International Journal of Educational Development 31 (2011) 109–117

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Educational Development

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev

# Developing a postgraduate dual-award in educational leadership: A Russian pelican[1] meets an English rose

Justine Mercer [a,*], Andrey Zhegin [b]

[a] Institute of Education, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK
[b] Continuing Professional Development Institute, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, 48 Moika Emb., St. Petersburg 191186, Russia

ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:*
Educational administration
International collaboration
Russia

ABSTRACT

Using analytic autoethnography, this paper discusses the influences and outcomes that shaped a 30-month project between a Russian and an English university trying to develop a dual-award in educational leadership. It explores the drivers, benefits, hindrances and affordances of international collaboration, before critiquing the literature on contemporary Russian culture. It then maps how various factors including money, language, hospitality, trust, commitment and flexibility affected the project. It concludes that unequal partnerships can result in shared learning, but that programme validation is harder to achieve if either institution imposes unrealistic financial constraints, lacks flexibility, or fails to recruit a high-level champion.



## 1. Introduction

At the start of the millennium, Crossley (2000, p. 319) argued that increased globalisation was "revitalising" the field of comparative and international education. He cited Arnove's (1999, p. 16) suggestion that "Globalisation has infused the ever-present need to learn about each other with an urgency and emphasis like no other in history". The events of September 2001 further heightened this need for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding (Crossley and Watson, 2003, p. 2), but global tensions continue to make such work difficult. It is therefore imperative that international partnerships are promoted wherever possible, and that the collaborative processes contained therein are critically examined in order that academics contemplating or already participating in such partnerships can make informed judgements about what will likely facilitate and/or hinder their endeavours. Accordingly, this paper analyses the influences and outcomes that shaped a two-year partnership between Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia and the University of Leicester, England, so that colleagues involved in similar Anglo-Russian research or curriculum development can learn from our experience.

It has been alleged that "collaboration demands equal, or near equal, power relations" and that "transplant" approaches in which a precise outcome is pre-determined are less likely to succeed (Gilbert and Gorlenko, 1999, p. 351). Our own experience co-leading a 30-month partnership between our two universities suggests that this is not always the case – an equal distribution of power is not a pre-requisite of effective educational collaboration, and programme validation is not the only measure of success. We have also come to the conclusion that partnerships evolve and are shaped by a multitude of factors operating at different levels (international, institutional, departmental and project-team), the most influential of which are money, trust and commitment.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the drivers, potential benefits, hindrances and affordances of international collaboration, drawing upon the generic literature in the field of international and comparative education, including Crossley (2000, 2002), Crossley and Holmes (2001), Crossley and Watson (2003), Fisher et al. (2008), Watson (2001) and Zajda (2005). The second section explores notions of Russian culture, drawing upon Hofstede's seminal work, and later research in Russia by Bollinger (1994), Gilbert (2001) and Naumov and Puffer (2000). The third section analyses the Herzen–Leicester partnership using a conceptual framework derived from the literature on international collaboration and previous empirical studies of Russian–UK partnerships. We have prioritised partnerships between educational institutions, particularly those described by Gilbert and Gorlenko (1999), Shaw and Ormston (2001) and Walton and Guarisco (2007, 2008), but, because the literature is quite limited, we have also included some examples of commercial partnerships (Katsioloudes and Isichenko, 2007; Paton and McCarthy, 2008). The final section draws conclusions about the conditions and processes that make fruitful collaboration more likely.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 0247 61 51197.
*E-mail addresses:* Justine.Mercer@warwick.ac.uk (J. Mercer), azhegin@yandex.ru (A. Zhegin).

[1] Herzen State Pedagogical University is the oldest teacher training institution in Russia. It uses the pelican as its symbol because it began life in 1797 as a house for foundlings, and a pelican nursing her young is the traditional emblem of Russian monastic orphanages.

0738-0593/$ – see front matter © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.05.004

## 2. Cross-cultural collaboration: drivers, potential benefits, hindrances and affordances

Crossley (2002) identifies three drivers behind the renewed interest in comparative and international education. These are intensified globalisation; intensified international competition, manifested in league tables of student achievement, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); and rapid advances in information and communications technology. Crossley and Watson (2003, p. 10) add a fourth driver, namely "rapid geopolitical change", a feature particularly pertinent to the Russian Federation.

In terms of the potential benefits, it is claimed that comparative studies enable researchers to develop a better understanding of their own and each other's contexts (Crossley, 2000, p. 324), though this, presumably, depends upon the skill and sensitivity of the researchers involved. It is also claimed that comparative studies can serve as a vehicle for democracy (Jarvis et al., 2005, p. 135), whilst safeguarding against the uncritical importation of Western models (Shaw and Ormston, 2001, p. 119).

With regard to hindrances, Crossley and Watson (2003, pp. 33–49) point out that comparative research is complex and subject to political motivations; the research focus may be unclear; there may be tensions between global and local priorities; agendas may conflict and misconceptions arise; and the data collected may be biased or limited. Moreover, in what Crossley and Watson call "developing countries", the infrastructure may be poorly developed; public research may be limited; funding may be inadequate; and researchers may not share a common language. Crucially, the literature is divided as to whether an equal distribution of power is a pre-requisite for successful collaboration, with Gilbert and Gorlenko (1999) arguing that it is, and Walton and Guarisco (2007, 2008) arguing that it is not.

In terms of affordances, the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE, 1998, p. 8) has produced a list of 11 "principles". These are:

(1) deciding on the objectives together;
(2) building up mutual trust;
(3) sharing information and developing networks;
(4) sharing responsibility;
(5) creating transparency;
(6) monitoring and evaluating the collaboration;
(7) disseminating the results;
(8) applying the results;
(9) sharing profits equitably;
(10) increasing research capacity;
(11) building on achievements.

Here again, though, KFPE's insistence that objectives must be mutually negotiated has been challenged by Walton and Guarisco (2007, 2008). They claim that partnerships can still thrive with predetermined, even imposed, aims, which is just as well, because partnerships are very often subject to the external requirements of funding bodies.

### 2.1. The influence of culture

Hofstede (2005, p. 4) defines culture as" the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others". His 1991 survey of 116,000 IBM employees in 72 countries is by far the most widely used (and abused) study of national culture. Critics have claimed that his data collection tools are Western-centric (Shaw and Ormston, 2001, p. 123) and that such bipolar surveys "imply opposition and conflict because they insist that people cannot adhere to both extremes at the same time" (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 312). Nonetheless, Hofstede's work remains hugely influential and, although his original survey did not include Russia, his dimensions of culture have been subsequently applied to Russian subjects, with varying degrees of rigour.

Bollinger (1994) sent a questionnaire to 55 executives attending a training course in Moscow in 1989. Although this represents a very small, skewed sample, Bollinger (1994) informs us that the Russians scored highly on Power Distance (76 points compared to 40 for the United States participants in Hofstede's original study) meaning Russians expect and will tolerate large power imbalances between employees; they also scored highly on Uncertainty Avoidance (92 compared to 35 for the UK) but low on Individualism (26) and low on Masculinity (28) meaning that Russians see men and women as having overlapping roles.

Whilst Bollinger's (1994) sent his questionnaire to only 55 subjects, Naumov and Puffer (2000) distributed theirs to 300 managers, professionals and students at several Russian business schools between October 1995 and June 1996. 250 usable questionnaires were returned. These indicated a score of 40 for Power Distance, putting Russia on a par with the US (40), and slightly above Canada (39) and the Netherlands (38). For Uncertainty Avoidance, they scored relatively highly (68) but not as high as in Bollinger's study (92). For Individualism, they scored 41 points, making them low for a developed country, but high for a developing country. Bollinger's research, conducted 10 years earlier, yielded a higher figure for Power Distance (76 compared to 40) and a lower one for Individualism (26 compared to 41). This leads Naumov and Puffer (2000, p. 715) to speculate that individualism may have risen during the period of *perestroika* or "reconstruction", and with it a growing intolerance of power imbalances.

Whereas Naumov and Puffer (2000) use quantitative data from 250 questionnaires, Gilbert (2001) uses qualitative data (observations, interviews and documentary analysis) from six case studies of Western-funded management development programmes run between 1995 and 1998. She highlights the fact that analysing Russian culture is "a hazardous exercise" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 5) and one "doomed to contradiction" (2001, p. 18) because it is very difficult to disentangle "traditional Russian culture" from "the Soviet mindset, a product of two generations of propaganda, command economy, institutionalised terror, and stultifying stagnation" (2001, p. 5). Nonetheless, she tentatively suggests Power Distance is a "highly ambiguous concept" (2001, p. 15) for former communist countries, and that personal power (as opposed to role power) is now more evident in Russia than in the West. She further suggests that Russians are divided over the issue of collectivism versus individualism, because of linguistic variations. The Russian language has far more words than English to describe a "team", leading her participants to conclude that the term is "hopeless vague" and that Western ideas about teamwork are "simplistic and trite" (2001, p. 15). This could explain why previous empirical studies have placed Russia at quite different points on the collectivism/individualism continuum. Finally, Gilbert (2001, p. 16) claims that, although Russians dislike the great uncertainty they now live with, there is no evidence to suggest they are more risk-averse than their Western counterparts.

What the literature above serves to illustrate is that it is hard to generalise about a nation state on the basis of a small sample, and that doing so is particularly problematic in the case of Russia because the region is composed of so many diverse ethnic groups (Heyneman, 1998, pp. 28–29) and has experienced such dramatic political, social and economic changes throughout its history (Gilbert, 2001, p. 7), but especially over the last 20 years.