Pre-sessional English language courses: university telecollaboration as a driver of Global North / South student-contact for engineers

Abstract

This paper discusses the potential offered by telecollaborative links between universities in the Global North and the Global South. It draws on data from the English for Academic Study Telecollaboration (EAST) project, an online pre-sessional partnership between Science, Engineering and Technology students at the University of Glasgow and at the Islamic University of Gaza. This is an ongoing project, now in its sixth year, which has attempted to follow a critical pedagogies agenda, and is examined here from a Freirean perspective. It looks for evidence of transformative outcomes for the students involved and analyses the extent to which a 5-week online collaboration can work to empower the most vulnerable of stakeholders, and to challenge received attitudes and practices. The paper concludes that pre-sessional English language telecollaboration that juxtaposes areas of peace and conflict can offer particular opportunities for the dialogue that, in Freire's view (1996: 69) leads, through action and reflection, to 'naming' - and thereby potentially changing - the world.

Introduction

In 1972, Michel Foucault co-founded the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP)* in France. The stated intent was:

> ….to make known what the prison is: who goes there, how and why they go there, what happens there, and what the life of the prisoners is, and that, equally, of the surveillance personnel; what the buildings, the food, and hygiene are like; how the internal regulations, medical control, and the workshops function; how one gets out…(Peters and Besley, 2014: 102)

Megaphone in hand, the *GIP* shouted over prison walls, and the prisoners shouted back. The intent was to allow the prisoners' voices to be heard, and to render salient to wider French society their prison system, and an underlying societal control that most were happy to leave invisible and unquestioned.

This paper argues that the current Western model of Higher Education has effectively created a 'wall', similar to that highlighted by Foucault, which works to exclude students from less privileged parts of the world. It suggests that new affordances presented by telecollaboration may allow students from the Global South to 'talk back' (Pennycook, 1998), revealing - as did Foucault's *GIP* – the difficulties they experience and the underlying

power imbalances; challenging problems of inclusion/exclusion and social justice; and enhancing awareness of different contexts and ways of being and doing.

The paper does so by looking at a telecollaborative project that has linked pre-sessional English language students in science-related subjects at the University of Glasgow with their peers at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG): the English for Academic Study Telecollaboration (EAST) project.

Since 2012, the inhabitants of Gaza have been to all effects imprisoned by border-closures imposed by Israel and Egypt; it is difficult in fact to imagine any area in the world where the analogy to Foucault's wall is more apposite. EAST represents an attempt to overcome this isolation for Gazan students, while providing Glasgow-based students with the language practice that will enable them to enter their chosen courses at the University of Glasgow. Over a five-week period every summer since 2015, Glasgow-based students have engaged in telecollaborative tasks with peers in Gaza to try to find solutions to Gaza-specific engineering challenges using English as the medium for communication.

This paper starts with an overview of Foucault's theories of power, relating them specifically to the current internationalisation agenda within the UK higher education system. It then looks at the affordances of telecollaboration with overseas partners, focusing specifically on one area that offers real potential, but which has been neglected to date: telecollaborative partnerships between the Global North and South[1]. Using the (extreme) case of Gaza, it exemplifies this potential - and the many challenges - through an analysis of data gathered from five iterations of EAST held to date. It concludes that pre-sessional students based in the Global North and their peers in the Global South can mutually gain, in terms both of enhanced language skills and of increased intercultural awareness.

Literature review

Higher Education: the power to exclude

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault built on his work with the *GIP* to outline the wider way that power works in contemporary society. He went on to develop the concept of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1994a), that is, the creation of the 'correct' types of subjects not by overt coercion, but through suggestion, resulting in the internalising of discipline and self-policing practices by a given person or wider community (Foucault, 1994b). He terms these limits (1994c: 131) "regimes of truth", working to provide (usually unaware) subjects with the boundaries within which they may shape themselves, and beyond which they will struggle to act. Foucault describes the indirect control that results (1994c: 341) as the "conduct of conduct". Concepts linked to governmentality are of direct relevance to issues currently facing higher education.

Within universities worldwide, the dominant regime of truth since the early 1980s has been one driven by a neoliberal ethos (Torres, 2011; Shor et al., 2017), marked by competition for resources and for students. This growing marketisation of higher education has also

[1] 'Global North/South' describes a political / economic division of the world, rather than geographic.

occurred in the UK, where there has long been pressure (Davies, 2006; Barnett, 2007; Fazackerley, 2019) to provide students with the 'value' that the fees introduced in the 1990's warrant, a phenomenon that van der Wende (2017) has termed 'academic capitalism'. Faculties need to justify themselves on economic grounds, hence quality needs to be quantifiable, leading to what Morrissey (2015: 615) describes as "a new academic subjectivity defined by accountability and performance". Subject-areas within the arts and humanities have been particularly susceptible to cuts and closures (Ball, 2016). Shor et al. (2017: 5) make a link between these growing constraints and the 'conduct of conduct', stating that institutions, schools and universities now function as "disciplinary instruments", rewarding with more privilege those who already hold privilege; they argue that an institutional predilection of ranking for 'quality' actually hides an underlying attempt at subordination, i.e. a coded narrative to justify *in*equality. Directly referencing Foucault, they claim that since the late 1970s universities have deliberately allowed less space for unearthing "subjugated knowledges" and "disqualified discourses" (Shor et al., 2017: 4). Postcolonial (Nyamnjoh, 2016) and feminist (Naples, 1998; Hekman, 2018) paradigms offer ways forward that foreground an emotional and a political resistance to this regime of truth. However, many doubt whether healthy research and levels of curiosity (see e.g. Giroux, 2002; Shor et al., 2017) or even a basic ethics of care (Atkins, 2009; Lorey, 2015; Jeffery, 2018) can continue to flourish under such a market-led ethos. Such financial imperatives have helped drive significant increases (Otten, 2003; Boden and Epstein, 2006) in the numbers of international students.

Internationalisation and Diversity

In the academic year 2016/17, students from outwith the European Union amounted to 13% of the total student-body in the UK (UKCISA, 2018). These numbers ought in theory to bring an increased diversity on campus and the students, whether domestic or international, to be benefiting from this intermingling and the opportunity for "re-invention" (Coleman, 2015: 42) that it can provide. However, this is often not the case. Firstly, most such mobilities involve moves from one Global North country to another (van der Wende, 2017: 6). Secondly, the very significantly higher non-EU overseas student-fees also mean that any students from the Global South generally come from relatively privileged backgrounds, and from markets that provide easy routes for student-recruiters; at UK level, Chinese students predominate, and made up 32% of non-EU international students in 2016/17 (UKCISA, 2018). In short, the growth in overseas student numbers doesn't necessarily mean a proportionate growth in diversity, whether in terms of social background or of L1.

If one problem is the lack of diversity among incoming student-groups, another is the fact that those students who *are* able to travel from the Global South to the UK for a university education often find that contacts with home-based students are quite rare or, when they do occur, remain superficial (Coleman [2015]; see also Bargel [1998] re mobilities to Germany; Gurin [1999] re the USA). Ideally students would be able to attend dedicated courses in inter-cultural communication that allow them to juxtapose their own ethnic and cultural identities with those of others (Crosbie, 2014: 97), even to discover and explore how the wider framework of power relations (as outlined by Foucault) might impact these identities (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 107). But few degrees can find space for such courses in-

sessionally, in already crowded timetables, and as a result there is a danger that any study period spent abroad will have only a limited sociocultural value (see Roberts et al., 2001; Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Wells et al., 2019), with surprisingly limited on-campus possibilities for meaningful intercultural contacts. Otten (2003: 15) usefully summarises the rarity / superficiality of the contacts that can result as "exchange without encounters".

Increasing diversity via telecollaboration

One way to address this lack of diversity is via telecollaboration, which O'Dowd and O'Rourke (2019: 1) define as:

> … bringing together groups of learners from different cultural contexts for extended periods of online intercultural collaboration and interaction. This is done as an integrated part of the students' educational programmes and under the guidance of educators or expert facilitators.

The lack of diversity among the incoming student-population ought, in theory, to favour the development of telecollaborative contact with international students from less privileged backgrounds, thereby presenting interesting issues of content, identity and power while addressing a social justice agenda, and Kumaravadivelu (2008: 107) suggests that such encounters, outwith the Global North, can lead to truly transformative change for those involved[2]. However, Helm (2015: 204) notes that links with the Global South are in fact relatively unusual, and more recent studies (see e.g. Plutino et al., 2019; Turula et al., 2019) still present an overwhelmingly Global North focus (the latter albeit from a social justice perspective). While stating that "the promotion of understanding across national and cultural divides…. is more pressing than ever", O'Dowd and O'Rourke (2019:4) include only one mention of telecollaborative projects involving Global South partners (Soliya, discussed below). Projects that *do* involve Global South partners rarely touch on the most disadvantaged: Starke-Meyerring and Wilson's 2008 overview of telecollaborations included partners in Mexico, China, Brazil and Nicaragua; all still qualified for Overseas Development Assistance in 2020, yet only the last is currently defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019) as a Lower Middle Income Country.

Examples of engagement with poorer and/or more politically isolated areas are therefore rare, but they do exist: Imperiale (2017), writing of a collaboration with Palestine, discusses a telecollaborative English course enabling English literature students to move beyond competence models in order to 'write back' (Pennycook, 1998; Holliday, 2007), expressing their creativity, imagination and above all cultural resistance via poetry; Fassetta et al. (2017) also talk of a telecollaborative project, involving the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language, again in Palestine, and again purposed for cultural resistance; moving beyond Europe, Kramsch (2013) describes a telecollaborative project linking learners of English literature in the USA and in Iran. Such HE interventions using telecollaborative approaches to raise learners' awareness of a range of challenging situations are cheering, particularly as they involve areas of the world (Palestine and Iran) that have been 'othered' (Saïd, 1993) for

[2] Though variations in ease of connectivity must be acknowledged, IT infrastructure in the Global South has improved markedly in recent years.

decades. However, the number of participants involved in these partnerships tends to be small, and it is also interesting to notice limitations in the *range*, in terms of subject-matter, of these interventions, which all have a focus on language, arts and the humanities. O'Dowd (2013), looking at barriers to telecollaboration between European universities, presents seven case-studies, five of which (like the works cited previously) involve link-ups between arts and humanities students.

Intercultural dialogue with the Global South involving the arts and humanities – areas which, as we have seen, are particularly threatened by the market-led ethos currently driving UK higher education - is of course to be welcomed, but this paper argues that similar Global North-South dialogue is *also* needed, in other fields. The next section focuses on one such area, Science, Engineering and Technology (SET)-related subjects, an area that the author's home university was keen to develop. Given the centrality of this field to the overall neo-liberal regime of truth (Foucault, 1994c), and specifically its centrality to the neoliberal agenda within higher education discourses (Morrissey, 2015), this is in fact precisely *why* an intercultural dialogue involving social justice issues must be championed for SET students.

Engineering and Telecollaboration

SET as a field has attracted growing attention in terms of intercultural studies, but conventionally not from any desire to 'write back' or to overcome barriers to social justice. If HE course-providers in the Global North now emphasise the need to enhance their students' ability to interact with peers across cultures, it is principally as a reflection of employers' concerns regarding graduate-employability. Katehi & Ross (2007), for example, would include intercultural competence (ICC) as a key 'professional awareness' element to any well-grounded tertiary-level engineering course; Downey et al. (2006) note specifically the importance of ICC in enabling the problem-solving element of engineering roles; Schaeffer et al. (2012) focus on the need to develop actual cross-border contacts between students as a means of achieving this ICC; O'Dowd (2012) outlines an unusual *poetry*-based link-up between Swedish engineering students and students of English in the USA, taking advantage of the fact that all Swedish engineering programmes have a Man, Society and Technology (MST) requirement.

These are all valid examples of virtual mobility, via telecollaboration, in the field of engineering, but each focuses on the creation of links *within* the Global North. Some initiatives to tap into the creation of North-South SET contacts afforded by the Internet do exist; in the UK, Engineers Without Borders is an example. Each year, a different country or region around the world sends UK universities a broad list of societal challenges (for instance, in 2017/18 from Tanzania, and in 2018/19 from the state of Tamil Nadu in India), and participating UK-based students then choose which to investigate. The students aim to provide a workable, low-tech response to the problem they have chosen, while the programme itself aims to offer "a change of mindset so that the social and environmental impact that engineering can have is recognised" (Engineers Without Borders, 2017). UK-based students can gain valuable learning experiences, and inexpensive and sustainable resources of applicability in the target regions may even result. However, the engagement is

purely theoretical, and opportunities for intercultural awareness-raising are limited by the absence of encounters with the potential end-users of any solutions that are proposed.

A programme that does provide such encounters is Soliya, an EU telecollaborative initiative that "aims to expand the reach and scope of the Erasmus+ programme through […] technology-enabled people-to-people dialogues sustained over a period of time" (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange). Soliya specifically targets the Southern Mediterranean, and Global North / South partnerships have resulted with universities in Morocco, Egypt, Palestine and Jordan, aiming for "a deeper understanding for the perspectives of others around the world on important socio-political issues", and to develop "21st Century skills such as critical thinking, cross-cultural communication, and media literacy" (Soliya website). The stated aim is the exploration of reasons for friction between the Arab/Muslim and the Western worlds and to "facilitate dialogue between students from diverse backgrounds across the globe" (ibid), thus helping to attain the Council of Europe's (2008) goals for intercultural communicative competence and intercultural dialogue. It also meets principles of Islamic dialogue which Ashki (2006: 6) defines as "a type of communication between people that respects the differences of 'the Other', which allows for true listening in a safe environment that offers possibilities for the transformation of self-awareness in each individual". But, as their website states, Soliya is once again "most commonly integrated into the schools of arts, humanities, social sciences, languages, and international studies"; students studying the sciences are, it acknowledges, represented less frequently.

To summarise, there is a recognised value in broadening engineering education to embrace collaboration with students in other countries, to develop the social skills / inter-cultural competences that co-operation and teamwork can foster. However, busy timetables can be an issue, and interventions that occur tend to provide somewhat superficial contact, focusing on employability skills. If they do involve face-to-face contact, via telecollaboration, this tends to be intra-Global North.

The EAST project: a critical pedagogies SET telecollaboration with the Global South

Telecollaboration and critical pedagogy: a digital megaphone?

This section describes the workings of EAST, a project which aims to develop a Global North – South link for SET students using a critical pedagogies approach, i.e. one that moves beyond employability, to touch on questions of power imbalance, and social and political justice, using telecollaboration as a tool.

The concept of critical pedagogies developed from the seminal work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), linking ongoing social injustices to structural imbalances within the educational system. Freire, writing originally in the early 1970s, argued that schools exist to maintain the status quo, and that educators support an invidious 'banking' system (ibid: 58), one which views students as mere 'receptacles' to be 'filled' and readied for a life in which the ability to question or think critically is unnecessary, even dangerous. However, Freire argued that students can develop their full societal potential by questioning authority and, in particular, if they are made aware of their own position within the power-

structures that shape their education, a process that he termed 'conscientization'. Parallels with Foucault's thinking on power can be drawn, and Giroux (2020: 717) - in an article on Freire's work – writes that if students can develop "a healthy scepticism about power", there are real possibilities for an openness to innovative change that might challenge the status quo.

Talking specifically of telecollaboration, Lamy and Goodfellow (2010: 124) note that, "computer-mediated communication has implications for the breaking down of the transmission approach, with consequent implications for the authority of the teacher, the institution, and the hierarchical structure of the education system in general." In the 'breaking down of the transmission approach' we see Freire's desired overturning of a 'banking system', and in 'authority' and 'hierarchy' we can see reflected Foucauldian issues of power, discussed previously. Foucault, in working with the *GIP*, aimed to highlight the isolation of prisoners from society, and to afford them a voice. There is a clear parallel between the situation facing the prisoners that Foucault highlighted, and that of the exclusion facing students in the Global South. Koehn and Obamba (2014) outline barriers dividing Western education systems from those in the Global South, which are figurative (yet very real); in the case of Palestine, the barriers consist of *physical* walls, and the Gaza Strip in particular is a territory that in over a decade of blockade has become what some now refer to as an open-air prison (Aouragh, 2001; Tawil-Souri, 2015). One aim of the EAST project has been to reveal, in a way that mirrors Foucault's work with the *GIP*, the harsh conditions of the confinement experienced by Gazans, 'calling over the walls' to highlight specific impact of blockade and travel restrictions on the hopes and aspirations of young people there. Given that virtual tools and communication strategies already form the basis of Palestinians' everyday transgressing of boundaries in order to overcome the state of social and political isolation that has been imposed on them (Fassetta et al, 2017), the use of online tools in order to 'talk back' and to highlight issue of social justice may be particularly fruitful for students in the Gaza Strip.

In adapting a critical pedagogies approach to include the internet (which didn't exist when Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), it must be acknowledged that technology is not neutral; our uses of technologies reflect underlying economic, geographical and cultural power systems (Belz and Thorne, 2005: xviii). Shor et al. (2017: 13) go even further, stating that "technology has been a one-way monologue so loud and pervasive as to exclude critical dialogue about what technology applications mean or engender, or who benefits." In other words, telecollaboration carries its own power-related baggage. However, if we accept that there is a pressing value in linking the Global North and South, then it is difficult to envisage (short of student-mobility - a theme returned to later in this paper) a means of critically linking North and South students that avoids telecollaboration. Guth and Helm (2011: 16) argue that technology can afford new spaces to its users and new forms of interaction (they term it a "relationship revolution") that can challenge traditional power dynamics, while Shor et al. (2017: 14), though clearly doubting the institutional motivations behind the proliferation of online learning initiatives, go on to concede that technology "may be used by ingenious critical teachers to develop students as activists who question knowledge and power in their society". In short, telecollaboration can be developed as a means to foster communication, and might conceivably function as a vehicle for the critical dialogue that is central to Freire's approach.

A pluriliteracies approach to the development of intercultural awareness

EAST is a telecollaborative link which operates under various constraints. It takes place *pre*-sessionally, i.e. before Glasgow-based international students matriculate, and is a project-based adjunct to an already-existing English language course. Pre-sessional courses are summer language programmes held by host universities in the Global North. They cater for overseas students whose abilities in English are almost at the level required, and their aim is attainment of a university-certified score equivalent to a Secure English Language Test (such as IELTS or TOEFL), which allows direct entry to the bachelors or masters course the students have chosen. In terms therefore of content, academic, subject-specific language skills must remain the main focus of the overall course, to which EAST is an accompaniment, taking place mainly outside the classroom. The final constraint is one of duration; EAST can last only five weeks.

Despite such constraints, since its introduction in summer 2015, EAST has aimed to broaden the reach of SET-specific language-enhancement provision at the University of Glasgow by providing critical-pedagogies-informed project work. Such project work has a solid theoretical underpinning in the expansion over the past 20 years, particularly in Europe, of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (see e.g. Pérez-Cañado, 2012; Cenoz et al., 2014; Dalton-Puffer et al, 2014), in which the subject is taught via the target language. An overseas telecollaboration allows the addition of intercultural learning opportunities. O'Dowd (2018: 14) summarises the COIL approach (Collaborative Online Intercultural Learning) to telecollaboration that EAST has followed as "the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills, including intercultural competence and critical thinking, while working on shared subject content and also providing [students] with different cultural perspectives on their subject area".

Goris et al. (2019) specifically note the affordances for an increased sense of belonging to an international community, and EAST has in fact developed its original CLIL-based pedagogy to take on elements of a 'pluriliteracies' approach, an extension of CLIL in which students are pushed (via the content-requirements of their project work) to be working at a cognitive level that is more demanding than that of their grammatical ability, i.e. of what Coyle (2015) terms their 'vehicular language'. The problem-posing nature of EAST is central to the development of critical awareness (Freire, 1996: 65) and the built-in need for communication creates extra demands that are crucial for effective learning; as Coyle puts it (2015: 90), deep learning needs to "involve social settings where learners are enabled to articulate their learning before internalising their own interpretation of these concepts on an individual basis".

The development of 'context'

The strength of the EAST project is that it provides these 'social settings', i.e. the 'contexts' which are so important to a Freirean approach that combines learning and social justice.

The Gazan students initially provide various Gaza-specific engineering challenges, and there are few places in the world with so many; three recent wars, coupled with the ongoing

blockade by Israel and Egypt, mean that construction materials and mechanical parts are in very short supply. They then mentor the Glasgow-based students (who come principally from China, with significant numbers from Saudi Arabia, and then from a range of other countries) by providing feedback on the responses that these Glasgow-based students propose. The feedback received from Gaza by the Glasgow-based students over the 5-week duration of EAST is content-specific, with no language-related help, in order to ensure that exit scores in language tests at the end of the pre-sessional course are a true reflection of Glasgow-based students' language abilities.

The students who arrive in Glasgow in mid-July to study English for Academic Purposes via the pre-sessional course may sometimes know a little about Gaza, but more often have never heard of it. Even students from the Middle East, who know something of the political background to the Palestine-Israel conflict, tend to lack a true understanding of the economic and humanitarian scale of the problems that the people of Gaza face on a daily basis, and of the ever-present fear of war. And for the few who can be said to arrive in Glasgow with some idea of this scale, it remains nevertheless in the abstract.

Since course-organisers in Glasgow are unable to know beforehand which applicants will in fact materialise from overseas on Day 1, awareness-raising activities for incoming students, prior to their arrival in Scotland, are not feasible. In a plenary lecture on the first afternoon, students newly-arrived in Glasgow are briefly introduced to IUG, and view a video in which they hear a short message from their soon-to-be partners. Glasgow-based students are immediately asked to form small groups (ideally of three) around Gazan engineering-based problems, which the students in Gaza have already identified and sent to the course organisers in Glasgow. For the Glasgow-based students, these groupings are (as far as is possible, given the preponderance of Mandarin-speakers), cross-lingual; a typical Glasgow-group might thus contain two students from China and one from Saudi Arabia, so that even within the Glasgow nexus, an intercultural element is in-built. The next day, course-organisers set up Facebook groups linking Glasgow-based pairs with those based in Gaza. At the end of this week, class-time is dedicated to ensuring that the Glasgow/Gaza groups meet via Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp, initially discuss the problem they will be researching, and get to know one another.

Purely Facebook-mediated student-to-student interactions create an insufficient bond between participants, so face-to-face encounters are timetabled to take place in Week 1 within lesson-time, leading students to feel greater ownership of the evolving collaboration, and to better understand the responsibilities involved (the Glasgow students to their Gazan partners, who have to live with very significant hardships on a daily basis; the Gazan students to their Glasgow partners, whose transition to masters study depends heavily on a successful project-outcome).

The bond created in Week 1 is fundamental to the intercultural learning opportunities that follow over the subsequent four weeks of EAST. Each class has a Writing teacher, who monitors progress on each Glasgow-based student's Gaza-related Subject-Specific Essay, and a Speaking teacher, who ensures that class members are ready for a teleconferenced presentation, delivered in tandem by the Glasgow-based and Gazan students in Week 5. But it is important to stress that the bulk of the lessons are English for Specific Academic

Purposes inputs, aimed at developing disciplinary literacies in Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing skills, and are not tied-in to the subject-matter of the students' EAST projects in any way. It is therefore fundamental that, from the outset, the students feel able to work with their partners in Gaza in autonomy, outside class-time, on whatever SET challenge they have chosen. It is via the Week 1 bond, fostered via a synchronous meeting timetabled in-class, that opportunities for solidarity-building, witnessing and ethics of care (to be discussed later in this paper) will be constructed.

A pre-EAST course, Constructive Feedback (Rolinska and Guariento, 2017) is given to the Gazan students by the course organisers in Glasgow. This is a short online course aiming to help the students in Gaza develop an understanding of how to make use of effective techniques when offering generic feedback, providing skills that will enable the IUG students to support the Glasgow-based students (but which are also purposed to be of value in gaining online work once EAST ends).

The EAST project through a Freirean lens

We have seen that previous attempts to justify telecollaborative exchanges for the development of intercultural awareness among engineering students have been made on the grounds of future graduate-employability but (as Starke-Mayerring and Wilson noted in 2008), in moving beyond competence models, a social justice approach provides a rationale for collaborative work that can be particularly compelling.

However, many facets of the role that telecollaborative interaction between engineering students in the Global North and the Global South can and should play - in particular, the space for a critical pedagogies approach - are challenging to implement. Here we look at the extent to which the EAST project may be said to meet Freire's critical pedagogies precepts. He breaks his capability approach down into four basic stages: selecting a generative theme; codifying this theme; problematising the theme; action (Freire, 1996).

Selecting a generative theme

Freire (1996: 64) suggests that the themes to be examined should be context-specific. Ideally they should emerge from discussion with the subjects or, failing that, from issues that they feel strongly about. The sheer numbers of participants in EAST (196 between Glasgow and Gaza in 2019) precludes Freire's workshop approach to this stage, but a principal strength of EAST is that the engineering challenges are closely related to a context, one provided by the Gazan students and relating the need for engineering answers to the wider (and pressing) needs of Gazan society. Glasgow-based participants are presented with a range of four or five engineering issues to choose from on Day 1, and this choice (within admittedly limited parameters) is an attempt to maintain the democratic principles which are central to Freire's approach.

Codifying the theme

Codifications can be considered "concrete representations of an aspect of people's lived reality" (Beck and Purcell, 2013: 3), an attempt to develop how we see ourselves in the

world, and society in ourselves (Freire, 1996: 47), and in EAST this stage differs very markedly from Freire's. For Freire, students should be developing a 'conscientization' of their own position as oppressed figures. However, it would be inaccurate to describe the majority of Glasgow-based students on the EAST project as 'oppressed' (in any Freirean meaning of the term), as they tend to come from privileged sections of their home communities. For this reason, they need to understand, as far as is possible, what it means to live 'in the shoes' of the Gazan partners they will be working alongside. Where Freire used OHP slides reflecting back basic themes from the lives of his participants to engender 'lived reality', EAST uses videos: a general video on life under blockade in Gaza (The Guardian: 2018); and in some cases engineering-challenge-specific videos produced pre-EAST by the IUG participants, to afford the Glasgow-based participants some idea of what living this reality might involve (see the following example from the EAST website: https://easttelecollaboration.wordpress.com/2016/10/13/a-video-from-gaza/#more-592).

Problematising the theme

This stage has seen the most change over the five iterations of the EAST project. Initially, in 2015, interactions between Glasgow and Gaza took place via Facebook, in the students' own time. However, not only did some students engage too slowly with their respective partners (time, in a 5-week project, is absolutely of the essence) but, more importantly, there was a qualitative shortfall. For Freire (1996: 90), a true exploration of the contradictions inherent in any codification, and the societal factors underpinning these contradictions, can only come about through critical engagement as a result of actual dialogue (he actually *specifies* conversation, rather than written interaction). From EAST 3, the timetabling of a precious teaching-slot during which students 'meet' their individual partners via videolink (Skype, Zoom or Whatsapp) to discuss the engineering problems together has proven very effective in burrowing down swiftly into the wider cultural, societal and political impacts. The Glasgow-based students realise that they are dealing with something tangible, something that impacts directly on people's lives. The inclusion of these sessions within class-time has allowed the teacher to be present, to monitor and assist, performing a facilitation role similar to that of the 'investigator' as outlined by Freire (1996:93), or to Foucault's holding of the megaphone to enable the voices of the excluded to be heard (in Peters and Besley, 2014: 102).

Action

This final stage is key to Freire's concept of 'praxis', i.e. the idea that thought can and must become action that changes a given situation, a change that then becomes the catalyst for further thought, and further change. In theory, EAST participants will enter this ongoing cycle of thought-change-new thought with each of the ongoing interactions that follow on from the initial, teacher-facilitated videolink at the end of Week 1. In other words, the remaining four weeks of EAST provide students with a cycle of questioning and exploration - a dialogue that invites student to reflect, to be creative, and, rather than simply 'banking' pre-digested information, to develop as activist citizens (Freire, 1996: 65) based around their chosen engineering issue, allowing intercultural learning to occur inductively.

Overall, there are considerable points of difference from Freire's conception of a critical pedagogy here; the Gazan students adopt a less active role than that envisaged by Freire, and from Week 1 onwards, student-student interactions take place without the oversight of a facilitating teacher. However, from a Freirean perspective, the concept of concrete action remains an arbiter of a successful intervention, and is embodied in the joint video-presentation in Week 5. Freire has been criticised (e.g. Elias and Merriam, 1980) for the abstraction with which he outlined his critical pedagogies approach, but in fact this very abstraction provides a malleability that can lead to adaptation and to the embrace of new technologies.

At the same time, it must be emphasised that the students at the two institutions have not been able to operate as equals, and the following section will look at possible reasons for this, at macro-, meso- and micro-levels.

Imbalance: the project sites

Differences in power and wealth at the macro-level are marked indeed. The UK is a wealthy Western European country, ranked 14th in the UNDP Human Development Index (2019) and is privileged in power terms, too, as one of five permanent members of the United Nations. Palestine is in the Middle East, ranked 119th in the Human Development Index (ibid), within which the Gaza Strip forms a poorer, non-contiguous part. Palestine as a whole was under British mandate until 1948 and since 1967 has been under Israeli occupation. While the direct occupation of the Gaza Strip ended in 2005, it remains under de facto Israeli control, with very strict limits on entry / egress of both goods and people. Recent statistics on this part of Palestine are telling; 34% of Gaza's population live in 'deep poverty', 44% are unemployed and, as a result of protracted crisis due to blockade by Israel and Egypt, family incomes have fallen significantly since 2011 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The Gaza Strip is also isolated not just geographically and economically, but also politically; Palestine is recognized as a state by many countries, but not by (for example) the UK or USA, and Palestine is also divided internally in political terms, with different ruling authorities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

At a meso-level, the two institutions also differ significantly in terms of power and wealth. The University of Glasgow is a research-driven Russell Group university ranked in the top 100 global universities (THE, 2020). It attracts large numbers of international students every year, while at IUG the geopolitical isolation described above also leads to a near-impossibility of physical movement (whether incoming or outgoing), either by students or staff, and concomitant challenges in the creation and maintenance of research networks. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are however well-developed in both institutions – as virtually the only opportunity for any form of employment beyond the Gaza Strip is found online (Fassetta et al., 2017), IUG has recognised and prioritised ICT as one of the only ways to overcome the restriction on physical movement / the economic blockade described above. The power differences relating to language are also relatively small; in Glasgow, course administrators are working in their L1 (a fact that confers clear power advantages), but at IUG English is (with Arabic) one of the two official languages, and is spoken fluently by administrators.

Power differences at the micro-level, i.e. between the students, are perhaps the least marked, as the students involved on the EAST project are *all* non-native speakers of English (whether pre-sessionally in Glasgow, or in-sessionally at IUG), i.e. using English as a lingua franca. At both institutions they share a particular need (which they recognise) to improve their listening and speaking skills in English (Rolinska et al., 2018).

Methodology

The author's own knowledge of injustices facing Palestine, alongside previous socially-committed links between the University of Glasgow's School of Education and IUG (Hammond, 2012), meant that EAST organisers were able to adopt from the outset a Critical Reflective praxis (Benade, 2015), one that accepts that teaching is essentially a *political* act (Freire, 1998). EAST was designed to 'perturb' (Beetham and Sharpe, 2013), in this case by using the web to introduce both an emotional (Atkins, 2009) and a political (Naples, 1998) element to an already-existing pre-sessional programme.

However, for its first two years, 2015 and 2016, the project ran with no intended research element; the data gathered, predominantly from anonymised end-of-course questionnaires written in collaboration by University of Glasgow and IUG staff, were purposed to provide participant-feedback that might improve the project for students on any subsequent course, i.e. to evaluate whether and to what extent the telecollaborative element was beneficial to students in Glasgow and at IUG in terms of language skills and intercultural competence, rather than for research purposes. Via these questionnaires, in September 2016 course organisers in both institutions found themselves with what Bryman (2008: 530) terms "a data-set that was waiting for a research question" and an interest in taking the collaboration further.

These two initial years of EAST went beyond an evidencing of reciprocal benefit; they also allowed the development of reciprocal trust and respect. The first iterations of EAST confirmed that a joint social situation (Hekman, 2018) existed, serving to locate potential subject and object on the same critical plane, and this provided the foundation for subsequent research that followed a Participant Action Research (PAR) paradigm. Grant et al. (2008), while admitting that approaches to PAR vary widely, acknowledge the importance of the relationship-building (which took place in the first two years of EAST) to PAR initiatives, within which researcher and researched will need to work alongside one another very closely. They also highlight a continued need for ongoing reflection on the part of the researcher. In these ways PAR can be seen as a logical continuation of a Critical Reflective praxis. But they also stress that a central element of PAR is the attempt to produce action that may (maybe slowly and iteratively) act as a catalyst for social change and, furthermore, that PAR often puts an examination of power-relationships centre-stage. PAR is a paradigm that acknowledges a need for flexibility and is able to adapt to very considerable contextual constraints (Willis and Edward, 2014: 24) - in the case of EAST, the massive impacts of the blockade, and the institutional impact of the embedding within a pre-sessional course - but the data-collection tools outlined below deliberately sought, from EAST 3 onwards, to use a PAR methodology in order to gauge these two specific issues: change; and power.

For reasons of continuity, the anonymised end-of-course questionnaires used for EAST projects 1 and 2 (in 2015 and 2016) remained the main data-source for the EAST projects in 2017 through 2019. *Table 1* shows the growing dimensions of the project (particularly in Glasgow), alongside a fairly constant (and unsurprising, given the SET field) preponderance of male students at both institutions.[3]

EAST 1, 2015: UofG	37 students (14 female)
IUG	20 students (7)
EAST 2, 2016: UofG	31 students (12)
IUG	21 students (7)
EAST 3, 2017: UofG	81 students (32)
IUG	23 students (8)
EAST 4, 2018: UofG	140 students (44)
IUG	52 students (22) (+ 10 students on waiting list)
EAST 5, 2019: UofG	171 students (67)
IUG	25 students (12)

Table 1: EAST project student numbers, 2015-2019

In total, 44 comments (by 41 students) taken from the anonymised post-course student feedback questionnaire are included in the findings section that follows; they are identified by ('Q') after each comment. Though these student comments represent the bulk of the data, the paper also draws on the following inputs: firstly, further contributions from students on the initial 2015 project, taken from Facebook exchanges ('F'), from end-of-course powerpoint slides ('PPT'), or from student comments and video-artefacts included on the EAST website; in addition, the author's own privileged position as course-organiser in Glasgow and as a legitimate outsider (Holliday, 2007) *vis-a-vis* the Gazans, allows a further perspective, namely field notes ('FN'), taken over the five years of EAST; finally, after the 2019 project, hypotheses gained from collection, analysis and coding of this data were used to inform a teachers' focus group facilitated by the author ('TF') with seven EAST teachers, held in March 2020. The teachers' perspective is also reflected by comments offered during the end-of-course teachers' meeting, the 'Annual Monitoring Review' ('AMR').

Along with quantitative data provided by closed questions (not exploited in this paper), the questionnaires posed the following open questions for each of the five years of the project to the students from both institutions:

- What was the greatest thing about participating in the project?
- What was the most challenging thing about participating in the project?
- What definitely needs to be improved/changed for the project to work better next time?

[3] In 2018 an additional 12 overseas participants (not included in this total) joined from INACAP, Chile. In 2019, an additional 11 participants (not included in this total) joined from Malawi University of Science & Technology, 5 from Pontificia Universidad de Valparaiso, and 1 from INACAP. This paper reports only on the relationship between the University of Glasgow and IUG during EAST.

- How do you evaluate the project in terms of raising your cultural awareness? Can you give examples of how you developed it?
- Has the project changed you in any way as a person, for example in the ways in which you think or act?
- How do you evaluate the project in terms of increasing your knowledge of global issues such as climate change/crisis, poverty, etc? What global issues did you learn about?[4]

The Glasgow-based students were asked the following additional question:

- Your partner lives and works in completely different circumstances, often much more disadvantaged than yours. To what extent has the project affected your capacity for compassion and social justice?

Relevant responses to these questions from 2015 and 2016 were retrospectively coded to enable an exploration of themes of potential interest post-2016, and data-collection from EAST projects in 2017, 2018 and 2019 followed a qualitative content approach (Altheide, 2004), with further interplay between additional data collected from the students and from field notes leading in turn to an ongoing (re)conceptualisation of codes / refinement of themes. Data was collected following University of Glasgow ethical compliance procedures.

Ultimately, two research questions emerged, with sub-themes as below:

Research question 1: Is there evidence for transformative change for students?

- Making exclusion visible
- Raising intercultural awareness
- Students' personal transformation

Research question 2: What issues of power-imbalance are evident? How do these impact the students' experience?

- Institutional resistance
- Ethical challenges relating to power-imbalance

Findings

Research Question 1: Is there evidence for transformative change for students?

Making exclusion visible

In her seminal work *Creating Capabilities* (2013), Martha Nussbaum outlines a range of 'capabilities' which, realised through 'functionings', signal the effective freedom of an

[4] This question, and the final one, are demonstrably leading. Though I recognised this in 2017, they were left unchanged for subsequent gathering of data (again, to preserve overall continuity).

individual to choose a life that she has reason to value. Some of Nussbaum's ten 'central capabilities' – such as the rights to live a life of normal length; in health; and with control over one's environment – are, given the circumstances in which Gazans find themselves, truly hard to envisage at present, and realistically beyond the scope of small-scale education projects (Fassetta et al. 2020). But others – such as the capability "to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude…." (Nussbaum, 2013: 33) are certainly touched on in the first student comments which are reported in this section (as is another that Nussbaum includes, "….justified anger"). These initial contributions suggest that, in emotional terms, the EAST project has had value for some students in Gaza. Even if only online and for a short time, the EAST project can make the borders of exclusion more porous, using the internet (as Foucault used the *GIP*) to make the exclusion both visible *and* audible, and providing students 'confined' in Gaza with a way to let others know about the challenges they and their friends and family experience on a daily basis:

> *'it was a bridge to many people to let them find out at least what Gaza is ...what is really happening here in Gaza...'* (Gaza, F: 2015)
>
> *'Having new friends and understating how other people knew about Gaza'* (Gaza, Q: 2019)[5]
>
> *'Listening to other people from other nationalities thinking with our problems and solve it is very supportive'* (Gaza, Q: 2016)
>
> *'I also participate in raising cultural awareness about my country and its problems'* (Gaza, Q: 2016)
>
> *'Make others aware about Gaza and its possibilities, real-situation problems, and culture'* (Gaza, Q: 2017)
>
> *'It strengthened my confidence and my identity when I explained to them our suffering'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)
>
> *'Think of all Palestinian students in Gaza who could not travel to pursue their education outside Gaza, who lost their scholarships, who were not able to attend conferences or participate in exchange programs, competitions, or internships'* (Gaza, F: 2015)

Alongside the desire to let the outside world know about the hardships and injustices facing the Palestinian people, an explicitly-stated pride in their own 'culture' or 'identity', also emerges, and the comments above exemplify too what Marie et al. (2018: 20) term 'Sumud', a word in Arabic that combines a personal *and* a collective steadfastness (i.e. '*Gaza and its possibilities*….'; '*my confidence and my identity*').

[5] Sic. Quotations from students/teachers are unedited.

The following comments reveal that some were saddened that a bridge to the wider world had revealed how little was known about Gaza, others conversely gladdened by learning of support outside the Strip:

> *'For me the greatest thing is that our voice reach the world by let other people know about Gaza and I really surprised when students [based in Glasgow] say that he did not hear about Gaza City. I am pleased that we show them Gaza which is the beauty, love and life'* (Gaza, Q: 2017)

> *'Also knowing that people in the other side of the world love us and also knowing a lot about us unlike what we were thinking'* (Gaza, Q: 2016)

> *'Talking and discussing Gaza problem with an international student made me happy that there people care and had an interest about my home land'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

> *'Now I know that there are people who love us and want to help us'* (Gaza, Q: 2017)

Just as the comments above from IUG students contain references (e.g. '*bridge'; 'voice'; 'love'; 'care'*) that suggest an emotional value to EAST, one in which there exists potential for "a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (Freire, 1996: 72), there is also evidence for a similar empathy being developed among the Glasgow-based students. Nussbaum talks of the importance of what she terms 'affiliation' (2013: 34), "to show concern for other human beings….to be able to imagine the situation of another". We have seen that many Glasgow-based students come from relatively privileged backgrounds, and that organisers hope that some will be able to 'walk in another's shoes'. For these students it is often a first contact with people living in circumstances more challenging than their own:

> *'It is quite sad to see some people having difficulties living'* (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

> *Yes, it affected much. After I know the live stander, I think I need do better to help them'* (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

> *'Let us realize the current situation in other countries'* (Glasgow, Q: 2016)

> *'Understanding how do poor countries suffer'* (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

> *'This kind of project will aware you that what is happening around us'* (Glasgow, Q: 2016)

The dialogue between Glasgow and Gaza constitutes what Freire terms a 'praxis' (1996: 68), an action and reflection that allows students to 'name' the world and, by so doing, potentially to change it. Freire argues that speech-acts carry meaning; by witnessing them, Glasgow-based students are able to legitimise the Gazans' suffering. This is one key way in which exclusion is challenged, and this is also intertwined with important issues of identity (Hall and du Gay, 2011) that are also raised and addressed by EAST. Gazans are denied travel, and thereby denied so many of the chances – which most students can take

for granted - to see themselves from alternate perspectives, and to develop the understanding of the plurality of identities that we all possess. Herrera (1992: 80) provides a parallel that illustrates how this can work. She talks as a primary school teacher from San Francisco, but working in a school in Cairo, which she gradually comes to see not as 'an Egyptian school', but simply as 'a school'; her identity as a primary school teacher subsumes her broader national identity, and (presumably) preconceptions that might serve to exclude. The interactions provided by EAST show that exclusion can be similarly overcome not just by showing the gravity of problems and challenges that may be peculiar to life in Gaza (as in the comments above), but also through the sheer *familiarity* of many of the engineering challenges proposed; the Glasgow-based students - from China, from Saudi Arabia, etc. - sometimes relate not only to the joy in many of the presentations, but also to the ubiquity of the situations they see. As course-organiser, sympathetic to and well-versed in the Palestinian struggle, the basic banality of the following engineering challenge (quite apart from the joy of its delivery) was a real eye-opener: https://easttelecollaboration.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/another-video-from-gaza/#more-362 (EAST website). This student, presenting on traffic challenges in Gaza, was allowing no space for the researcher's own, stereotyped imaginings of victimhood, as emerges from the following comment, regarding the 2015 EAST presentation themes:

> *'Traffic, pesticides, litter, car-pollution….life in Gaza seems to throw up pretty similar problems to life here in Scotland!'* (FN: 2015)

Moreover, as one teacher (herself of Arab background) noted:

> *'Also some problems, e.g. Saudi students, may be shared with Gazans, for example political / societal, such as having to wait for a long time to get things done, but not for lack of money'* (TF: Teacher 7)

To conclude, whether by highlighting the challenges of life in Gaza, or the commonalities of identity between participants, the overcoming of exclusion (for the Gazan students in particular) has been a key achievement of EAST; where previous to the project many felt excluded, now some may (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019) feel that they *belong.*

Raising intercultural Awareness

We have seen that internationalisation in the UK is increasing, in response to a variety of global forces, but still leaves the overall student-experience as one of surprising homogeneity. We have likewise seen at IUG a lack of free movement, one that has led to an "enforced monoculturalism" (Imperiale et al., 2017: 43); there are very limited opportunities to study abroad, and incoming students are even rarer. Thus, there is a need to increase ICC in both institutions, and the opportunity to learn about cultures other than their own was a principal attraction mentioned by students both in Glasgow and at IUG:

> *'I decided to participate in the EAST Project to meet new friends from different backgrounds and cultures'* (Gaza, Q: 2019)

'It is my honour that can work with Arabians together, which is I never try it before. And they are very nice people and fill with passion' (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

'When I dealt with others with each one has its own culture, my view of the subject really changed...i actually get to know some cultures and really impressed by some' (Gaza, Q: 2016)

This latter comment above is particularly important; the fact that most Gazan students work on EAST with a Glasgow-based pairing comprising *two different nationalities* (often Chinese and Saudi) makes the inter-cultural element much more salient - as de Nooy (2006) notes, partnerships with a binary set-up and an overt ICC focus (such as Soliya) risk casting learners into a defensive representative of their culture, but a built-in three-way split in terms of nationality makes this less true of EAST. For some Gazans there was therefore the opportunity to *generalize* about the value of working interculturally (rather than of comments specific to an any one cultural grouping), as the following comments suggest:

'I learned how to respect the cultures of others….before the project it wasn't a big thing, but when I dealt with others with each one has its own culture, my view of the subject really changed...' (Gaza, Q: 2016)

'If you ask me what is the most useful thing that you take it from this project i will certainly say the knowledge about cultures, its great thing to share your ideas and thoughts with other people' (Gaza, Q: 2016)

'you have just know them, also you can get a full of useful when you chat with them about their habits, thoughts, living and many thing relating to their lives not just talking about the education or college :)' (Gaza, Q: 2016)

Overall, Glasgow-based students made fewer comments relating to a raising of intercultural awareness. It may be that the Gazans felt more strongly about the theme of interculturality (though it may also reflect the fact that Gazans were on holiday and had more free time, or that the Glasgow-based students were preoccupied with the pass/fail nature of the course). There is evidence elsewhere, however, that the inductive approach to raising intercultural awareness adopted by EAST could successfully impact Glasgow-based students as well; as Dix (2016: 155) puts it, "for a transformative process to occur, the problematic must become *my* problem or *our* problem, must be experienced as a construction or obstacle to be overcome." Trying to find a solution to what starts out as engineering problems could touch on a multiplicity of very complex societal, environmental, and political issues. The following three example (taken from the author's field notes during the Week 5 presentations) serve as illustrations, and highlight the importance of Freire's underlying 'context':

'…this [Glasgow-based] group has learned that Optical Character Recognition software struggles to adapt successfully to the complexities of the Arabic script, but also that in Gaza many have damage to their eyesight (due to the conflict / lack of access to adequate healthcare)' (FN: 2016).

'…this [Glasgow-based] group of civil engineers (2 Chinese / 1 Thai) propose a high-rise solution to the housing shortage. They learn that normal building materials = embargoed in Gaza, plus high-rise solution needs electricity for lifts. But power-cuts are so common!' (FN: 2017).

'Telecommunications engineers (1 Saudi / 1 Chinese) with wireless telephony focus; they propose GPS solutions, to help overcome the lack of addresses across the Gaza strip. They have learned that 4G mobile systems exist in Palestine, but only from Israeli providers' (FN: 2017).

Hence students in Glasgow begin by working on an ostensibly subject-related issue, but something more serious may emerge, maybe from the students' research, but (more fundamentally) from the interactions with the partner in Gaza to find, together, a contextually appropriate (Freire, 1996) response. It would of course be fascinating to know what the students really understand by the term 'culture', i.e. the extent to which students see its features as prescribed or essentialized (Holliday, 2007) along ethnic or national lines, but the comments are nonetheless interesting. However, there is evidence here to suggest that learning *beyond* the acquisition of language and content, i.e. learning of an intercultural nature, has taken place inductively, i.e. without overt training for the development of intercultural awareness and despite the time-constraints under which EAST operates. Bringing together those who have experienced peace in education with those whose education is marred by conflict and siege can thus, I feel, combine interculturality and subject-matter in a meaningful way.

Students' Personal Transformation

We have seen that students appreciated the chance to learn about other cultures, but some also mentioned the opportunity to see perceptions of their *own* country through the eyes of another, and others even noted the most interesting final step in the raising of intercultural awareness, the opportunity for reflection and to project any learning back onto their *own* culture and a consideration of the social forces that may have formed meanings, beliefs and behaviours that underpin it (Byram, 1997: 35). The following comments suggest that such deeper and personal transformation can occur for students on EAST, via extra-curricular activities and/or online exchanges between the partners, even though there is no space to timetable explicit intercultural awareness-raising activities:

*The EAST project offered to my life a different experiment too; when [the Glasgow-based co-ordinator] asked Gazan students to film a short video about our problems, I considered that was a big challenge for me to stroll around the streets holding my camera, especially that my teams' problem was the road traffic and I faced some obstacles like interrogation by police. That experience made me a courageous and strong human. I was very happy to make that video because it transferred our suffering to the world, it was a clever idea.' (*Gaza, F: 2015)

'In the project, I talked remotely with completely strange people, for the first time in my life, who are from very far country, talk different language, and have new culture

to me. This opened my eye about new things, as not all people think the same way, so I should clarify new ideas for people. The idea that might seem obvious for me might not be that clear for other people…' (Gaza, Q: 2018)

'You will get astonished when you hear that i have learned many thing about the problems of my countries that i have never known it is existing' (Gaza, Q: 2016)

The students above reference instances ('*made me a courageous and strong human'; 'opened my eye'; 'you will get astonished'*) that point to personal transformation. It would seem that a chance can be presented, telecollaboratively, for an encounter of significance, providing students with an 'authenticity of task' (see Guariento and Morley, 2001) that is a feature of the real world, but lacking in most UK pre-sessional programmes.

However, such authenticity also suggests a necessity for taking risks. In normal circumstances there is a positive pedagogical *benefit* to be gained from an approach to learning that places problem-solving at its core; As Wolfe and Alexander (in Coyle, 2015: 96) state, "argumentation and dialogue are not alternative patterns of communication; they are principled approaches to pedagogy". From Canagarajah's "cultural struggle" (2002: 196), through Mezirow's advocacy of "disorienting dilemmas" (2011), to Kumaravadivelu's "disturbing dialogues" (2008: 181), there is a wealth of other research supporting similar approaches. Specific to the raising of intercultural awareness via telecollaboration, Ware & Kramsch (2005: 203) talk of the potential value of "extended episodes of misunderstanding", and O'Dowd (2011: 351) of the "cultural rich points" that may emerge from moments of online friction. As the following comments suggest, there were certainly moments at which the online interactions were uncomfortable, even fraught:

'At the beginning, I didn't know much about Gaza. So I was very careful to talk about some sensitive issues like wars with them' (Glasgow, Q: 2017)

'Since we have different culture background, sometimes I just afraid I will offense their religion without attention' (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

'I find out that our group members from different countries think in different ways, so it's hard to understand each other. We have to explain everything in detail' (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

'Due to the bad situation in Gaza, acquisition of competencies and improving the skills was very hard, this was the basic motivations to join in EAST project. At the beginning, I was worried about this experience and I will fail to communicate with another people who have another culture, thinking, language and another way to life, but as time passed, I started to know that it's a lot easier than I thought. We had two video chatting then we complete chatting by writing, and we had a lot of fun and exchange cultures together. Actually, in the first discussion about our topic, we had a big misunderstanding and my partners were very angry and confused, then it went well. You know, this experience made me realize that I need to live more and be always happy' (Gaza, Q: 2017)

The final student-comment, above, is quoted at length, as it seems to offer support to the many researchers who champion risk-taking, whether in the classroom or online. But it also highlights that these are risks which may well be magnified in any sudden, novel and high-stakes online contact between students in the Global North and South. The siege-related insecurities and fears make these dangers particularly salient in the case of Gaza (Phipps, 2014), and given the long-standing nature of the Palestinian struggle, Argenti and Schramm (2012) argue for a possible *collectivised* trauma, one that may be transmitted inter-generationally, and which may add to any current trauma that IUG participants are carrying within. The following comments suggest the size of the impact on Glasgow-based participants:

> *'I just knew that there were wars in Gaza, but I didn't know to what extent they influence in daily life of the people there'* (Glasgow, Q: 2016)
>
> *'can't believe the truth [of the situation in Gaza]'* (Glasgow, Q: 2019)
>
> *'…the poverty and bombings….I couldn't begin to imagine the impact of this, let alone the students who knew nothing about Gaza'* (TF: Teacher 5)

These comments align with Nussbaum's central capability of affiliation, allowing participants from a SET background (who might otherwise never have the opportunity) to learn about issues of social justice in the Global South. However, as the comments in this section have suggested, when contemplating work with the Global South in general, and with a country such as Palestine in particular, the relationship between risk-taking and personal transformation presents many challenges, and presages ethical issues that we shall examine shortly.

Research Question 2: Impact of power-imbalance

This section now presents evidence relating to research question 2: What issues of power-imbalance are evident? How do these impact the students' experience?

Institutional resistance

It is far from easy to separate the impacts on stakeholders at student-level and at institutional-level, as these are deeply interwoven; for example, a situation in which a student collaborates effectively despite perceptions of initial language-weaknesses might be seen as transformational for the student herself, but it might also reveal to course organisers / the wider institution just what their students are capable of when, via telecollaboration, local generative themes are linked (or as Freire [1996: 101] terms this, 'hinged') to larger social contexts. But that inequalities also exist between the Global North and South at institutional level is of course no surprise; as Koehn and Obamba (2014: 74) note, these social contexts "both generate and reproduce structural power and epistemological hegemonies", and "militate against the construction of symmetrical partnerships".

Such issues of underlying structural power have been sufficiently visible to attract notice from participants at both institutions. Comments concerning the need for more reciprocity in the EAST set-up, suggesting a lack of 'symmetrical partnership', have come from the Glasgow-based students; they are able to see a bias towards the Global North institution at which they are studying, i.e. to note their own privilege. They feel that their Gazan partners ought to be allowed to:

> *'….write a short essay formally evalauting the solutions provided by [Glasgow-based] sts - this could be in form of short academic presentations too, a couple of slides added on to the Glasgow sts' presentations'* (Glasgow, Q: 2015)

> *'The initial presentation of the problem could be in form of a video - a more extensive presentation of the problem'* (Glasgow, Q: 2015)

> *'IUG sts [should be] given access to Glasgow Library online databases during the project'* (Glasgow, Q: 2015)

Understandably, IUG students have made similar points, suggesting that the provision of the pre-EAST Constructive Feedback course, delivered to IUG participants as training prior to EAST and taking place before the Glasgow-based students arrive in Scotland, fails to compensate for the limited role that the IUG students assume during the actual EAST project:

> *'May be if we swap the role so IUG students give the presentation and [Glasgow-based students] ask questions and giving feedback'* (Gaza, Q: 2016)

Some of the suggestions above have been acted upon in subsequent projects; the introductory videos already mentioned, explaining the social impacts of the engineering challenges facing Gaza, became integral to EAST from 2017 onwards, and in 2016 written feedback (both language and content) on IUG students' output was provided, with the help of a British Council ELTRA grant (although this couldn't be sustained, following the unexpected and significant increase in student numbers in Glasgow the following year). The idea of a reversal of roles – as suggested by the IUG students - would necessitate a near-complete rewrite of the accompanying course, to which EAST is an adjunct. The provision of IUG access to the University of Glasgow's library system was explored in depth before EAST 2017, but the computer systems can be made available only to matriculated students.

These reflect factors which are at play at institutional level that will not be visible to the participating students, nor amenable to change by course-organisers. Institutions may see benefits in collaboration of a wider nature than the immediately apparent benefit to the learner, and compromise is a key part of any institutional collaboration, if it is to develop in time and in a mutually beneficial way. Koehn and Obamba (2014: 14) point out that "many high-impact transnational research and development partnerships adopt an approach based on *complementarity and equity* (italics in original) rather than insisting on the pursuit of complete equality or symmetry between the Northern and Southern partners". IUG administrators are active in overcoming the wider isolation imposed on their country by the Israeli/Egyptian blockade and, importantly to IUG as an institution, there is the important

role that IUG plays within Gaza in training graduates in the employability skills that can enable them (as already mentioned) to find scarce jobs, in particular over the internet. Finally, there is almost certainly the kudos of working with a UK Russell Group university.

Ethical challenges relating to power imbalances

Tuhiwai Smith (2012: 18) notes that it is possible for academics in the Global North to develop "ways of working with indigenous groups on a variety of projects in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way", but the EAST project has nevertheless raised significant ethical issues, which are discussed below. These emerge from both the data and from researcher reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquand, 1992) on the factors that can influence a research project's design and the ethical implications of bias and power imbalance.

Three specific ethical conundra will be discussed:

- How freely can the IUG participants express their voices?
- Given a limited audience, why are IUG participants so eager to participate?
- Where does EAST sit within wider discourses?

Ethical conundrum 1: How freely can the IUG participants express their voices?

Some students show an awareness of where EAST sits within the wider institutional set-up and, significantly, its links with the world beyond, and express frustration, even anger, with this wider context. Given the gatekeeping nature of the pre-sessional course for the Glasgow-based students, the candour of the following comment (even within the anonymity of the post-course feedback forms) is noteworthy:

> *'I don't know why we have to do it since these work may not be feasible to the situation in those countries, I feel really bad for this. Are we just making day dreams?'* (Glasgow, Q: 2019)

Unsurprisingly, in view of the economic blockade, of the permanent fear of bombardment, and of the political constraints on egress from the Strip, frustrated comments from the IUG students were more frequent. Risager (2007) argues that effective intercultural communication is one that allows participants to 'appropriate' the languages and cultures that are studied, without the need to disguise, or to lose, their own identities. One Gazan student began her presentation with a clear positioning, thus:

> *'Gaza strip located in historical Palestine which occupied by what called Israel since Nakba in 1947'* (Gaza, PPT: 2018)

Although such overt expression of political frustration during EAST has been unusual in *public-facing* communication, the following comments in post-course feedback show that the frustration, even anger, certainly exists:

'When you talked about cause of problem you could add Israel occupation somehow because this unjust occupation is the main reason for every problem in Gaza' (Gaza, Q: 2018)

'Our problem here in Gaza is purely political; therefore any solutions should be put forward be at the front of freedom and get ride from occupation and then come the role of scientific solution' (Gaza, Q: 2018)

'As a student in Gaza, I have encountered many difficulties and challenges, especially in the last war, where my older brothers have lost due to the brutal Israeli aggression' (Gaza, Q: 2018)

'*….but the important question is where we will build this solar power station and how we will protect it? As any one knew, Gaza Strip is a region of war, in the last 12-year people of Gaza Strip live 3 destruction war, 2008, 2012 and 2014'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

The IUG students clearly have a voice, but these comments cannot be categorised as attempts by the IUG students to 'write back', as the post-EAST student feedback lacked an audience. Given that the real-world impact of a course lasting just five weeks must at most be marginal, an important arbiter of its effectiveness may be measured in terms of the audience that it provides the Global South participants, and in these terms EAST lacked impact. The Gazan participants clearly want to communicate their frustration, but do so rarely in a public-facing manner, which suggests that they did feel obliged to disguise their identities (Risager, 2007). The students wanted and needed to "express their anger" (Nussbaum, 2013: 33), but were unable to do so. This raises a further question of concern; if many Gazan students felt unable to reveal their real identities, why did they choose to participate in EAST?

Ethical conundrum 2: Given a limited audience, why are IUG participants so eager to participate?

This question again reflects student-student power differentials, present in Global North-South interactions, which are significantly reduced in most intra-Global North interactions.

After the first two EAST projects (2015 and 2016), and drawing in part from the "partnership capital" (Koehn and Obamba, 2014: 25) engendered by EAST, the University of Glasgow presented two successive, and successful, bids for Erasmus + International Credit Mobility (ICM) funding in 2017. This appeared on the surface an example of 'complementarity and equity'; a project that had, for two years, benefited in the main the students based in the Global North would now contribute to students from the less privileged partner. But the following comment from an IUG student, at the end of the very first EAST project, already presaged a serious structural issue:

'Now what I really hope is to meet my new friends from Glasgow face to face :) I really wish if I could travel there' (Gaza F: 2015)

This comment from the teaching-team, minuted in the post-course annual monitoring review the following year, talks to a similar concern:

> *'we suspect some [IUG feedback] may be over-positive, due to Siege (any input is better than no input, or maybe because they hope for travel-opportunities beyond Gaza Strip')* (Glasgow AMR: 2016)

In other words, even before an Erasmus + ICM collaboration was mooted, course organisers in Glasgow were aware of a moral dilemma and of underlying power issues linked to involvement with students living in difficult circumstances; there was a fear that the IUG students were captive participants, joining EAST in the tiniest hope of a study-abroad experience, a means of escaping from war, economic hardship, and lack of opportunities.

Subsequent to the successful ICM bids, thirty Gazan students were in fact able to attend courses in Glasgow, for either six or 12 months, and to return to Gaza with credits towards their degrees. Applications to EAST among Gazan students immediately showed an almost threefold increase in 2018 (see *Table 1*). The end-of-course comments from IUG participants on EAST in 2018 (below) gave actual voice to the teachers' concerns as stated in the annual monitoring review:

> *'Due to the difficult conditions in which the residents of the Gaza Strip are going through the closure of the crossings, we have not been able to travel abroad…. I hope I have the opportunity to study Master in Britain'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

> *'This program encouraged me to study English very hard to obtain an international scholarship that allowing me to obtain a master's degree. I hope to get a Master's degree at the University of Glasgow where great efforts are made to make it students unique in their fields'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

> *'In the end I hope to have another chance to participate in Glasgow University students' educational projects or get a chance to study at the University of Glasgow'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

> *'This program encouraged me to study English very hard to obtain an international scholarship that allowing me to obtain a master's degree'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

> *'Now I hope that I will have my postgraduate studies through this program in the UK'* (Gaza, Q: 2018)

These comments shed light on what should be a much more seriously-considered ethical consideration in educational projects linking Global North and South institutions, particularly in areas of conflict, than is currently the case. Fassetta and Imperiale (2019: 9), in a recent literature review on indigenous engagement produced for the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, conclude that

> ….reflections on the role of funding allocations to individuals and/or groups within Indigenous communities (especially relevant in the case of international

> development projects) and about the power dynamics this may set in motion…..were conspicuously absent from all the literature we examined.

Though EAST has no grants for overseas study linked to it, the problem still remains, in that even the hope in Gaza of *possible* funding (or travel beyond Gaza) reflects a power dynamic which must perforce be an element when working with such differentials of privilege and opportunity. This doesn't mean that projects such as EAST should not take place. However, as Fassetta and Imperiale (ibid) state, the power dynamics need to be openly acknowledged, and expectations managed.

Ethical conundrum 3: Where does EAST sit within wider discourses?

The teachers on EAST were also aware of the ethics of working in a project such as EAST, i.e. a telecollaboration involving the Global South. In order to understand this awareness, some background to the particular position that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers occupy within the wider university is useful. Their position within the University of Glasgow mirrors the (precarious) situation that EAP teachers occupy at national level.

Ding and Bruce (2017: 195) note that the EAP practitioner is working, at social, generic and textual levels, on a broad remit of discursive competences that are challenging and stimulating, yet whose very breadth set them in an anomalous position within academia. Ding and Bruce outline growing professionalisation initiatives (driven by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes), in an attempt to develop EAP from a support-service to an academic field in its own right. At the moment, they say, this move is incomplete, and pre-sessional courses / educators find themselves in a liminal position, with few opportunities for research and with less prestige than subject-lecturers.

This in some ways presents benefits. Teachers and directors of EAP courses, working as 'almost-academics', have greater freedom to adopt student-centred, participatory methods, including the telecollaborative work with unconventional partners described in this paper. While negotiating this position of liminality, they are also working with incoming graduates in the main from China and Saudi Arabia, who may be described as 'almost-students', in need of the language of academia, but also in need of a wider acculturation into university life. The 'hybridity' of the EAP teachers' position (Bhabha, 1994) overlaps with the 'becoming' (Kramsch, 1993) of the students' position. Helm et al. (2012: 107) argue that this affords a potentially very valuable 'third space' of shared understanding and in which conventions are open to challenge, a place which is "constantly constructed and re-constructed by participants who actively engage in dialogue and negotiate identities", and that as such offers many possibilities for creativity and for dialogue.

But at the same time EAP teachers are well aware of the context within which they work, often with short-term contracts. They have a first-hand awareness of what Bourdieu (1986) has termed the social, cultural and symbolic capital, including but also going beyond economic capital, that actors bring to interactions and that can be converted from one form of capital to another, depending on the actor's structural position and agentive power within a given field (their own, *vis-a-vis* the University, and by extension the IUG students',

vis-a-vis their Glasgow-based partners). They tend too to be more aware than most of the power structures that underpin the strong international element to university work. The majority of EAP teachers work overseas through the year, returning to the UK only for the summer, and are well-positioned in their international focus to see through the 'mission statements' with which universities cloak their internationalisation-as-recruitment agenda in internationalisation-as-development garb (Avgousti, 2018).

A focus group was held with seven EAST teachers, in March 2020, guided loosely by the researcher on the basis of the opportunities for student-transformation and the underlying issues of power that inform this paper. The following post-EAST dialogue between teachers, was revealing of their informed position, and more specifically of the doubts and differences of opinion they held regarding their specific role and of their positioning within the wider academic system:

> *'unfortunately (our students) don't have access to the research in Palestine, i.e. how do those people see things? How can our students get reliable documents? So we do impose a Western perspective on Gaza-related issues. First we impose the Western perspective on Chinese students (via the pre-sessional course) and then we make them report the Western perspective on Gaza!'* (TF: Teacher 3)
>
> *(jokingly) '….so it's doubly racist and colonialist!'* (TF: Teacher 2)
>
> *(disagreeing) 'The Western teacher steps back, it ends up as a dialogue between two people whose first language is not English, so the power levels are a lot more even. They have to do this on their own, to collaborate. I mean we're not over-looking them, making sure they're doing this. So there is that free communication there'* (TF: Teacher 6)

Teacher 2 seems to be attempting a disarming role in the response given to Teacher 3's position, but shows a realisation of a core concern; as Koehn and Obamba (2014: 78) put it, Global North actors can influence the direction that any student-student interactions will take. Teacher 3's linking of the pre-sessional English language course with 'colonialist' narratives acknowledges the many (see e.g. Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998; Canagarajah and Selim, 2013; Nyamnjoh, 2016) who link courses such as the University of Glasgow's to the wider and, they argue, exploitative field of ELT which, they feel, perpetuates a status quo that is detrimental to the Global South. The position of English as an 'imperialist' language has, however, been contested (see e.g. Risager, 2007; Hirsch, 2020), and Teacher 6 demurs; she allows the students the agency to overcome this challenge, incidentally acknowledging the Freirean 'teacher-as-facilitator' role.

In the following exchange, teachers are ostensibly discussing organisational issues, i.e. the choice of the engineering problems under discussion, but again underlying issues relating to exclusion and power emerge:

> *'It's far better to have Gaza involved than not. The alternative would be isolation. But why can't Palestinians think about solving Chinese problems?'* (TF: Teacher 2)

> *'How about working together on UK problems? Though there could be a potential power issue in expecting Chinese students to criticise the host country'* (TF: Teacher 3)

A final comment, again from Teacher 3, gets to the very core of the dilemma presented to EAST organisers:

> *'The main issue for me is lack of balance, in that the Gazans are just basically used, in a way, and they're not getting much out of it'* (TF: Teacher 3)

Teacher 6 acknowledges the power carried by the English language, but here Teacher 3 seems to move beyond this; Kramsch (2002: 284) counsels a wariness of the very concept of ICC, as one that "can easily be high-jacked by a global ideology of 'effective communication' Anglo-Saxon style, which speaks an English discourse even as it expresses itself in many different languages". Mignolo (in de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015: 23) approaches this more broadly still, talking about the very concept of 'modernity' as representing an 'imperial project', one that takes as a given seamless progress, industrialization, scientific reason, and secularisation; he argues that we need to acknowledge that these 'bright shining concepts' bring a concomitant 'shadow', one of spatiality (i.e. control of lands), ontoepistemic racism (i.e. elimination of difference) and a geopolitics of knowledge production (i.e. an epistemic violence).

The comments from the Gazan students on EAST certainly show the understandable salience of the spatial elements of life in the Gaza Strip, and the comments from the teachers also touch on these ontoepistemic and epistemic issues that Mignolo raises. The colonial violences perpetrated in the past may be acknowledged by universities, as in the University of Glasgow's grant of £20,000,000 to the University of the West Indies (Karasz, 2019). However, Freire specifically warns about "generous gestures" (1996: 41), and de Oliveira Andreotti et al. (2015) argue that current attempts to decolonise academia emphasise increased access (to knowledge, skills and cultural capital) for the Global South within the *existing* institutional framework, i.e. without calling into question the integrity of the system itself. For them, Mignolo's 'shadow of modernity' is being addressed, rather, by an 'expansion of modernity'. As such:

> ….the core business of the university as a credentializing institution for 'emancipated' socially-mobile subjects will remain intact. Radical-reform cannot, in practice, take account of ontological and meta-physical difference, as it cannot promote non-capitalist futurities without shooting itself in the foot (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015: 34).

The overall tenor of the teachers' comments concerning EAST remain very positive (many return each summer, specifically citing the value of the social justice agenda that it tries to offer). However, the comments in this section suggest that their liminal position within academia combined with their wider international (even internationalist) perspectives of UK higher education have brought some to pose the same ethical question as that raised by de Oliveira Andreotti et al. (2015): when a university makes space for a project such as EAST, is the project hacking the system, or is it being hacked *by* the system?

Conclusions

With this question, we return to the 'conduct of conduct', as posited by Foucault and outlined in the introduction to this paper. By 'shouting over the walls' of French prisons, the *GIP* cast light on questions of power not only for prisoners, but also within wider French society, and the telecollaborative megaphone has had, I feel, similarly reciprocal effects in Glasgow and in Gaza, and has helped make the question posed by de Oliveira et al. (2015) visible.

The comments from students reported in this paper have permitted not only a gauging of the impact of EAST on the pre-sessional course within which it is situated but, when combined with comments from the teachers on the course and with the author's field notes, they have allowed further reflection on the beliefs and practices of the institution, and even on the policies and ideologies within the field and the extent to which neo-liberal discourses influence the learning environment within UK universities. In summary, the initial 'shouting over the walls' into Gaza has, over the five-year course of EAST, taken on a fascinating (and unexpected) two-way direction, revealing a need to question beliefs and behaviours that academics and students, privileged enough to work and study in the Global North, take for granted. This unmasking of the way that power works is useful not in overturning institutional or (much less) global discourses - an impossibly large task for a small-scale project of this nature - but in allowing a Foucauldian understanding of how we as stakeholders have been 'put together' by discursive practices that influence higher education in the Global North, and (as Brunskell-Evans [2009] notes) to resist and challenge these if we choose to. After five years, EAST remains a project in frustratingly prototypical format, but the evidence offered here does suggest significant, and as yet untapped, potential for such resistance. It is also absolutely vital that the current Covid-related rush to online learning is not used as a vector for further neoliberal assaults on employment rights and work practices at university (Brabazon, 2020), and the presence of socially-rooted projects such as EAST are particularly important in these times as exemplars of online alternatives.

The first stated aim of this paper was to look for evidence for transformative change for students in the EAST Project. While EAST cannot be said to develop a true 'critical consciousness'– the Glasgow-based students cannot be described as 'oppressed' - the forefronting of a context via EAST is key and innovative, and meets a key Freirean precept. Many of the international students based in Glasgow would not otherwise have an opportunity to become interested in or sensitive to situations in the Global South, and for these students EAST is potentially transformative in that the telecollaborative project-work provides a strongly contextualised social justice agenda linked to an area of the world that confronts endemic conflict and injustice. Turning to the students in Gaza, Nussbaum's ten capabilities list many that appear intractable given the circumstances there and (once again) beyond the influence of students or course-organisers of small-scale educational projects such as EAST. But transformative change can in some instances be possible for the Gazan participants, too; as Wolfe and De-Shalit (in Nussbaum, 2013: 44) note, the "fertile functionings" of certain capabilities may, in combination with others, offer unexpected

opportunity for change across the broader capability spectrum. Taking Glasgow-based and Gazan students together, EAST certainly lends support to Bikowski's contention (2011) that telecollaboration can be used to enhance students' intercultural awareness *inductively,* without the need for overt ICC inputs; the inherent authenticity of the collaborative work, the intellectual challenge of the pluriliteracies approach, combined with the empathies - maybe even friendships - that can result, can engender commitment and a resulting potential for the breaking down of barriers. At the most fundamental level, examples presented in this article support Freire's contention that speech-acts carry meaning: "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 1996: 69); perhaps the current Covid-related restrictions - which have given those of us from the Global North cause to reconsider much of what we have hitherto taken for granted - may well increase participants' predisposition to just such reflection. EAST certainly offers potential for transformative impact.

The second stated aim of this paper was to examine power-relationships evidenced by the EAST project. EAST demonstrates the risks inherent in working telecollaboratively with the Global South and the concomitant responsibilities that the power-advantages confer on Global North organisers. In the case of working with Gaza, these responsibilities are even more salient; not only are the overt power and wealth differentials very great, but course-organisers are also dealing with an (almost literally) captive audience. However, the examples offered here demonstrate that it would be an over-simplification to cast the Gazans simply as victims, and wrong to deny the Gazan students the agency that all students bring to participation, an agency that is mirrored at institutional level, too. Within her list of capabilities, Nussbaum (2013: 34) specifically notes that institutions play a key role in helping to develop and protect the affiliative function, and EAST has been able to demonstrate the value, at institutional level, of pre-sessional telecollaborative project-work with the Global South. Foucault highlighted the exclusionary effects of existing power structures, but in the context of higher education, before 'subjugated knowledges' and 'disqualified discourses' (Shor et al, 2017) can be confronted and positive impacts on students achieved, relationships at institutional level need to be crafted. Universities in the Global North have lists of 'strategic partners' with whom to prioritise international collaboration, and (by default) these will not include the overwhelming majority of universities from the Global South. Organising link-ups between the Global North and South will only happen given slow and patient relationship-building, collaborating "long enough to build the institutional capacity and human capabilities needed for autonomous project leadership and positive societal outcomes" (Koehn and Obamba, 2014: 25). Massive power differentials exist between actors from the Global North and Global South, but only by setting up opportunities for contact can these power differentials be offered up for examination.

Pre-sessional courses can play a crucial, and as yet unrecognised, role in building these contacts. In terms of power, Global South institutions are in a weak position *vis a vis* their Global North partner, and so too are pre-sessional courses, occupying a peripheral position *vis a vis* the wider Global North university that they serve to feed. But the power of the squatter (Owens et al., 2013) is a fruitful analogy here; as a paradoxical result of this very *absence* of institutional power, an autonomy and space for experimentation is extended to pre-sessional courses, allowing the chance for innovative and meaningful initiatives – in this

case, stimulating and mutually rewarding collaboration with the Global South, and a potentially life-enhancing exposure to other cultures and to areas where conflict, rather than privilege, is the default. EAST shows real potential for transformation, promoting the dialogue between students and institutions that, in Freire's view (1996: 69) leads, through action and reflection, to "naming" - and thereby potentially changing - the world.

Limitations

This paper has used data that was initially collected for course-evaluation (rather than research) purposes and while other data-inputs are included, for reasons of project-to-project continuity, and given the surprising (and gratifying) growth in student-numbers, the multimodal nature of the interactions, and limited resources, it has needed to rely principally on student-feedback provided by end-of-course questionnaires. A second weakness of the study outlined in this paper has been the lack of attention paid to gender, and this is an area where more work will be very interesting - as a field, SET attracts a disproportionate number of male students, and at the same time, Gaza is an area where gender roles are quite strictly differentiated (and IUG itself is probably more traditional than other Palestinian universities in this respect), and finally, there is a great deal of pertinent research on the gendered nature of internet interactions. A fruitful third area to address would be a targeted exploration of just what students understand by 'culture', and how (if at all) they differentiate it from language or national group. Plans are now underway for a study of the synchronous communication between a targeted number of groups, combined with the use of reflective journals, in an attempt to explore these three areas. Building on this research, and developing the affiliative and emotional impacts outlined here, may also open the way for longer-term collaboration, leading ideally to mutually beneficial *in-sessional* relationships, and the development of (currently bilateral) Glasgow-Gaza / Glasgow-Chile / Glasgow-Malawi links into a network, drawing mutually on the different skills-sets and range of experience that each participant can bring.

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