

Nine propositions

... how would you rank their importance?

The future is a huge question ... and every question that we ask raises five new questions that are not easily answered.

Our culture and assumptions affect how we answer these.

1

The complexity of issues.

Concepts like partnership and sustainable development are complex, everywhere and at all scales from local to global.

The more we look into them, the more questions we will have.

The issues are seldom 'black and white', but more often several shades of grey. This does not necessarily mean they are inaccessible: an important starting point is to learn to look at our own world from several different perspectives.

2

Everything links.

When looking into questions about sustainable development in any place, we begin to make all sorts of connections which help us start to make sense of things.

This includes connections between concepts like rights, responsibilities and the environment; between places - Britain, The Gambia and the rest of the world; between people within specific communities and how they work together.

3

People and places stimulate and inspire learning

... whether it be in the school grounds, community or in unfamiliar or distant places. As learners, we are affected by everything around us. In terms of sustainable schools, this can translate into "the three Cs" curriculum, campus and community. As teachers, we need to think about how we use all these spheres as a stimulus to learning, with the child's experience at the heart of it.

4

The value of mutual learning.

Working in teams and groups helps us understand things better and often more enjoyably.

This is true of learning within our own [UK] group as well as learning alongside colleagues from The Gambia.

All collaborative learning has an intercultural element, and offers us a fresh view on concerns which are of shared interest.

5

Learning is an essential part of how we respond to things

... and not least the challenge of sustainable development. Learning never stops.

The more you know, the less you know, and becoming aware of this is a positive indicator that learning is taking place.

As a teacher, I need to learn in order to teach, and I have a role to help my colleagues learn in order to teach.

Do our schools have a culture of learning?

7

To lead change in our schools

... we need to inspire ... and to challenge.

9

Culture as an influence.

Our culture [in the widest sense] influences what we learn, and how we apply that learning.

Our filter of experience, influences and backgrounds affects the way we view things, the decisions we make and the actions we take. Being conscious of this helps us understand things better.

Relating to others' perspectives within a group also helps us look again at our ideas and assumptions about what we are learning.

6

The importance of pupil voice.

The process of change in schools is ultimately about children and the development of their learning.

Learners need to be involved throughout, to have space to explore and discuss the 'big' issues, and what this means for their learning needs.

If we don't provide this space, they are likely to become overwhelmed by what is happening in the world around them.

8

Drafted by 2008

Tide~ Gambia Course Group

Ben Ballin, Sally Wood [Co-leaders], Jamie Bailey, Judy Bridges, Christine Buckler, Eleanor Beeley, Jean Edge, Sarah Elliott, Clare Finkel, Sarah Humphreys, Fran Martin, Joanne Sheen, Lucy Williams.

Ben Ballin reflects on these Propositions. See page 34



Let's look at it from a different angle

Learning from a UK / African partnership

Ben Ballin

Between 1998 and 2016, I was privileged to play a key role in Tide~'s partnership with the National Environment Agency in The Gambia: bringing teachers from the two countries together to share ideas; leading a series of study visits to The Gambia and occasionally helping host a reciprocal visit to the UK.

Much of this work is documented in an existing online article and some enduringly useful resources including, ['Learning today with tomorrow in mind'](#), ['Educating for Sustainability'](#) and ['Global learning – lenses on the world'](#).

What might all this mean in 2021, where crises of climate, Covid, democracy, division and decolonisation are harder than ever to evade?

To start answering that question, I revisited some **'Propositions' from a 2008 study visit group** [See page 32]. I looked at them from four different angles. Each relates to an aspect of my current life and, therefore, offers a distinctive lens.

1. As a parent of two sixth formers ... I would like to say it was all about (8) **pupil voice**, but right now my daughters are more concerned about how they can bring their experience of school to a successful conclusion. They are already more than a little overwhelmed by a year when learning has mostly been online, exams have been cancelled and uncertainty is in the air.

So actually, many of the real immediate questions for them (and myself as a parent) are about (1) **the future and its very real short-to-medium scale uncertainties**. In the context of

the Covid crisis, it is material circumstances rather than 'culture and assumptions' that are most significant. When, for example, will it be safe for my daughters to see friends socially again?

2. For primary geography networks, it is second nature that (4) **people and places stimulate and inspire learning**, though almost equally so that (3) **everything links**, especially if we are trying to make unfamiliar places relatable to children.

A lot of the place-related teaching material is either out of date or wedded to 'the great answer book in the sky' and the notion that there are 'correct' answers to such pressing geographical questions as what a particular place is like or what we best do to protect our environment.

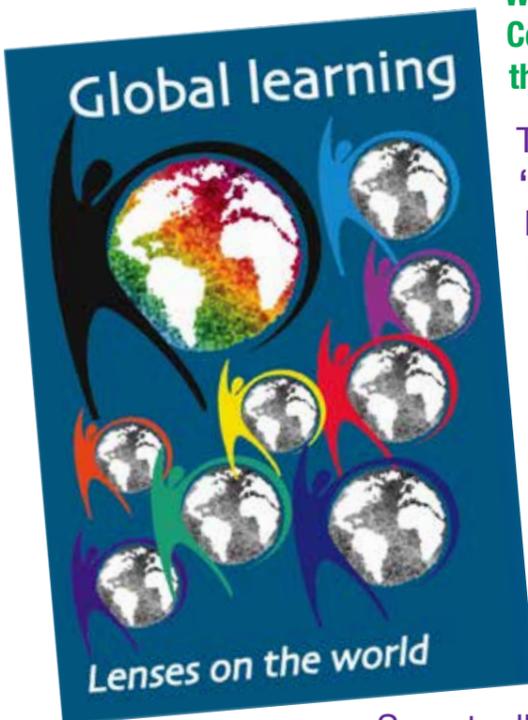
It would be great to see a new generation of materials emerging that really make the most of online technologies and the opportunities they open up for more hands-on, exploratory and relational ways of finding out about the world beyond our immediate local area.

3. As a member of a national environmental education organisation, I have a bit of a bee in my bonnet about all that entry-level behaviour change stuff that is out there.

I am still much more interested in (7) **the culture of learning**, in what Bill Scott has called **'ESD 2 – learning as sustainable development'**.

That is not to say that the challenges are not urgent. Some of them are desperately so, but it will take a whole load of trying and critiquing ideas, of imagination and creativity, to do the sort of 'cathedral building' that Greta Thunberg and others have talked about. And it would be arrogant in the extreme to imagine that the best of that thinking is all going to come from countries like the UK: indeed, they may possibly be the last places capable of making any sort of significant paradigm shift. So perspectives and models from a huge range of places and people are essential. **As is framing this as a question of justice: between social groups, generations and nations.**

I am not convinced that we can leave it to Bill Gates ... or even the school strikers.



4. As a citizen with a commitment to racial equality, I am naturally drawn to (6) **consciousness of culture**, including making power visible.

I have been engaged with the issues for long enough to want to see real change. The issues are too real and lives are literally at stake, whether we are talking about child and maternal mortality or the criminal justice system: here in the UK as well as in a country like The Gambia. >>>

Ben Ballin is a freelance educator involved in a range of projects.

He was a member of Tide~ staff.

He is now co-opted to Tide~ Trustee meetings.

Inconclusion

‘Inconclusion’ ... because I admit to a degree of confusion having started out on this exercise. Although inconclusive, the following points may be useful.

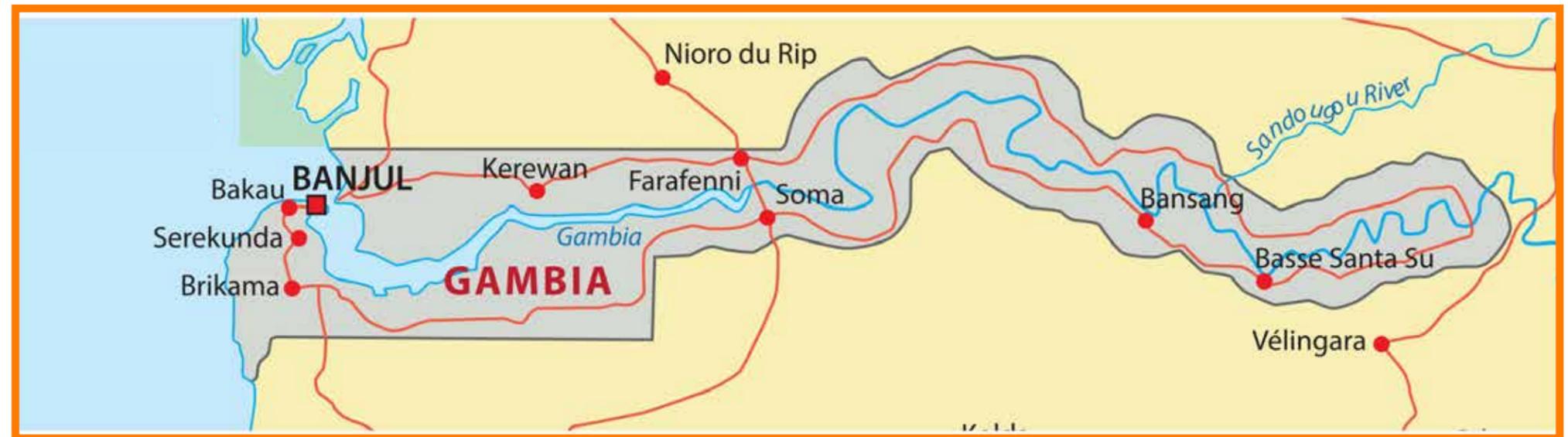
There seems to be a need to **start with where young people are at now**, and recognise that they may be finding themselves in unusual and challenging circumstances. Perhaps this is more than ever the best starting point to build from, the learner’s needs, rather than seeing ‘the global’ as something to be imposed? This could be described as “inside-out global learning”.

What could **high quality teaching materials** that help children understand unfamiliar places look like now, especially given the opportunities presented by the internet?

- ◇ Could they be less reductive and objectifying - and more relational - than some such resources have been in the past?
- ◇ Can they also connect meaningfully to learners’ needs and lives?

Why, even the borders of The Gambia, its official language, its very existence, are products of white power over Black people, part of the ongoing legacy of slavery. To understand that is to make a start. **The ‘Third World’, the unequal economic and geopolitical position of countries like The Gambia, did not come into being by accident but through human design and on behalf of particular interests.**

There is a huge amount to be done and most of it is a million miles beyond glibly liberal lip-service to ‘diversity.’ Black Lives Matter and calls for decolonisation offer both a stimulus and an opportunity.



The shape of the country highlights Britain’s colonial claim based on the river.

Related to this, how do we best help young people to understand the **often still-hidden histories and geographies**, the deep legacy of colonialism and imperialism?

How can we use this to start unstitching the power relations that originate significantly from that history and geography?

What challenges does this present to us as citizens and teachers, not least for our own understanding?

How can we go beyond set ideas about the climate crisis and sustainability to really support young people as thinkers and innovators who can think their way through the huge environmental (and social, cultural and economic) challenges of the near future?

