Supporting teacher development in fragile and challenging contexts using digital technologies

Gary Motteram
Overview

• Initial observations
• Background
• Some guiding principles
• Video conferencing and teacher education
• Pakistan case study – teacher education in difficult circumstances
• Mobiles and teacher education
• Teachers who are refugees
• Syrian teachers case study (Zaatari refugee camp)
• Next steps
Initial observations

• I am hoping to show here how what we are doing builds on the work of others. I’m not sure as a profession we are always that good at doing this

• I work at the Manchester Institute of Education at the University of Manchester, so I come at the field of ELT from an educational background and although principally an English language teacher, I am also drawn to what Maths and Science teachers have to say or teachers of other languages like German and Chinese (also in CALL – another home that I inhabit)

• The MIE sits within the School of Environment Education and Development (SEED) and Development/ social justice are a significant beacon at the University Manchester

• As I was preparing this talk I ranged over a number of resources, some analogue (my research diaries) and some digital (I use a variety of tools to maintain stores of useful materials) and found a number of really useful organisations and reports that may be useful. I refer to some of them during the talk, but have added a list at the end of the slides
Background to the case studies

• Education had not been a priority in Humanitarian Relief until more recently (Burde et al, 2017)

• Education systems are usually an early casualty of any disaster, man-made or environmental
  o E.g. schools and other educational buildings are often taken over and used for various functions, including safe spaces for fighters or insurgents

• Mobile technologies are very prominent in the world, as true for refugees as for others (Various UNESCO reports)

• We do know how to do online education (but people seldom read what has been said) and are learning how to use mobiles for teacher development (see Dahya, 2016 and Miao et al., 2017)

• We also know a lot about good practices in teacher education in general and in ELT

• In difficult and complex circumstances some technologies are more useful than others and there is often not good access to the internet
Some guiding principles (1)

ICTs can “… open[...] up prospects and opportunities for promoting democracy and prosperity in poor parts of the planet …” (Zembylas, 2009, p18)

- Materials can be provided for teachers who don’t have access to any resources
- These materials can be localised based on existing materials/models being used in other parts of the world (other south countries) supplemented with our own ideas and ideas from other development projects
- Aim is to enhance teachers knowledge and skills and enable them to be more effective as teachers in the classroom (Key theme related to the success of Millennium Development Goals – SDG 4)
Some guiding principles (2)

Power et al (2009, p90) argue that:

“... one of the most important contestations around ICT for rural education and development is to strengthen the voice and power of educators and their communities over the discourse of technicians and global capital.”

We also need to avoid the “... [f]our barriers to educational ICT interventions in rural schools... Poor intervention design ... Costs ... Social conditions ... Disempowering educators”. 
Some guiding principles (3)

Michael Trucano’s 10 principles or approaches to consider when planning to introduce ICTs into remote, low-income educational environments

1. The best technology is the one you already have, know how to use, and can afford
2. Start down and out, and then move up and in
3. Treat teachers like the problem ... and they will be
4. It’s the content, not the container
5. If you are pointed in the wrong direction, technology may help you get there more quickly
6. Anticipate, and mitigate, Matthew Effects (benefits the already advantaged)
7. To succeed in doing something difficult, you may first need to fail (and learn from this failure)
8. Put sustainability first
9. We know a lot about worst practices -- we should make sure we don't repeat them
10. ________
Case study 1 -- Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI)

- Developed by the British Council in the Punjab (Pakistan) in conjunction with the local Department for Schools Development (DSD)
- Targeting 400,000 teachers
- English Medium Instruction for a range of subjects
- Teachers with low level language skills:
  - A baseline survey that the British Council in Lahore (Pakistan) conducted with 2000 teachers 30% were A0, 35% A1, 30% A2 and only 5% reaching a B1 level
Video conferencing in teacher development

• There is a lot more information on using VC for language learning (e.g. work at the UK OU – Regine Hempel and Eric Baber – early article (2003), Yuping Wang in Australia (2204), LANCELOT Project in Europe)
• There is a lot more material on watching recorded materials, or recording classes as a way of analysing what is happening (see Major & Watson, 2016)
• Much less literature on video conferencing in teacher education, particularly language teacher education (see Maher and Prescott, 2017).
• More if you look at synchronous communication as a topic (e.g. Bower, et al., 2015)
• An important set of relevant papers/ chapters focus on Plan Ceibal en Inglès where video is used as a significant source of teacher development (I found this model very attractive)
  o VC used one-one and also one to many
• Also in Libya (Gray, 2016) – one-to-many
• English to Go – Language project in Germany using Skype
• In the Jordan project (more below) – one-to-many & tandem project (could be many-to-many) – funded by the ESRC as an Impact Accelerator Account project
Teaching landscape in Pakistan

- Pakistan: Approx ⅓ -- total school pop 29 mil, so 9.4 million children not in school (UNICEF, 2014)
- Public school expenditure fell from 2.7% of GDP in 2013 to 2.5% in 2015
- Country sits 147th out of 188 in the 2015 HDI
Our own data

• Data similar to our own survey of 2013 in-service Punjabi teachers:
  
  - 96.5% own mobile phone (70% basic Nokias)
  - 85.3% own a TV
  - 55.2% have access to a computer
General technology landscape

• 87% of Pakistani households own mobile phones (*Express Tribune*, 2014 quoting The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey)
• Difference between urban and rural is 94.7% and 83%
• Network is currently mostly 2G, although 3G has arrived in Karachi
• Difference in internet connection: 17.4% urban; 1.3% rural
• 60.2% of households countrywide own a TV

Developmental questions

• What roles could Skype play in supporting large-scale teacher development for primary teachers in the Punjab?
• How successful would the implementation be?
• How well could the framework of the Plan Ceibal en Inglès set up and run in Uruguay project be transferred to a more low-tech context in Pakistan?
Developmental findings -- initial phase (1)

Technology

Quality of the sound -- varied with the number of groups involved -- three was suggested as an optimum number.

It was also suggested that the sessions include the use feedback channels, like text, or a mobile phone number for questions or comments. This would be good to bring all the groups into the on-going discussion so one group was not the centre of attention.

Management of the groups

• encouraging the teachers in the centres to stand up when they are talking to others, or feeding back to the remote tutor, so that the microphone, which was positioned at the front along with the camera, would able to pick up the sound more effectively.
• making sure that the regional centre seminar leader remain conscious of who they are speaking to and consciously direct attention either to the audience in the room, or the speaker on the screen.
• that the remote teacher be more involved in the process, feeding questions via the regional centre seminar leader, or getting the local teachers to do the task.
Developmental findings -- initial phase (2)

*Online methodology*
The remote tutor was asked to think more about eye contact, about where they were looking at the screen so that the participants in the room get the sense that they are being looked at.

It was observed that generally there were good comments from the DTEs and good feedback. One of the groups engaged much more than the others, the other groups needed to be better included in the process.

These sessions continued to be a part of the regular training meetings at DTSCs throughout the remainder of the year and as the project continued ideas changed and developed.
Developmental findings -- intermediate phase (1)

By July 2015 the original methodology had then shifted to include the use of PowerPoints to both help manage the session, but also to act as a support for the regional centre participants who found it difficult to follow sessions that were only oral. This use of the capability of Skype to ‘show the desktop’ demonstrated a more confident approach to the use of the technology overall.

The remote tutors had also started to work with regional centre coordinators acting in the role seminar leaders who were supporting interaction from the seminar groups. “DTEs [would] pass questions to the coordinators who [would] type them into the [Skype] text chat [leading] to question and answer sessions” Observation 16 July, 2015. These seminar leaders would support the process by translating ideas, repeating questions from the floor and generally developing an effective working relationship with the remote the teacher.
Developmental findings -- intermediate phase (2)

A new development in March 2015 had been to use Skype as a way of delivering orientations for training consultants who would be leading face-to-face session. This meant that training consultants did not need to travel to Lahore to attend orientation sessions saving time and resources.

Further consultant training was also conducted in June 2015.
What we learned from the experiences of video conferencing

• That using Skype was a possibility, but there were issues. However, other options would not have been sustainable

• That our materials (content) with some modification were effective

• Initial training would have been useful for the core tutors who were new to the process. We learned from our mistakes

• Having local co-ordinators was a good idea

• That the Skype sessions could be enhanced by including other technologies into the mix, e.g. PowerPoints to provide structure and mobile phones for back channel communication

• Running activities this way did get around the local barriers created by a deteriorating security situation and did reach out to large numbers of isolated teachers

• That starting in this way led to other training opportunities and that it would be easy to transfer to local trainers to continue the practice
Case study 2: Jordan project

• This project is taking place in Jordan, but concerns Syrian refugees, particularly teachers in the Zaatari refugee camp. Started March 2017 – initial phases finishes April 2018

• Worked alongside the British Council as a part of the LASER project, a teacher training course ran from March – July (2017)

• Our project offered to provide additional online support to the programme that was being offered, initially via WhatsApp (asynchronous), but also tried Skype, too (synchronous)

• Also worked to design materials to go with an app – Ustad Mobile – that would work offline (asynchronous). Essentially we tried to build a component-based mobile VLE to suit the particular context

• Project also started working with teachers in the local community schools as a form of tandem project
Mobiles in teacher education

• Many early and still current articles look at general roles that mobiles can play in teacher education, as a support to classes, or for communication. There are not even that many of those type of articles

• Policy report on Mobile learning policy from UNESCO (2013) – UNESCO’s direction of travel

• Most recent survey article is by Baran (2014)

• Dahya (2016) – mentioned above – contains a lot of useful references to mobile learning

• Miao et al. (2017) – Supporting teachers with mobile technology gives the first real set of case studies with reasonable numbers of students that can give us some insights into how we might work

• Our study is a contribution to this growing understanding and taking place in a different context
Syria: Numbers and Locations of Syrian Refugees

- 315,923 Syrians in need of assistance in camp and non-camp areas in Turkey. According to the Government of Turkey, there are an estimated 400,000 Syrians in Turkey. (Source: WMX, April 30, 2013)

- 450,639 Syrians in need of assistance in Lebanon. According to the Government of Lebanon, there are around 1 million Syrians in Lebanon. In addition, DPA reports approximately 42,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon. (Source: WMX, April 11, 2013)

- 63,084 Syrians in need of assistance in Egypt & North Africa. According to the Government of Egypt, there are some 150,000 Syrians in Egypt. (Source: WMX, April 30, 2013)

- 448,370 Syrians in need of assistance in Jordan. According to the Government of Jordan, there are some 470,000 Syrians in Jordan, including illegal immigrants/migrants. (Source: WMX, April 25, 2013)

- 140,172 Syrians in need of assistance in Iraq. (Source: WMX, April 20, 2013)

- 6.6 million in need of assistance, including 4.25 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) estimated in Syria. (Source: WMX, April 9, 2013)

Number of Syrians receiving international aid:
- 1,418,188

Metric:
- April 2013: 1,418,388
- 2013: 1,000,000
- 2012: 200,000
- 2011: 500,000
- 2010: 300,000

Refugee camps:
- Open
- Under construction
- Area of conflict and displacement
- Official border crossing
- National capital
- International boundary
Teachers who are refugees

• Focus in the literature on ‘refugee teachers’ until recently has been on refugee camps in Africa and what happens to teachers when they move to other countries (e.g. Scotland) and try to re-train

• Quite a few UNESCO reports (and some in the media, e.g. a recent BBC documentary) that are rich with stories of life in camps throughout the middle east: Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan

• Most Syrian teachers of refugees work in the informal sector or assist in formal schools where the main teachers are Jordanian. Unlike in other contexts, children study to take Jordanian exams – the Tawajihi. In Turkey, it is reported that some children follow a version of the Syrian curriculum (Edwards, 2014)

• Most reports of teachers and teacher development report that there is a lack of qualified teachers and the training that they receive is not well co-ordinated.

• Mendenhall et al. (2015), have also pointed out that “despite the new policy focus on teachers’ instructional role in refugee settings, there is little evidence to suggest that the short, uncoordinated, and minimally effective workshops of the past (Buckland 2005) have been replaced with more productive training programs (INEE 2015)” (p. 95).
Our study in Jordan – ESRC IAA Project

• Our study hoped to build on what we knew from the past and look at the role that digital technology might play, we believed that mobile was the best option here.

• We’re in the process of analysing a range of data, but are currently focusing on the use of WhatsApp to look at the role that this kind of informal social networking tool can play.

• In choosing WhatsApp, we are starting with ‘what is there’; we tried to get as much information about the teachers and their situation (what in ELT we would call a ‘Needs Analysis’) – ‘not seeing the teachers as a problem’.

• We discovered other possible tools that might be more useful in the context, e.g. IMO instead of WhatsApp and Zoom rather than Skype.

• We hoped to build a system that would be sustainable. We tried to develop links with the UNHCR (semi-successful) and the local NGOs (not so successful).

• We are trying to work on relevant content within the Ustad mobile app because this will work offline.

• We did face a lot of issues, mostly around internet connectivity and working with the NGOs.
WhatsApp data

• A mixed-methods approach to data analysis, following Moore et al. (2016) when it comes to the discourse analysis.

• 1170 contributions were coded according to their broad function. These included functions such as ‘Greet other participants’, ‘Arrange a meeting’, ‘Tell a story’, ‘Describe teaching problem’, ‘Share a link’ and so on.

• A final 53 discourse functions were identified in the data. Some exchanges were excluded at this stage.

• The remaining 1135 exchanges were then further categorised by theme.

• A total of 16 themes in the data were identified (one appears in two places).
Findings from the main WhatsApp group

- **Interpersonal (24%)**
  - Social
  - Personal

- **Organisational (33%)**
  - GM training
  - Group
  - Logistics
  - NGOs
  - Technology
  - WhatsApp

- **Developmental (46%)**
  - GM training
  - Course related
  - Culture
  - Language
  - Teaching Practice
  - Differentiation
  - Lesson plan
  - Materials
  - Resources
Examples of exchanges
What we learned from the experiences of working in Zaatari

• Dahiya (2016) talks of “system strengthening” initiatives’ (p16) and with slightly better access to the internet and some more support from the NGOs we believe we could make a significant contribution

• That a combination of: suitable materials provided on a tool like Ustad Mobile, using WhatsApp and/or Skype for interactivity would work very well

• Teachers would be more attracted if we could offer them some form of certification and it was linked better to existing activity. They would also like more classroom materials

• With limited financing and a longer term project we could get the kind of evidence that is missing from the field currently

• We need to improve our links with the NGOs and work out how to get on their radar – crises don’t stand still and NGOs are pulled away to work on the most recent developments

• That digital technologies can make a difference and we should be actively pursuing such activity
Next steps

• British Council ELTRA project working with teachers in Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire and Rwanda
References (1)


Felix, U. (2003). *Language learning online : towards best practice*. Swets & Zeitlinger. Retrieved from [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FL11uAtL7HkC&oi=fnd&pg=PA171&dq=video+conferencing+and+language+learning&ots=bQGvoxF4Rg&sig=7xcQrtfcZGZp3qeY0DxdY0x3NUI#v=onepage&q=video conferencing and language learning&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FL11uAtL7HkC&oi=fnd&pg=PA171&dq=video+conferencing+and+language+learning&ots=bQGvoxF4Rg&sig=7xcQrtfcZGZp3qeY0DxdY0x3NUI#v=onepage&q=video conferencing and language learning&f=false)


References (2)


