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Chapter 5

From cultural visits to intercultural learning: Experiences of North–South–South collaboration

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the collaboration occurring within a network of five universities in Finland, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa from 2012 to 2016. The members of this network, called the Culturally Responsive Education network, engaged in joint teaching, research, conferences, and exchange programmes for students and faculty. The network is analysed as a space for intercultural learning through collaboration across contexts and among junior and senior education scholars sharing an interest in qualitative research methods and culturally responsive education. The data are drawn from the network participants' group discussions, qualitative project reports submitted to the funding agency and evaluative member check interviews. The analyses focus on identifying significant intercultural learning experiences in network activities at both the individual and the institutional levels. The network activities are analysed as dynamic contexts for the development of the participants' intercultural competences and their translation to successful network activities benefiting all participating institutions. These network activities supported the joint construction of an enabling intercultural context for individual and institutional learning. However, issues of power, access and continuity must be considered in all aspects of North–South–South partnerships to enable meaningful participation and learning by student teachers and teacher educators.

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Introduction

The growing demand to educate interculturally competent teachers has created a need to analyse international partnerships among higher education institutions as contexts for intercultural learning and the development of intercultural competences. International collaboration in higher education has received increasing research attention, often focused on the benefits of internationalisation for institutions (e.g. Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, & Paleari, 2016) and individuals (e.g. Messelink, Van Maeleb, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015), though scholars have also analysed the power relations embedded in international partnerships (e.g. Botha & Breidlid, 2013; Holmarsdottir 2013; Khoo, 2011). In teacher education, much of the recent research on internationalisation and interculturality has contributed to knowledge on internationalising programmes (Jarvis, Bowtell, Bhanja, & Dickerson, 2016) and pedagogies to support intercultural learning (Dervin, 2014; Lehtomäki et al., 2015; Posti-Ahokas et al., 2017). In the present chapter, the focus is on mobility-focused student and staff partnerships in a network of five universities in Finland, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa in the field of teacher education and educational science. The network is analysed as a space supporting the intercultural learning of the individuals participating in the various groups within the collaboration. We analyse how the network supported its members' learning and how this learning influenced institutional improvement.

The North–South–South network, or the Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) network, was coordinated by the University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education. The network was funded from 2012 until 2016 by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and coordinated by the Centre of International Mobility under its development cooperation programmes for higher education. During the network's funded period, nearly 100 students and staff members participated in physical mobility activities, including 16 student exchanges (three to five months each), 21 teacher exchanges (one to two weeks each), three network meetings, five administrative visits and a one-week intensive course with 26 travelling participants. In addition to the mobility activities, 20 students participated in a multi-site online course, and members of host institutions engaged in the network through activities organised and attended by visiting students and staff.

The network members shared an interest in CRE (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013) and the potential role of qualitative research in supporting the development of quality education. Their shared interest enabled them to develop various network activities focused on a common theme. CRE refers to education that is relevant and addresses cultural variations and power issues among learners and within societies at large. The approach views and reflects culture beyond ethnic and national classifications. Thus, we considered the CRE approach particularly important in supporting the participants' focus on transcending simplistic comparisons of the five countries.

According to Gay (2013), culturally responsive teaching focuses on developing learning that is meaningful and empowering for the learner. Learners are addressed in a comprehensive way and multidimensionally engaged in learning activities. Furthermore, since learning seeks to promote change and freedom, it is both transformative and emancipatory. The network engaged with the notion of cultural responsiveness as both an area of study and a guide for the planning of network activities, such as the formation of diverse groups comprising members from several partner universities and study programmes and the identification of tools and technologies that could be used in diverse contexts. Within the network, the participants peer reviewed good practices in teacher education within the partner universities. During exchange activities, intensive courses on qualitative research methods, network meetings and conference presentations, they also engaged in dialogues with students, teachers and teacher educators. The participants were then guided to analyse their gained experiences and findings and bring them back to their own learning communities. A peer reviewed edited volume (Lehtomäki, Janhonen-Abuquah, & Kahawanga, 2017) gave voice to the discussions carried out within the network.

Taking a dynamic, relational approach to the development of intercultural competences (e.g. Dervin, 2016), this chapter analyses the process of developing intercultural competences in social interaction. Our aim is to explore the dynamic relationships within the network that enabled a movement from cultural visits (e.g. participating in an intensive course or completing a short teacher exchange between partner organisations) towards deeper learning experiences that make academic collaboration more meaningful for both individuals and institutions. We analyse the dynamic relationships among individuals, groups and institutional learning across contexts, exploring how the initial acquisition of

knowledge and skills develops into awareness and, finally, embedded learning and improved practices and processes. Ultimately, these practices and processes support the development of intercultural competences.

Intercultural learning in international higher education collaborations

A recent evaluation of Finnish higher education development cooperation (Salmi, Mukherjee, Uusihakala, & Kärkkäinen, 2014) pointed to the challenges of achieving sustained institutional impacts given currently available funding instruments and labelled North–South–South cooperation as a small-scale internationalisation platform for Finnish higher education institutions. Within the prestige-dominated discourse on the internationalisation of higher education (e.g. Seeber et al., 2016), research focusing on learning and professional development within international collaboration has been given little attention. In this review, we discuss the most relevant research findings to frame the subsequent analysis of the CRE network.

The research on international collaboration as a strategy for internationalisation follows two distinctive streams. The first stream, which we call the ‘benefits approach’, has a managerial focus and examines the benefits of partnerships. These analyses consider institutional effectiveness (Spencer-Oatey, 2012) and employability (as the desired outcome of international mobility) (Messelink, Van Maele, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015; Potts, 2015) as determinants of success. The second stream, or the ‘learning-oriented approach’, seeks to understand the nature of the learning that occurs during international collaborations (Holmarsdottir, 2013; Jarvis et al., 2015) and study abroad (McLeod & Wainwright, 2009). Both streams are important for evaluating the value added by international collaboration: The benefits approach focuses on the instrumental value, while the learning-oriented approach examines the intrinsic value of international collaboration. Further, growing opportunities for intercultural dialogues through online learning (for examples, see Dervin, 2014; Zong, 2009) challenge the rationale of collaboration based on physical mobility. However, in partnerships between the Global North and South, the role of technology must be given specific attention due to differences in technological infrastructures (Queiros & de Villiers, 2016).

Within the context of North–South–South collaboration, issues of power and equity are central to collaborative success. Khoo (2011, p. 350) argued that the contradictions of internationalisation are starker than ever due to the financial pressures for higher education institutions to focus on marketised, competitive forms of internationalisation, thus eroding ethical and cooperative development policies and programmes for mutual learning. Experiences of various North–South–South collaborations (Bastien, Mukoma, Ezekiel, & Helleve, 2013; Botha & Breidlid, 2013; Desai, 2013; Holmarsdottir, Farang, & Nomlomo, 2013) have been described as useful but challenging, and the importance of such projects has been argued to lie in their promotion of real dialogue and understanding between the Global North and South. Holmarsdottir (2013) examined existing forms of North–South and North–South–South collaboration, questioning whether these regions should collaborate at all and, if so, what key challenges such collaborations face. As early as the 1980s, King (1985) pointed out that North–South collaboration seemed to be a process initiated in the North and participated in by the South. Holmarsdottir, Farang and Nomlomo (2013) questioned whether old ideas of development aid have merely been newly packaged and labelled as collaboration. Botha and Breidlid (2013) further noted that Southern partners are seldom able to steer North–South–South collaboration, suggesting that, as a result, collaborative arrangements for ‘capacity building’, ‘development’ and ‘mutual exchange’ not only fail, but also reproduce structures that undermine these goals. In essence, money makes such collaborations asymmetrical. Jones (2007) referred to a specific global education discourse dominated by large Non-Governmental Organisations and influencing the unequal power relations. Botha and Breidlid (2013) went further, asking a question that is seldom explicitly asked: How has hegemonic educational discourse helped to promote the capitalist world system and globalisation and to defend positions of power? They questioned whether Northern partners’ critical thinking is critical enough and whether they see that their knowledge transfer is biased and embedded in a historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

Desai (2013) observed a more nuanced process in a project driven by the North and benefiting the South and, based on her results, proposed the existence of a continuum encompassing the binary perspectives. She encouraged Southern partners to actively contribute new knowledge to collaborations, arguing that collaborations are based on asking who benefits in what way. Her experience came from a

10-year North–South–South project funded by the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education (NUFU) showing how contestation and negotiation can eventually lead to successful partnerships. The project began with insufficient funding, and its allocation was contested by a Southern partner in danger of dropping out. Over the years, trust was sensitively built around funding issues and through intellectual ownership, such as first authorship of publications. Based on her findings, Desai (2013) claimed that universities are privileged spaces and that academics are well placed to work towards the common good. She further argued that the nature of North–South–South collaboration depends a great deal on the roles played by individual academics.

According to Bastien, Mukoma, Ezekiel and Helleve (2013), establishing an enduring and sustainable partnership requires Southern institutions to be fully engaged in the project's overall lifespan. They clearly stated that the quality of a partnership depends on trust and respect. They also observed that the implementation phase of a project presents immense opportunities for reciprocal learning and scientific development. Periodic scheduled calls and frequent verbal communication provide updates and a mutual understanding that facilitate progress in the partnership.

There is also a risk of looking at projects as venues for 'cooperation' (i.e. aid or working with someone), rather than 'collaboration' (i.e. reciprocal recognition and mutual learning) (for further discussion, see Holmarsdottir et al., 2013). North–South–South collaboration could potentially build shared cultural horizons and epistemic communities (Chisholm, cited in Holmarsdottir et al., 2013), as well as epistemological sensitivity (Janhonen-Abruquah, Riitaoja, & Posti-Ahokas, 2016). Botha and Breidlid (2013) further proposed including students' own experiences and paying more attention to their home environments in order to build learning environments that offer horizontal components in learning across social worlds. Given these considerations, North–South–South collaboration could create a stronger allegiance to equity and justice, thereby supporting the objectives of critically and globally oriented multicultural (or intercultural) education, as defined by Zilliacus, Holm and Sahlström (2017).

Approach to intercultural competences within the network

Dervin (2016) suggested looking at intercultural competences (IC) from a liquid realistic perspective in order to highlight their dynamic nature. IC should be viewed as a dialogic process through which

learning occurs in the interaction or navigation between the simple and the complex and through learning from failures (Dervin, 2016, pp. 82–85). According to Dervin (2016), IC should be collectivised to allow for shared responsibility for what happens in interculturality. The idea of collectivising IC is appealing from the perspective of the CRE network under analysis in the present study. As network participants with various roles, we focused our learning on the interactions taking place among the different groups that formed within the network. The network dynamics were also determined by negotiation, navigation and learning from failures. Therefore, in order to analyse how the network enabled learning at both the individual and the institutional levels, we focus our analyses on collective discussions and collaboratively written reports.

The work done within the network was guided by the notion of cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2010, 2013) and the social theory of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1998). CRE addresses learners in a comprehensive way through multi-dimensional engagement in learning activities. The network activities were planned to create learning spaces through student and teacher mobility, joint coordination, joint courses and qualitative research. The social theory of learning sees learning as an experience: as doing, belonging and becoming. Thus, the focus is on the process of being an active participant in the practices of social communities and on the construction of identities in relation to these communities. Lave and Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice is used to recognise the roles the network participants played in determining their engagement and connections across boundaries, including academic specialisations and professional practices.

A recent series of research papers and analyses explored effectiveness and interaction in intercultural collaboration in the context of a collaboration between Chinese and British universities (Reid, 2009a; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). This project suggested a learning process model for intercultural partnerships (Reid, 2009b) that highlighted the active learning that occurs in international projects. The model distinguishes levels of acquisition, awareness and embedding in the learning process. While the first two levels focus on individuals' knowledge acquisition and increasing reflexivity, the third level also recognises the collective and institutional forms of learning that result from the first two levels. We found this model useful in framing the experiences reported by the participants of the North–South–South network.

The CRE network as a learning space

An overview of the network activities is provided in Table 5.1

Table 5.1 Timeline and key activities of the CRE network

Key activities	2012		2013				2014				2015				2016	
	3Q*	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Student exchange	—	—	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	—	—
Staff exchange	—	—	•	•	—	•	•	•	—	•	—	•	—	•	•	—
Intensive courses	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	•	—	—	•	—	—
Book	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Network meetings	•	•	—	•	—	•	—	•	—	•	—	•	—	•	•	—
Evaluation/ reporting	—	—	—	—	—	•	—	•	—	•	—	—	—	•	—	•

*Key: Q refers to a quarter-year (e.g. 3Q refers to the third quarter of the year, or July to September).

The network received funding for two partly overlapping phases: one from 2012 to 2014 and one from 2014 to 2016. The first six months were a period of joint planning and a clarification of roles and responsibilities. Student and staff exchanges commenced in early 2013. A total of 96 network members, including students and faculty, received mobility grants for participating in intensive courses or exchange periods lasting from one week to five months. Representatives of all partner institutions met twice a year in network meetings hosted by the partner institutions. During the final stage of phase one, the network initiated the idea to edit a book compiling the research conducted by the network members under the umbrella of CRE. The network coordinator compiled four qualitative reports to the funding agency to summarise the network's activities and impact. Participant evaluations and reports were collected from students and faculty participating in the activities. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with selected network members to analyse the participants' individual experiences. All of these evaluative activities were conducted collaboratively by the network participants. Therefore, the analyses presented here should be considered self-evaluative and designed to improve future collaboration.

The following sections summarise the learning processes mapped throughout the life cycle of the network using the three-stage learning process model for intercultural partnerships (Reid, 2009b). The processes of reviewing, reflecting and revising are introduced to depict how the network engaged in shared reflection to improve practices and take responsibility for the successful completion of the projects.

The data for the analysis are drawn primarily from notes of group discussions among the project partners in June 2014, the three qualitative project reports (October 2013, October 2014 and May 2016) and an evaluative member check interview conducted in one of the Southern partner institutions in July 2017. The objective is to highlight the dialogic, collaborative learning processes of groups and institutions. The analyses have been conducted in multiple stages: continued discussions during the funded project periods, collaborative writing during the reporting phases and an evaluative analysis of the project documentation after the funding period. Approved reports for the funding agency, conference papers and research articles (referred to in this chapter) have served as member check mechanisms throughout the project.

The processes of reviewing, reflecting and revising network activities

First, examples of ways in which the network activities were adjusted to changing conditions are given to describe the dynamics of the network and to highlight the challenges faced in establishing collaboration among five institutions located in different contexts. In the beginning, most network members had never met one another in person. Regular meetings among partner universities (monthly on Skype and twice a year in person) served as important spaces for shared reflection on and direction for activities.

The Skype meeting turned out to be extremely valuable over the period when no face-to-face contacts were run. The monthly meetings kept the momentum going and the participants motivated and involved (Final report, May 2016).

Technical challenges related to unreliable Internet access resulted in occasional absences of some institutions from the monthly meetings. Furthermore, dependence on online communication increased during the sudden outbreak of the Ebola virus in the summer of 2014, which caused major challenges for the planned mobility periods and intensive courses. Ultimately, network mobility

activities were halted for eight months, and the focus was shifted to activities that did not require travelling. A multi-site online course was planned for students and researchers focused on writing papers for the joint publication.

The newly established network faced several practical challenges related to implementing the mobility periods. Furthermore, most partner institutions were unfamiliar with the funding instrument, resulting in administration challenges. For example, it was soon realised that more emphasis needed to be paid to the criteria for student selection, as the first outbound students from North to South faced unnecessary challenges due to a lack of sufficient tutoring in the host university. Later, the network agreed to prioritise mature students, to send students to mobility periods in pairs and to assign students thesis advisors (selected from the network participants) in their host institutions. Differences in academic calendars also created some challenges. Students took part in the courses that were available at the time of their exchanges, but were not always able to complete the full courses. Since the studies were recognised in the students' home institution curricula, extra flexibility from the home institutions was required. These negotiations to adjust institutional processes to the specific context of the CRE network can be considered critically important spaces for intercultural dialogic learning. The joint objectives of the network motivated the participants to find flexible solutions.

Despite all participants' willingness to make the network operational, various challenges were faced throughout the funded projects. Challenges related to the payment of scholarships and the costs of receiving visiting students and researchers were solved on a case-by-case basis. All partner institutions had to be flexible in order to accommodate the network activities within their processes and timelines. For the University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, which was the network's main coordinator, the network was the first of its kind. Thus, the first phase was characterised by efforts to set up new practices and processes to manage the network. Gradually, the practical challenges diminished as the partners' communication improved and the institutions learned to manage the project. However, dramatic organisational changes in the coordinating university caused continued administrative challenges during the second phase of the project. As a result, ownership of the network was again transferred to individuals rather than institutions.

At the institutional level, it was tough to put the beautiful words of the benefits of internationalisation into daily practice. It is easy to say that internationalisation and, especially, internationalisation at home are favourable and in line with the Department's goals and visions, but when it comes to practicalities in the form of arranging cash payments for visiting lecturers and staff, finding office space, providing pots and pans and bedsheets and pillows for the visiting lecturers and students and, in general, welcoming visitors, the practices are not there. It is 'no one's work' (Final report, May 2016).

Linking individual learning processes with institutional development

This section focuses on the interplay of individual and institutional processes. Initially, collegial connections served as the catalyst for the formation of the network of five universities from four countries. It was through the persistence of committed individuals that the formal project agreements with all partner institutions were finalised. These formal agreements provided the framework for the network's activities and enabled the learning of individuals and groups.

Participation in the project was truly based on each participants' own interest, as no salaries were paid. In other words, those who took part really wanted to take part. They felt the participation was somehow beneficial for their own academic career. Motivation was either to finish or collect data for bachelor's, master's or doctoral theses while studying abroad or to search for international partners for further collaboration. The added value for each participant was that they were able to do their normal work – whether studying or teaching – but now in the context of North–South–South cooperation. Each participant's work gained a new dimension (Final report, May 2016).

To strengthen institutional support to individual members, the network engaged in research under a commonly agreed theme of CRE. This commitment enhanced the network's motivation to provide quality supervision for master's and doctoral students visiting partner institutions. After the first cycle of student exchanges, the participants in previous exchanges acted as important tutors for newcomers in the host institutions. The growing group of people familiar with the network members and institutions, therefore, served as a critical source of support for the network.

During their visits to partner universities, the participants engaged in dialogue with students, teachers and teacher educators and brought their findings back to their own learning communities.

But the network activities have not only had an impact on those ones who have participated in mobility activities; they have also influenced the whole work community. Visiting students and lecturers have taken part in daily

activities in hosting universities. They have contributed to lectures, workshops and seminars in hosting universities and, thus, played an important role in internationalisation at home (Final report, May 2016).

However, individual perspectives, as evaluated through member check interviews, may be more critical than the collective experiences recorded through participant evaluations. Therefore, such perspectives should be paid special attention:

If it is a mobility project, if you don't get to travel, what do you do locally? ... Mostly, people are looking at it as you get to travel abroad. Individual benefits come first. The institutional benefit—people look at it differently. (Member check interview, July 2017)

Finding meaningful ways to participate in the network locally or virtually remained a challenge for individuals. The online course was one attempt to provide opportunities for wider participation.

The teacher exchanges were considered most successful when they were combined with other network activities, such as network meetings, intensive courses or administrative visits. They also enabled the dissemination of information about North–South–South activities to the other faculty members and students who were more peripheral to the core activities. New person-to-person connections and relations leading to possible future cooperation were also established.

The conditions set by the funding instrument (e.g. no possibility of paying salaries or funding research) were seen as constraints. However, these constraints challenged the network participants to find other meaningful ways to engage in the network:

One of the strengths has been the complementarity: members' knowledge, skills and expertise benefit each other and impact teaching and collegiality in the workplace. At the personal level, as the funding has been only for mobility activities, all the work done had to complement each network participant's regular work or study. Another strength has been the capacity building and professional development of members' subject expertise and research. (Final report, May 2016)

These examples show how network activities fed into individual and institutional objectives in various ways. However, the process of embedding learning at the institutional level requires time.

Thinking of who [individually] will benefit also leads to the department to benefit and eventually to the university ... this will make the university gain points in terms of ranking ... in terms of how many of the staff have had international collaboration. (Member check interview, July 2017)

At the institutional level, the network activities have started slowly to grow into departments' and faculties' international affairs structures, administrative procedures and curriculum planning. This is a process that takes time, but as the network activities become part of faculties' organisational routines, it provides sustainability for the network activities. In the vision and mission statement documents at the faculty level, both outbound mobility and internationalisation at home are recognised, but the implementation and academic relevance of the mobility need to be worked on further. This is where CRE network activities have been important. (Final report, May 2016)

Again, it is important to recognise the tensions resulting from projects in which only certain individuals get immediate benefits:

I know, in Google Scholar, my university gets some ranking, but my colleagues see it as my individual benefit. (Member check interview, July 2017)

Whilst network members view their involvement in the collaboration as their contribution to their institutions' international recognition and advancement, non-members see this as a privilege the network members have been selectively 'handpicked' to enjoy. Thus, members are torn between disclosing their involvement in the international collaboration and publicising the network and not, which would reduce the benefits to the institution. Making projects visible beyond their immediate beneficiaries is critical for concretising institutional benefits and ensuring sustained institutional commitment to North–South–South partnerships.

In this section, the impacts of the CRE network have been analysed at personal, group and institutional levels. Table 5.2 summarises how participation in the CRE network supported learning processes from the initial acquisition stage towards the embedded learning of individuals and institutions. The single arrows refer to the hierarchy of the learning process model (Reid, 2009b), while the multi-directional arrows point to our findings concerning the inseparable dynamics of individual and institutional learning.

Table 5.2 Learning processes at the individual and institutional levels

	<i>Individual level</i>	<i>Institutional level</i>
Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial contacts between partner institutions through individuals • Learning from project themes, particularly culturally responsive education • Individual fact finding before intensive courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation agreements among participating institutions • Administrative challenges in inter-institutional processes • Identification of participants
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint planning meetings to agree on ways of collaborating • Individual learning through staff and student exchanges • Reflective reports by individuals on mobility periods and intensive courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding flexible solutions to successfully implement staff and student exchanges
Embedding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ideas and perspectives to participants' studies, teaching and research • Engaging in joint teaching and research • Continued professional development through CRE network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative reflection of intensive course and network meeting participants • Mobility periods increasingly linked to regular activities of host institutions • Publication of an edited volume by the network • Secured funding for a second phase • Course on culturally responsive observation at University of Helsinki

Dissemination of network outcomes

The volume *Culturally responsive education: Studies in the Global South and North* (Lehtomäki, Janhonen-Abreuquah, & Kahangwa, 2017) produced by the CRE network contains 13 articles written over the course of the various network activities and influenced by the participants' opportunities to visit and discuss with colleagues within the network's partner universities. The articles in the book give voice to the network members' discussions concerning the challenges facing different educational contexts. Today, the book remains a visible outcome of the project that will benefit participating

institutions in various ways. In addition to the book, the network members presented three papers at international conferences and published short articles in national and institutional publications. Furthermore, these publications, together with the ‘day in a school’ online and live courses, influenced the development of a research methods course titled ‘Culturally Responsive Observation’ at the University of Helsinki. This course complements the courses already offered by the Faculty of Educational Sciences and adds a new dimension to the university’s research method courses. Finally, the present chapter represents an important effort to summarise and analyse the learning that occurred within the network.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the CRE network enabled the sharing of both knowledge and experience in a variety of areas. Through seminars, workshops and access to online resources, the network contributed to knowledge, research, teaching experiences and resource sharing. The activities of the CRE network were explorative in nature, and the rules of operation were guided by ideals of mutual benefit, equal participation and democratic decision making. One of the strengths of the network was its complementarity: Members’ knowledge, skills and expertise benefited other members and impacted teaching and collegiality in the workplace. Another strength of the network was the capacity building and professional development of the members’ subject expertise and research. Successful network activities engaged the participants in collaborative learning processes; thus, managing and participating in the network was a context for intercultural navigation and negotiation. This phenomenon is perhaps similar to Dervin’s (2016) proposed approach involving collectivising and sharing responsibility for developing intercultural competencies.

The notion of CRE provided tools for the network members to analyse educational contexts in ways that transcended simplistic comparisons of countries and nationalities (see Janhonen-Abruquah et al., 2016; Patel, 2015). The application of CRE helped to highlight similarities and differences across contexts and to reflect culture beyond ethnic and national boundaries. Furthermore, CRE offered the network members tools for reflecting on how education responds to cultural variations and related power issues in and around educational contexts. The network members reported adopting culturally

responsive activities and strategies in teaching. Exchange visits helped them identify good practices, which they then remodified and contextualised. The collaborative work within the network also encouraged the continued sharing of ideas on CRE and its use in developing education in specific contexts. Thus, CRE provided a useful, equity-focused framework for discussing, observing and problematising 'culture', thereby contributing to the intercultural understanding of the network participants.

The partners' commitment grew as they took part in network activities and experienced individual benefits for their study and work careers. The continuation of activities built trust among the network partners, creating a basis for further collaboration. Our analyses highlight the interdependency of individuals, groups and the network as a whole in enabling collaboration and learning, thus reflecting the idea of the development of intercultural competences as a collective process. Individual learning experiences contributed to collective learning and motivated contributions to the network. While institutional arrangements provided the framework for collaboration, the network also influenced the participating institutions. Though analysing these long-term institutional influences is not possible given the data available for this analysis, it can be said that, though continued collaboration is critically important for institutional learning and the development of practice to enhance intercultural competences, sustaining the network's activities beyond the funding period has proved challenging. In the context of development cooperation, changes to the policy priorities of the funding country also influenced the length, substance and geographical focus of the network's partnerships. Thus, our findings indicate that North-South-South collaboration is particularly vulnerable to changes in institutional policy frameworks and that its success is highly dependent on the genuine commitment of the individuals within different partner institutions. Therefore, analysing collaboration from both the benefits perspective and the learning perspective is critical for understanding the conditions for sustained collaboration that can enable meaningful intercultural learning.

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