was explicit and framed by the priorities of each participant, so the day focused on the development of lines of enquiry. This is an important strategy TSIA has developed to ensure a strong focus on the study and learn components of the visit to prevent drift into 'edu-tourism'. This approach has been explored and refined over a number of similar visits to India and the USA. The aim is to ensure that during the visit participants frequently ask the question: 'How does this relate to my lines of enquiry?' The lines themselves ranged from leading learning in the classroom, to the strategic leadership of policy and whole school vision. Naturally and importantly, the preparation day also offered opportunities for informal discussion around current roles, responsibilities and challenges in education and learning. This was a very important process because a crucial and recurrent theme in the development of leadership learning throughout the visit, was the understandings developed within ad hoc opportunities that existed around the more formal scheduled activity. The space between formal and informal activity was crucial to the development of a trusted community of learning as mentioned above in the design section. After the preparation day, we received profiles of head teachers leading the Indian schools involved in the visit. Jill and others saw a strong moral purpose in the narratives and the significance of this grew once the visits were underway. Field notes suggested that because of the diversity of the Indian education system, profiles of each school (size, history, funding, catchment for example) alongside the heads' profiles, would have been even better to prepare participants.

Once in India, the formal programme of evening meetings began, to feedback and reflect on the school visits. Each participating school had been briefed about our visits by tGELF and

made preparation in ways that tried to best suit our lines of enquiry which they were already aware of. tGELF was responsible for providing a link between the English and Indian education systems; their representatives were instrumental to the informal and ad hoc clarification of school procedures and policies, leadership structures and the historical, cultural, economic and political backgrounds of pupils and staff.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, it became clear that we were not just interested in our learning, but the circumstances under which we learnt most: personally, emotionally and professionally. By 'circumstances', I mean perhaps 'affordances': the opportunities occurring during the day where our positions as leaders were shifted and challenged. Our focus was on the nature of the shift of course and its relevance to our lines of enquiry, but also on the conditions under which that shift took place. In other words, we became absorbed by how and why our learning about leading was developing - this is at the heart of this paper. The following sections will to some extent explore what we learned, but mainly as illustrations of the relative effectiveness of the 'circumstances' under which our learning took place.

### **Learning Walks**

Most of the schools we visited organized a learning walk - a familiar activity in English schools and colleges. This activity has been critiqued as an extension of existing QA schemes (O'Leary, 2011). This may have been a hidden agenda in the relaxed versions of learning walks we took part in, but if it was our experience did not reveal much evidence of this. We were perhaps exposed to some 'showcasing' and we did not assume we were seeing the lived day to day working of a school. But as Tim commented, learning walks 'are always interesting because of the leadership choices made about what they are showing you. It tends to give a strong impression of what they feel is important, it also indicates what they do not feel is important'. Rebecca coupled this 'hierarchy of choice' (Tim) with pedagogic

development and commented that learning walks 'revealed what the teachers regarded as 'best practice' or most up to date practice'; this prompted some discussion amongst participants on how learning walks might be best used in their own settings, particularly where students led the walks. Some participants felt that reflections on the learning walks in India had prompted a rethink of their own institution's approach to this activity. For example, Richard saw the importance of mutual respect between students and visitors during student led learning walks and felt this provided a natural context to ask questions and for students to 'share their thoughts and feelings about their school'. Rebecca felt that in two schools, the student led walks 'clarified both the different moral purposes of the schools and the different life experiences of the students' thereby prompting thoughts around the diversity of schooling experiences in the private education system in Delhi. Tim felt student led walks 'reflected the importance placed on student leadership' and that the students chosen 'often had a very clear and articulate understanding of the expressed values and aims of the school that matched closely the narrative presented by school leaders'. We discussed the extent to which students may have become familiar with a script, but participants felt strongly that students' answers to our questions were careful, open and honest. This led to informal discussions about how students in England might carry out similar roles. Finally both Richard and Jane suggested that learning walks revealed how most school environments had been enhanced by design and decoration. Richard noted how 'space and light played an important role in the design of the schools and helped set the atmosphere'. This was something many participants noted. Buildings designed to manage heat and light afforded discussion during learning walks about the impact of environment on learning dispositions. For example, all schools maintained gardens that:

...were beautiful yet purposeful as students were encouraged to grow food stuffs as well as decorative flora. The design of colours and shapes in the pots and beds were a work of art ... it was clear that the school environment was a priority' (Jane).

We considered learning walks then, in terms of the extent to which these were expressions of the publicly expressed values of the school and participants learnt more about how learning environments could be enhanced. Importantly, participants challenged their own assumptions about approaches to learning walks in the England, especially for visitors.

### **Observations**

It is not surprising that classroom based observation would form an important part of a school study visit. Sometimes we experienced just a glimpse inside a class during a learning walk, but in other schools we were assigned to whole lessons. Naturally there was some staging of classroom activities but participants understood the pressures teachers were under with foreign visitors dropping in. Nonetheless, Jill felt it was possible to gauge pupil teacher relationships from observations. She was particularly interested in what she saw as 'the formal respect for leadership, with pupils standing when a member of SLT entered the classroom'. This was a reminder of English schooling in the past when children stood in recognition of teachers entering the classroom. Jill was interested to juxtapose this deferential and hierarchical response with the following reflection:

Pupil/teacher relationships were in most settings warm and nurturing, the 'family' ethos very clearly communicated. This filtered through to the children who appeared to be very supportive of one another, and in certain cases especially those children with special needs, suggesting that the family ethos was very embedded.

These complex frameworks where formal displays of deference sat alongside the clear fostering of care and compassion, helped participants to challenge their own classroom leadership issues in these areas. This was one of the most frequently debated subjects during the visit and suggests how important it is for leaders to be challenged by the complex

dynamics of institutional practices and the ways in which these are compared to social systems such as the family.

Still on the subject of classroom visits, a number of separate discussions about what we saw, led to an interesting general view about an outward looking global pedagogy. For example, Jill noted the very 'precise use of English technical vocabulary' that was revealed through access to student work books. Though English has been an important part of the colonial history of India, Jill and other participants were still surprised by the very accurate handwriting and spelling which Jill considered to be 'especially impressive in a second or even third language'. This led to important critical reflection in the group around how important language learning was (perhaps particularly English as a common internet language) to international perspectives in schools. Developing this point a little more, Jane noted how comfortable students were talking about world politics and Alan saw how this extended in many schools to the politics of global environmental sustainability. Together with Rebecca's comment that students saw it as 'an honour' to lead discussion in the presence of overseas visitors, these collected observations coalesced into an impression of a positive, outward-looking disposition in most of the school classrooms we visited. Even the way in which some of us were actively engaged by pupils as a learning resource in the lesson (Richard and Alan for example, were involved in a question and answer session about global warming) was a further indication that global issues were relevant and meaningful to many of the schools we visited. Further discussion noted in field notes allowed us to reconsider the importance of understanding the local, the international and the complex relationships between the two which is so vital to leaders aiming for the development of an outward-looking curriculum with broad horizons. These were important and complex political reflections that can often be lost in more functional, individualised skills-based leadership development. In summary, classroom observation led to some important rethinking of

assumptions around respect and compassion in schooling. These complex issues were not closed out and fixed during the visit but acknowledged as part of an ongoing ethical discussion where an international perspective can be very important to shifting the debate beyond the parochialism that might sometimes narrow the view.

### **Meetings with senior staff**

Meeting senior staff is often an important part of international study visits, especially those exploring leadership. Occasionally, visitors to education settings might experience highly controlled, verbal rituals from strategic leaders. This was not our experience. Jill felt that the ways we were welcomed at director level were 'highly respectful' and considered ways in which her English setting could develop their welcomes for visitors in future. Tim captured the importance of these leadership meetings by commenting that they helped to 'understand....the context and current issues around school operations'. A critical example of this was an Indian government policy to include students from the 'Economically Challenged Sections' in all Indian schools, including fee-paying. Schools were finding this policy directive very challenging. Through meeting strategic leaders, we gained detailed access to the impact on fee paying schools and learnt of the context in which strategic leadership decisions were taken. In addition to this government policy insight, Jill was engaged by 'the charismatic personality' of a director and found this an invaluable lesson in the range of personal qualities that support successful senior leadership. Helen felt that meeting directors 'was particularly effective as it deepened my understanding of the school system, and gave greater access to the strategic view of the school'. She recommended meeting directors as well as principals because of their different roles within the Indian fee paying schools we visited.

Jill reflected on what appeared to be less external pressure on Indian senior management teams than their English counterparts, to meet externally set exam results targets. She and other participants (Richard for example) recognised the strong moral purpose in Indian education and felt this was more explicit than single minded adherence to externally set targets. This was linked to a refreshing emphasis by senior leaders on children's happiness and well being. This was evident in learning walks and in classrooms too and in one instance led to a discussion with Indian colleagues around the spiritual significance of Lord Krishna to childhood development. This gave rise later to important discussions of the moral and spiritual underpinnings of our relationships with children in England and as noted in the field notes, clearly had an impact on participants' leadership principles. Again, as with discussions around respect and compassion, these debates were seen as ongoing and iterative tropes of critical reflection, rather than static positions or facts about leadership. It was clearly important to participants' leadership development to have senior staff provide a political and spiritual context because this in turn supported their own reflections on familiar English settings.

#### **Small group and one to one discussions with teachers**

Participants felt that small discussion groups with teachers were very engaging and led to 'thoughtful individual responses that added to the core school narrative' (Tim). Helen observed that in some meetings with teachers 'the presence of the Principal was supportive and in others the staff looked to the Principal for guidance'. This comment echoes debates around hierarchy and respect referred to earlier. Helen felt teaching colleagues offered views more readily when the meetings were small. This endorsed Alan's view that smaller discussions with teachers were more interactive and candid. In these smaller groups, teachers revealed strong understandings of learning routines 'assessment for learning, planning, delivery, marking and feedback and summative assessment cycles'. (Jill). Participants had

opportunities to explore the spirit of school life as a family environment. Jill reported a conversation with a student who endorsed this 'school as family' notion. She also observed that teachers felt: 'the overriding aim of school was to ensure that children were happy stating that children should be allowed to pursue subjects that made them happy'. Again, echoing to some extent earlier comments from strategic leaders of schools. Students occasionally joined these informal meetings, and where this occurred, it was possible, as a result of the informality of the meeting, to observe 'warm, encouraging and mutually respectful relationships' (Tim) between teachers and students. As we might expect in England, it was during more informal conversations over lunch or whilst walking the corridors that social and emotional stories were revealed.

Student performances were a particularly impressive part of most school visits. They evidenced a common regard for live performance and the important artistic development it engenders (Jill). Participants found the obvious self-confidence and willingness to perform in front of an audience very refreshing. One event we were invited to was taking place for parents so we were able to see for the first time the synergies between teachers, young learners and parents within what appeared to be a closely knit Delhi community. The event was an endorsement for us of the importance of live performance to bring a community closer together (Alan). Tim reflected on how interesting it would be to have informal conversations with some of the parents at this event. A further aspect of live performance was as Tim comments: 'the wonderful formal welcome ceremonies that students performed for visitors'. RC and many other participants felt these welcome celebrations were powerful messages that would strongly influence their own approach. Tim reflected on what his English regional equivalence could be in his setting; again another example of how the Indian context allowed frequent contextualising for critical reflection. Morning assemblies were another form of live performance led by student groups across age ranges. In one school

**Comment [a3]:** rephrased in response to R2

Richard observed yoga breathing techniques in preparation for the day ahead, again another opportunity to reflect on how spiritual well being was accepted and enjoyed by learners in their day to day experience of schooling. During this assembly, everyone listened to John Lennon's 'Imagine' (another indication of an international outlook) and the sound used to end the assembly was the ring of a Buddhist singing bowl. Participants were certainly moved by this live event and were in no doubt that the experience would influence the role of assemblies in their English settings. Returning to England with fresh ideas about the broad role spirituality can play for learners and teachers alike added a richness to leadership development hard to achieve in any other way.

The next section of this paper moves on to consider learning that occurred outside the school visits themselves. As mentioned earlier in the paper, we took part in formal reflection events at the end of each day. Richard felt these events 'ensured the day's visits were captured rather than just experienced'. He also went on to say that 'listening to others and their perceptions made me question and adjust my own initial thoughts'. Helen commented that the formal events 'allowed us to ensure our reflections were fair and honest' which was important to the trustworthiness of each participant's learning. Rebecca said that feedback nurtured 'a much deeper reflection on the experiences of the day'. She felt that feedback and debate, was invaluable and helped her to challenge and reformulate her leadership ideas. She also felt these sessions 'aided my thinking on how I might present ideas to colleagues on return to England and how I might wish to apply insights into affecting practice back at my own school'. Rebecca and Helen felt the reflection events really helped to develop fresh ideas about what her school could become. Tim helped participants to see how influential the study visit could be by introducing to these sessions the notion of a school narrative. This idea was based around the story that might be told to visitors about your school. What is included and left out of the narrative helps to establish a position that can incorporate important learning

from the visit. The idea of a school narrative was welcomed by participants and was discussed as a effective way of taking learning back to England for further discussion.

The final opportunity to learn was perhaps the most important and the most elusive. Teachers know that formal development events are important; but the informal opportunities that slide into the spaces around formal events, often create further unexpected and often influential understandings. The study visit organisers understood this and allowed plenty of opportunity for unscheduled learning. These opportunities occurred frequently every day and there is only space here to consider a few. For example one of the most influential aspects of the study visit was learning about the private and public schooling systems. It was not possible for us to visit government schools in Delhi (this was briefly discussed earlier) but we did meet teachers from government schools and the group was clear about the inequalities that exist. We were supported by tGELF (our local agents) in these discussions and the ethical dilemmas presented to us by this system led again to reflections on England's own fee paying school system. It also led to a number of important emotional responses that were sometimes challenging to manage and therefore very important to the range of emotional reactions education leaders are required to absorb and consider. In a different direction, this understanding of an economic system within schooling was complemented by seeing and learning about a major world city in a developing nation. Richard and Tim felt that seeing and observing Delhi life while travelling to schools helped to add context to the public/private schooling divide in urban India. Helen, along with three other participants, mentioned again how important tGELF were in clarifying our interpretations of what we saw and experienced and again there were plenty of ethical and emotional responses to the disparities between rich and poor that are so obvious in many developing world cities. More specifically, Jill highly valued informal opportunities for reflection as a 'powerful process

whether in the taxi, on the train or in a cafe, informal discussion with colleagues was vital to interpreting the day's events in school'. Rebecca added that she learned from observing urban life around her and added that travel time was important in itself: 'journeys before and after school visits were an intense and natural way of reflecting on our experiences'. Rebecca felt strongly about these opportunities:

During the journeys with different colleagues on different days we also reflected on the journey that our own schools were on. This gave rise to ideas for joint practice development, for example transition in English from year 6 to 7. It also gave time to reflect on my own leadership, for example listening to someone else's experience led me to reflect on how I communicate with colleagues in school.

This extended comment is important to establish the rich evidence that exists for sustained influence on Rebecca's leadership practice emerging from unscheduled, ad hoc learning during the study visit. Helen and Rebecca also made good use of travelling and social time in the evening to make notes about possible developments to their school action plans while ideas were fresh in their minds. Helen goes on to comment that travel time provided opportunities to:

...reflect as a small group and ask questions of each other. As we often used experiences from our own schools to aid our reflection and critical thinking, these informal conversations allowed us to gain a deeper insight into our own leadership styles

Rebecca also mentioned how important meal times were to share ideas triggered by school visits and the cultural context of our activity: 'Social occasions with Indian colleagues strengthened relationships and gave insights into the political and social background to education in India'. As mentioned already, the challenge India faces to educate the disadvantaged became a *leit motif* for many informal comparisons between Indian and English approaches to learning and education in socio-economically challenged settings. Helen also made the important point that informal opportunities for discussion allowed participants to test out views and opinions they may not have felt comfortable expressing in

larger, formal groups. In summary then, unscheduled learning had a major influence on all participants who learned that both formal and informal opportunities were vitally important during the study visit and, even more importantly, in the ways they will plan future teacher development in their own English settings.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The introduction to this paper critiques competency based frameworks that tend to dominant leadership development in England. These frameworks may be useful as starting points for discussion around leadership, but they lack the richness and depth of more critically reflective approaches. Our position is that well-led international study visits can provide a context for intense and fruitful experience with influence that extends beyond conventional leadership learning and into the kinds of identity shifts to which Gagnon and Collinson (2014) refer. These shifts occur when assumptions are challenged and the research identifies a number of points where participants' positions and beliefs about for example an ethics of care and spirituality are meaningfully transformed; that word returns to how important (in contrast to competency based frameworks) the role of perspective transformation was in the study visit, as described by Mezirow:

In transformative learning the learner intentionally transforms his or her established frame of reference to allow a **perspective** that is more inclusive, differentiating, critically reflective, open to other points of view, and more integrative of experience. Kegan (1994) would describe **perspective transformation** as movement toward a higher level of consciousness. (p.117)

**Comment [a4]:** Greater focus on Mezirow

This leads to a further discussion of Eraut's typology of informal learning (2004) where the categories of *implicit*, *reactive* and *deliberative* learning help to frame participants' transformations during the study visit. Eraut is also helpful in reminding us of the work of Schutz (1967) who commented that discrete experiences become meaningful when they are

accorded attention and reacted upon. This 'act of attention' brings experiences, to the fore 'which would otherwise simply be lived through' (p. 251). It was the case on this study visit that the community of leaders in a critically reflective culture, unsettled to some extent by the international location, were finely tuned to acts of attention.

**Comment [a5]:** Inclusion of Eraut

The findings in this paper touch complex issues: schooling and compassion, globalism and the importance of an outward-looking pedagogy, the ethics around the public and private schooling systems, the positioning of spirituality in the school day, the school as family and emotional reactions to challenging leadership responsibilities. These key issues formed the framework and because these issues were not set for the group, they became more valuable. The group generated their own lines of enquiry before the study visit and learning then arose naturally around what was influential and important during each day. In this way the group constructed a leadership curriculum supported by TISA's structured reflection sessions and, importantly, by the unscheduled learning that took place too. Furthermore, because the group generated this curriculum, they became confident in supporting the group too. So, as different school visits took place from day to day by small groups of participants, each group sought out comparisons in the evening from the full group and were eager to incorporate, digest and challenge the learning that others had undergone. This was how the trusted community developed to check and validate learning. This eagerness to learn and present to the learning community was accelerated by some important contextual factors: ownership, the newness of the experiences and the excitement and consequent commitment surrounding fresh learning. These conditions are not easy to create but urban India was a crucial context to stimulate and challenge. Zembylas (2010) refers to an 'ethic of discomfort' as 'a space for constructive transformations' (p.703). This idea deserves further exploration but this study visit certainly led to discomfiting emotional reactions which strongly influenced participants' understandings of the responsibilities of leadership. It may seem this approach silently

endorses the use of a developing world setting as a poverty 'horror show' to the benefit only of English education leaders returning to a relatively rich country. This was of course, definitely not the intention of the programme. Though it is impossible to give this debate the space it deserves here, it is important to note that participants were working with ethical organisations who took the role of cultural interpretation seriously. Participants were accompanied by Indian hosts (fully aware of English and Indian education contexts) supporting our understanding of what we saw and heard. This was absolutely essential to the success of the visit and helped supported well-informed debates about leadership. The crucial role of TSIA and tGELF was mentioned briefly at the beginning of the paper.

**Comment [a6]:** The 'policy tourism' debate

Finally, it is important to go back to an issue mentioned at the start of this paper. The leaders who undertook the visit, were already a well linked cluster of colleagues where settings frequently worked together. After the visit, participants acknowledged those links were stronger and more valuable. Perhaps Bell's notion of 'relational connectedness' is important here (Bell, p.14 2011) and leads back to the debate about leadership competency frameworks which in light of this study visit, seem to understate the complexity, importance and context of the leader/leader relationship in development programmes. Giles (2010), in a paper about student teacher/teacher educator relationships, refers to the 'counter-productivity of transmission models of learning' to developing the necessary 'sensitivities and sensibilities' (p.1518) at play in teaching. This is just as true for leaders whose roles require experience in understanding and developing relationships in many different directions. This leadership study visit was a highly effective context for learning about self and others and the importance of learning with and from others through the growth of personal and professional relationships within a learning community. This is of course about 'collegiality'; the complex relationships between peers who are united in a common purpose. Grossman et al (2001) capture this well in the following quotation:

Of all the habits of mind modelled in schools, the habit of working to understand others, of striving to make sense of differences, of extending to others the assumption of good faith, of working towards the enlarged understanding of the group - in short, the *pursuit of community* - may be the most important' (p81).

This is essentially what was taken away from the study visit. The formal and informal opportunities for learning led to important outcomes but fundamentally, this was a process of humanisation, which is perhaps the missing link in the way we approach education leadership development in England today.

## References

- ACKER, S., 2000. In/out/side: Positioning the Researcher in Feminist Qualitative Research. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28(3/4), pp. 189-210.
- ALVESSON, M. and SKOLDBERG, K., 2009. *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research* Alvesson, Mats, 1956-; Sköldbberg, Kaj, 1942-. London: Sage.
- BELL, B., 2011. *Theorising teaching in secondary classrooms*. Oxford: Routledge.
- BOLDEN, R., GOSLING, J., MARTURANO, A. and DENNISON, P., 2003. *A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks. Edited Version of a Report for Chase Consulting and the Management Standards Centre*. UK: Centre for Leadership Studies University of Exeter.
- BURSTOW, B., 2009. Effective professional development as cultural exchange: opportunities offered by visits of head teacher groups from Malaysia to the UK. *Teacher Development*, 13(4), pp. 349-361.
- COFFEY, A. 1996 'The Power of Accounts: Authority and Authorship in Ethnography', *Qualitative Studies in Education* 9(1): 61-74.
- COLLINSON, D., 2005. Dialectics of leadership. *Human Relations*, 58(11), pp. 1419-1442.
- ERAUT, M., 2004. Informal learning in the workplace *Studies in Continuing Education*, (26) 2, pp.247-243
- FORRESTER, J., 1982. A critical empirical framework for the analysis of public policy. *New Political Science*, 3/4(9/10), pp. 33-61.
- GAGNON, S. and COLLISON, D., 2014. Rethinking global leadership development programmes: the interrelated significance of power, context and identity. *Organization Studies*, 35(5), pp. 645-670.

- GILES, D., 2010. Developing pathic sensibilities: A critical priority for teacher education programmes. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, **26**(8), pp. 1511-1519.
- GROSSMAN, P., WINEBURG, S. and WOOLWORTH, S., 2001. Toward a Theory of Teacher Community. *The Teachers College Record*, **103**, pp. 942.
- GUNTER, H., 2010. A sociological approach to educational leadership. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, **31**(4), pp. 519-527.
- HOYLE, E. and WALLACE, M., 2007. Educational Reform: An Ironic Perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, **35**(1), pp. 9-25.
- KESSON, K.R. and HENDERSON, J.G., 2010. Reconceptualizing Professional Development for Curriculum Leadership: Inspired by John Dewey and informed by Alain Badiou. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, **42**(2), pp. 213-229.
- LEITHWOOD, K., SEASHORE, K., ANDERSON, S. and WAHLSTROM, K., 2004. *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. University of Minnesota.
- LEITHWOOD, K., HARRIS, A. and HOPKINS, D., 2008. Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, **28**(1), pp. 27-42.
- MARSHALL, C., 2004. Social Justice Challenges to Educational Administration: Introduction to a Special Issue. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, **40**(1), pp. 5-15.
- MERCER, J., 2007. The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas. *Oxford Review of Education*, **33**(1), pp. 1-17.
- MEZIRROW J., (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MEZIRROW J., (1996) *Toward a learning theory of adult literacy*. *Adult Basic Education*, **6** (3) pp. 115-126
- O'LEARY, M. (2013) *Developing a National Framework for the Effective Use of Lesson Observation in Further Education*. UCU Publications.
- SCHUTZ, A. (1967) *The phenomenology of the social world*. G. Walsh & F. Lehnert, Trans., original work published 1932) (Evanston: Northwestern University Press).
- SKEGGS, B., 1997. *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage.
- STAKE, R.E., 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research*. California: Sage.
- THE FUTURE LEADERS TRUST, 2014. The Future Leaders Trust Competency Framework [Homepage of The Future Leaders Trust], [Online]. Available: [www.future-leaders.org.uk/.../27/TFLT\\_Compentency\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.future-leaders.org.uk/.../27/TFLT_Compentency_Framework.pdf) [15th June, 2015].

TIMORA, A.H., 2006. Writing small discoveries: an exploration of fresh observers' observations. *Qualitative Research*, **6**(4), pp. 429-451.

WALKER, A. and DIMMOCK, C., 2004. The International Role of the NCSL: Tourist, Colporteur or Confrere? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, **32**(3), pp. 269-287.

WATKINS, P., 1989. Leadership, Power and Symbols in Educational Administration. In: J. SMYTH, ed, *Critical Perspectives on Educational Leadership*. Lewes: Falmer, pp. 9-37.

ZEMBYLAS, M., 2010. Teachers' emotional experiences of growing diversity and multiculturalism in schools and the prospects of an ethic of discomfort. *Teachers and Teaching*, **16**(6), pp. 703-716.