

**YASHWANORA YAHAYA**

Institute of Teacher Education, Ipoh Campus, , Malaysia

**HENDON MOHAMMAD**

Institute of Teacher Education, International Languages Campus, Malaysia

**NETTIE BOIVIN**

Nazarbayev University, Language Centre, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kazakhstan

## **EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CO-CONSTRUCTING OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN PARTICIPANTS AND MALAYSIAN LECTURERS**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to determine if cultural expectations can impede or facilitate trainer/trainee relationship between the Malaysian master teacher trainers (MMTTs) and the Afghanistan master teacher trainees (AMTTs). The study also aimed to highlight the external factors influencing the co-constructing of experiential learning between the MMTTs and the AMTTs. The sample consisted of randomly selected participants from the 240 master teacher trainers from different teacher training institutions in Afghanistan. For this study, data were collected using the mixed-method study utilising trainee's profiles, post-training feedback via Facebook and e mails, lecturers' interviews, qualitative observations and course evaluation feedbacks. Findings highlighted empathy for the students' socio-cultural home context as an important new socio-cultural factor influencing the Malaysian success in their master teacher training. Other expectations of a trainer's role and image based on prior cultural beliefs can impede any classroom trainer/trainee relationship. This is true in the average classroom unfortunately, where in conflict educational or fragile contexts, there are other hindrances which need to be addressed. The case study findings highlighted four aspects faced by the ATTs when co-constructing relationships with the MTTs from marginalised, fragile contexts. The four areas which required specific empathy were: sharing relationship, building an inclusive empathetic relationship with students, inclusion of women in education, and peaceful diversity.

### **Keywords:**

Peaceful Diversity, Co-constructed Training Relationship, Inclusive Training, Empathy, Fragile Context

**JEL Classification:** I24

**Introduction:**

Master teachers attending further training abroad bring with them constraints from the local context. When the local context is layered in various socio-cultural factors a different teacher training relationship is required. The study participants, who attended the Malaysian Education Project for Afghanistan from the year 2009 till 2013, were from different training colleges in Afghanistan who had been selected to be the national Master Teacher Trainers of Afghanistan (AMTTs). They came from different educational environments, as previously stated, that are rural, developing, war ravaged or fragile contexts (UNESCO, 2004: p. 27). Hence, to train these adult teacher trainers, a special relationship needed to be co-constructed. This research investigated a special type of master teacher trainer/trainee which in this globalised transmigrant world is becoming increasingly common in the world. To better appreciate the difficulties faced by these AMTTs the Afghanistan context will be assessed from prior literature and participant observations.

Unlike other in service participants in the Institute of Teacher Education International Languages Campus (IPGKBA), most of the AMTTs came mainly from rural, impoverished areas while some were from urban areas. However all came from a 40 year war torn learning contexts. Therefore, similar to other refugee students, a type of peace building initiative was required. However, unlike a migrant/immigrant situation, these trainees would be returning to their home country. Instead of creating a special course, Lederach (1997) states:

Cultivating an infrastructure for peacebuilding means we are not merely interested in 'ending' something that is not desired. We are oriented toward the building of relationships that in their totality form new patterns, processes, and structures. (Lederach, 1997:84-85)

The participants in this project were not only provided with training on best practices and content but also exposed to better understanding on the importance of a co-constructed relationship between trainer and trainee. The four aspects identified were sharing relationship, building an inclusive empathetic relationship with participants, inclusion of women in education, and peaceful diversity.

**Literature Review:***Prior Context*

Afghanistan is among the world's poorest countries after nearly 30 years of war (Andersen and Kooji, 2007: 4). "Afghanistan has a long history of social unrest and ethnic conflict, and the manipulation of the education system by internal and external powers for political purposes has been one of the major contributors to these divisions." (Spink, 2005: 2). As Dupree states, 'Afghanistan has not one culture, nor one people' (as cited in Spink, 2005: 3, 1980: 323). Often it is forgotten that "within Afghanistan, there are many different ethno-religious and tribal groups that quite recently targeted each other in the civil war (Andersen and Kooji, 2007: 4)." This diversity of religion, languages and ethnicity is often overlooked during the training process (UNESCO, 2003: 27). In Afghanistan there are over 100 languages and several religions (Spink, 2005: 4). Therefore, not only is the present educational and

learning context in Afghanistan embedded with the results of poverty and war but is also a diverse multicultural environment not a unified cohesive ethnic environment (Afghanistan MOE, 2005: 2; Brodsky, et al., 2012: 17; UNICEF, 2003: 27).

There have been several attempts to train university master trainers (AMTTs). Previous teacher training courses, mostly on pedagogical knowledge and skills, were prescribed to the participants and did not consider socio-cultural aspects affecting the implementation of these new methods and approaches. Spinks in 2005 stated that 'teacher training programmes have been implemented by almost every humanitarian organization working in education in the country. The majority of these programmes have focused on pedagogical methodologies in the classroom, including classroom management, lesson planning and concepts of student centred learning. These teacher-training programmes have mostly been small scale and lack coordination' (Spink, 2005: 9). Furthermore, the issue of the 40 year war both civil and from external forces have created a closed, fearful and intimidated mind set in students, teacher trainees, and master teacher trainers (Brodsky, et. al., 2012; Spink, 2004). The learning context is not peaceful thus educators in their desire to create an orderly structure impose an authoritarian model. Statements from both the MMTTs and AMTTs cohort 1 and 2 on February, 2011 corroborated that 'before I was thinking that the relationship between the teacher and students should not be friendly, the teacher should smile or laugh in the class should tell stories and have fun and the teacher should be a dictator. After returning back from Malaysia I totally changed as I saw the result' (adapted from cohort 1 and 2 interviews 2001: 4-6).

The above conversation was directly verbatim taken from interviews between the AMTT and the MMTTs. While their English proficiency blurs the meaning it is apparent from the conversation that the Afghanistan participants' beliefs in how teachers are perceived changed after exposure to the Malaysian Teacher Trainers. Prior research reveals that perceptions are a key aspect in educational and societal change. 'A large literature in social psychology points to the importance of inter-group contact in reducing inter-group conflict. Contact can reduce tensions between social groups when people are on equal footing, are working towards a shared aim (Andersen and Kooji, 2007: 6).' Often teacher training is conducted by western trainers who have little or no experience with the lives of their participants. Hence, the researchers aimed to examine, how bringing participants to a similar yet different culture that was mindful of their religion, was essential to the success of the training. 'Achieving high quality in adult learning programs depends in large measure on the availability of knowledgeable, skilful, sensitive and socially committed adult educators. Yet priority has not been given to their training' (UNESCO, 2003: 13), where the training of trainers aspects are being side-lined. Often this special bond is overlooked due to the urgent necessity of having trained educators. Therefore, the article will highlight the crucial aspect of this seemingly small insignificant aspect that ultimately was the crux of the AMTTs applying the knowledge and experiences gained.

A trainer presents best-practices both in and out of the classroom (Boendermaker, et al., 2003: 27; Garman, 2005: 6). Often expectations of a trainer's role and image, based on prior cultural beliefs, can impede any classroom trainer/trainee relationship (Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007: 16). There are three important traits of a good trainer; knowledge, skill and personality (Boendermaker, 2003: 24). However, this research team argues that there is a fourth trait equally important that of empathy. By this we

mean the trainers ability to empathize with the trainee's socio-cultural home context. This new fourth trait of empathy is not just understanding of the six key factors in inclusive education (Garman, 2005: 34). With regards to the studies use of the term inclusive education, it stems from the EU Teacher Education policy report (Garman, 2005: 30). In this report they refer to all students, regardless of social, cultural, ethnic or psychological factors are entitled to the same individual treatment. Thus, the study is not using the term to refer to only disabled student but to the broader definition of inclusive education. In addition, there are intertwining traits that encompass this new socio-cultural fourth trait of empathy. It cannot just be empathy defined as understanding of someone's situation rather trainers need to continually be reflective with regards to understanding the students' socio-cultural context (Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg, 2005: 12). Not only should trainers 'reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment and to take greater responsibility for their own lifelong learning' (EU Teacher Education Report, 2009:16) but also understand the fragile home context of trainees. Thus, the trainers must co-create a relationship built on empathy, to connect the learning of the present classroom environment with that of the fragile home context.

### **Research Question:**

- 1) *Do socio-cultural factors outside the classroom influence attitudes and perceptions either increasing or decreasing acceptance of pedagogical practices?*
  
- 2) *How does the Malaysian co-constructive training impact the Afghanistan master teacher trainers learning and application of the knowledge?*

### **Research and Methods**

#### *Population:*

The AMTTs were predominately male with few female from various educational background coming from remote and urban teaching training colleges of Afghanistan. There were 240 participants in six cohorts of AMTTs specialising in Islamic studies and literacy. They attended the 14 week cascading training project from 2009-2013 which contained twelve competency fields (core subjects) and two generic components (English and ICT). Their ages ranged from early 20's to early 50's while their academic background ranged from high school graduate to a Masters holder. The interpreters appointed were of mixed educational background to assist in the training and they were of mixed proficiency in both languages, namely Dari and Pashto.

The MMTTs were predominantly female and male senior academic lecturers from three different Institutes of Teacher Education, appointed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Their academic qualifications ranged from Masters to PhD holders and most of them had had vast experiences in conducting training, at national and international levels.

#### *Methods*

Due to the previously mentioned constraints of the research, a mixed method case study approach was designed. Using several types of mixed modalities such as; post-training feedback taken from practicums in Kabul and presentations, quantified course evaluation feedback, case study interviews with AMTTs and translated emailed responses as well as extracts from social network discussions regarding training from the AMTTs. The qualitative and quantitative data analysis extracted from the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia (IPGM) reports, and social network discussion board were triangulated with a third party interview with four MMTTs from the three institutes (IPGM) discussing the relationships formed with the participants as well as other socio-cultural influences stemming from the data on teacher training. The analysis of the data was conducted by a non-biased party so not to unduly influence the results. During the reporting of the results, the MMTTs were reported as; MMTT 1=N, MMTT 2=H, MMTT 3 =K and MMTT 4 =A. The focus of the data analysis was on the beliefs and perception of the participants as well as the interpreters, on the Malaysian trainers and the training learning ecology in the Malaysian context.

Questions from the course evaluation were divided into three sections for analysis covering; a) the usefulness of the course b) socio-cultural experience and c) interaction with trainers. Certain questions pertaining to administrative issues such as registration and infrastructure were removed from the calculation as these were not relevant to the study. Section A, investigating the usefulness of the course, analysed questions 1-4 which asked whether the course was helpful, useful in my work, promoted cooperation with Malaysia, and would be useful in Afghanistan. Section B, investigating socio-cultural experiences, analysed questions 14, 15, 17, and 18, to rate the hospitality of Malaysia, IPGM staff, lecturers and students. Section C, investigating interaction with trainers, analysed questions 24, (tutors were helpful), 29 (I have acquired new knowledge), 30 (the teaching strategies were effective) and 31 (teaching activities were effective).

#### *Data Collection*

This collective case study was based on a constructivist paradigm, informed by the supposition that truth is relative and dependent of the participants (Yin, 2003: 22). This relationship enabled a *derived etic* approach, 'the researcher adapts ways of questioning, observing, and interpreting to fit the perspective of the participants' (Rogoff, 2003: 30). While it is convenient and easier to categorise participants, the nature of this research is to collaborate towards a common truth. Of course, it is understood that we all are inherently biased. However, due to the fragile context of the participants it was important the research allowed their voices to be heard. Moreover, it is important aspect of the research that the process was in-line with the pedagogical framework applied to the training context. Therefore, the use of questionnaires alone would not adequately reveal changes in participants' attitudes. It must be noted that these participants came from diverse marginalized context. Thus, the advantage of this approach is a co-constructed relationship between the researcher and participant (Miller and Crabtree, 1999:8). In order to avoid bias, a third party was assigned to collect and assess the data as well as design the interview questions. The third party had participated in the later part of the programme briefly and had completed an ethnographic collective case study of marginalised Nepalese families for her PhD. Thus, the third party researcher provided some objectivity and methodology knowledge while still being familiar with the educational context. The data tools were designed based on a framework which would be discussed next.

### *Data Collection Tools*

The interview questions were designed by the third party and based on the factors from Boedenmaker framework and socio-cultural factors which arose during the qualitative interviews. The questions guiding the interviews of both the participants and the master teacher trainers investigated a) changes in pedagogical approach, b) relationships between both the Malaysian and Afghanistan master teacher trainers, c) changes in attitudes and beliefs during pre and post training, d) outside classroom experiences that altered or influenced attitudes, practices and expectations. The interview discussion was focused on factors relevant to the relationships formed with the participants as well as other socio-cultural influences stemming from the data on teacher training. The nature of the research requiring participatory observation (Yin, 2003:7) entails the establishment of a relaxed trusting relationship with the participants from a marginalised context. Moreover, the co-constructed relationship between the MMTTs and the AMTTs, based on shared cultural understanding, allowed for a more participatory relationship to develop. The relationship enabled a derived emic approach, “the researcher adapts ways of questioning, observing, and interpreting to fit the perspective of the participants” (Rogoff, 2003: 30). Rather than implementing a full emic approach with the co-construction of the relationship the MMTTs created a more derived emic approach. Some information was derived from surveys as in an etic approach however, the relationship created a more emic or culturally sensitive approach. Furthermore, the interview questions were based on the parameters outlined as a guide during the observation (listed in appendix 3) where the questions guided the participants rather than directed their answers. In addition, the team also participated in the research along with the participants.

### **Results**

The results from 2009-2011 had an average score of 4.56 (see Table 1 below) where the mean was regarded as a high score. In addition, focus group interviews showed evidence of greater praise among not only the literacy group but also the Islamic education group. Despite the fact that the majority of the respondents were male who had hardly been trained by trainers of the opposite gender, they acknowledged the Malaysian female trainers’ capabilities and expertise in their respective areas. Most participants requested for a longer duration of the training ranging from six months to a year.

Table 1: MAEPA Course Evaluation

<b>MAEPA Cohort Year (out of 5)</b>	<b>Usefulness of Program</b>	<b>Fosters Socio-cultural ties</b>	<b>Training</b>
<b>MAEPA 1 Cohort 1 2009</b> (29/06 –2/10)	4.71	4.81	4.68
<b>MAEPA 2 Cohort 2 2010</b> (05/05 –8/10)	4.52	4.81	4.66
<b>MAEPA 3 Cohort 1 2011</b> (18/07–21/10)	4.73	4.78	4.70
<b>MAEPA 3 Cohort 2 2012</b> (13/02-18/05)	4.14	4.20	3.95
<b>MAEPA 3 Cohort 3* 2012</b> (11/07 19/10)	4.50	4.64	4.53
<b>MAEPA 3 Cohort 4*2012</b> (11/07-19/10)	4.60	4.35	4.79

<b>Total from 2009-2011</b>	4.53	4.60	4.55
<b>Total mean</b>	<b>4.56</b>		

\*Cohort 3 & 4 ran simultaneously at different sites

The interviews with the four MMTTs reflected some similar beliefs and perceptions towards the AMTTs. One such similarity was how all the MMTTs viewed the Afghanistan Cohort 1, 2009 MTTs. All the MMTTs agreed that when they first met the MMTTs, the male AMTTs would avoid the Malaysian female trainers and students. In addition, they made no/minimal eye contact, and distrusted people to the point of not smiling. In the beginning, MMTT 1 commented, ‘... you people are so serious. Smile!’ The interpreter responded by saying, ‘...why should we smile when war seems never-ending’ representing the AMTTs’ view. But the MMTTs (1-4) did prompt the AMTTs further by saying, ‘...isn’t smiling encouraged in Islam as stated in the Hadith, as it’s a form of almsgiving’ (adapted from personal communication during classroom interaction with cohort 1, 2009).

Cohort 2 was more receptive. This was confirmed in the feedback section from Cohort 1 and 2 reports stating, ‘...Before, I thought that I shouldn’t have to laugh or smile in the class while this was a Hadith of Prophet Mohammad, so I learnt this in Malaysia and now I am very friendly and open in the class’ (adapted from a conversation in class cohort 2 July, 2010). These results were discussed in terms of the factors particular to the Afghanistan context and need to co-construct a shared MMTTs and AMTTs’ relationship.

## Discussion

To build an empathetic co-constructive relationship several factors must occur. Empathy comes from understanding students outside of the formal classroom (Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007: 17). Inclusive education (as defined above) allows for diversity only occurs when attitudes are altered through exposure, reflection, and positive modelling (Garman, 2005: 6; Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg, 2005: 10). With reference to the term inclusive education it stems from the EU Teacher Education which encompasses students with differences such as social, cultural, physical and mental, being treated fairly. The results triangulated from IPGM questionnaires course evaluation feedback, and case study interviews revealed a pattern of the previously discussed empathetic co-constructed relationship highlighting the areas of the relationship. The researchers implied that each context would contain variations in these factors dependent on the constraints of the AMTTs’ home context. Below is the evidence, highlighting four factors which require teacher trainers to have empathy of participants’ home context.

### *Sharing Relationship*

The constructing of a sharing relationship is reciprocal and one which exists outside of class (Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007). The theme of a sharing co-constructed relationship between the MMTTs and AMTTs was discussed during interviews with the MMTTs and triangulated with IPGM questionnaire results. The sharing included not only teaching anecdotes but also, shared personal experiences. This was a different pedagogical approach than what the AMTTs experienced in Afghanistan. Initially, the participants asked ‘Why are you sharing all your personal stories with us? Shouldn’t they be for private consumption only?’(adapted from personal conversation June,



2011). MMTT 1 stated, 'I am a trainer. I am professional. Whatever I do I reflect so I can learn from it and share with others so that you learn from my experiences'. Other MMTTs stated that their relationship with the AMTTs was not only at professional level but also personal level, treating the AMTTs as colleagues and friends. All the MMTTs interviewed relayed how they intertwined personal and family stories in their training. In addition, some MMTTs revealed that they invited the AMTTs to their house, on several occasions. MMTT 3 who was also a mentor, invited them to meet her family as she believed that 'they were lonely and homesick'. For some of the participants this was the first time they had left their country. The sharing also was in conjunction with acts of kindness not just relaying prior experiences.

The shared experiences were both small and large acts based on understanding of the participants' situation. MMTT 3 spoke of a particular moment when one of the AMTTs named M referred her as 'my mother' in Arabic, when the AMTTs went to her house to break the fast during Ramadan, the fasting month. The AMTTs felt that MMTT 3 was like a mother figure because she treated them like her children (she was one of the senior lecturers). This act could only occur with a shared empathetic understanding of the participant's religious practices. MMTT 3 prepared *halal food* and made them feel like at home and introduced her family to them.

However, the sharing was not one way rather it was reciprocal where the AMTTs also shared their lives. During an environmental social visit, the participants stated that living in Afghanistan was hard. From the second cohort, AMTT (W) said he wanted to write a reflective book about the shared experiences in Malaysia. In the feedback and conferred in the interviews, all spoke about witnessing the effects of the simple act of 'going to the mosques with Malaysian teachers'"(adapted from Cohort 3 Feedback, 2012: 7). In fact, many of the female MTTs also shared how privileged they were to be able to perform their prayers freely in public places (mosques, suraus, and rest areas) as back in Afghanistan, females can only pray at home. These simple acts of sharing your cultural practices and life have great repercussions Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007: 15) as the AMTTs were not worried about any threats of being bombed or shot at, when performing their prayers.

They became more open to sharing and reflection. The AMTTs shared not only their professional but also their personal experiences where they discussed their personal life of balancing their family and work. MMTT 1 discussed how her family gave their support to her allowing her to comfortably contribute to the MMTTs' well-being. She even introduced her husband and four children to the participants, and involved especially her children in most of the events and trips organised for the AMTTs. She lived with them as a warden and mentor, and her children called the AMTTs, uncles and aunties, indicating that they were part of her family.

This ethnographic and shared empathetic pedagogical approach allowed for a greater bond to be formed. The result of these small acts was that, by the end of the course, some of the male AMTTs from one of the cohorts, cooked dinner and showed videos of the women dancing traditional dances for the MMTTs to view. They shared as if they were peers or family. In addition, all the Malaysian mentors who conducted training in Kabul, were invited to their homes by the AMTTs. When the AMTTs went to Kabul the shared relationship continued. One participant brought his wife to the workshop, while others brought their daughter, siblings and relatives, to be introduced to the MMTTs. This was not the only evidence of the impact of the relationship. Below



is an email responding to the questionnaire sent. The interpreter discussed the impact the sharing relationship had on them. The AMTTs stated *'her good relation and empathy led to this issue to call her my sister. Every time I came to Malaysia as MAEPA interpreter, I never felt I am far away from my family. Even I had a larger family with included at least 30 sister, brothers and even a personality same as mom (Ustaza Qamariah) along with my other Afghan colleagues'*(adapted from email response May, 2013). Further on in the email discussion regarding the effects of this relationship was stated *'It was a good friendly and learning environment, so I really learned invaluable things from her professional and personal behaviour'* (adapted from email response January 2013, see appendix 1).

The case study shows that the MMTTs were very reflective, stating they felt they learnt more about the AMTTs. The experience allowed the AMTTs to share personal information such as; having 'to walk across the Pakistan border running from the war'. These small private personal discourses both inside and outside of class, co-created a mutual bond between the MMTTs and the AMTTs. The bond was not just in the safety of the Malaysian context but translated back to the Afghanistan context as previously discussed. However, this was a reciprocal co-constructed relationship. The breaking fast during Ramadan strengthened their relationship. Shared cultural experience strengthened the relationship. This relaxed the participants to be more open to the trainers especially the female trainers. This will be discussed further in the section on results of changing AMTTs' attitudes, beliefs and approaches. Next, discussion regarding the impact of the sharing relationship extended to classroom best practices with students and colleagues.

#### *Building an inclusive empathetic relationship with students and colleagues*

Training is about forming a relationship (Boendermaker, 2003; Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007). They wanted to show how training is not just about knowledge but it is the personality and experiences of the trainer that connects with the students that make a good trainer (Boendermaker, 2003). At the beginning of the project the MMTTs 1 and 2 were unsure what to expect being Muslim but coming from a more multicultural and less orthodox educational context. The women MMTTs were aware that the male participants might create a barrier to their learning in the class based on the gender issue. Moreover, participants came from a lecturer-style approach educational culture. They were not used to an interactive teaching style. As a result, they decided to team teach in the sessions and not just have one lecturer while the other trainer waited. Therefore, the participants were surprised when the MMTTs would interject in the other Master Teacher Trainers presentation. MMTTs 1 and 2 displayed true co-teaching and modelled best practices. When queried why they allowed the other trainer to interrupt they stated "you don't own one session". In the feedback the participants (AMTTs) revealed in cohort 4 feedback 2011, how 'our teacher (MMTs) is very friendly with students (AMTTs) and at the end of the lesson asks the students (AMTTs) about the teaching and we give opinions'(adapted from Cohort 4 Feedback 2012: 7). As well, '...the behaviour of Malaysian Master Teacher Trainers (MMTTs) which were very open and friendly...Practicum was very good, because it increased our confidence' adapted from Cohort 4 Feedback 2012: 9). Additionally, the AMTTs stated that 'the relationship of the teachers (MMTTs) with themselves and with the head of department is very friendly and even like a family and there is mutual cooperation' (adapted from Cohort 4 Feedback 2012: 2). This is evidenced in their

actions in and outside of class. They began to joke with them. Overtime this slowly changed as they joked with them, smiled began to look in the eye.

Taken from the feedback after the practicum the Master Trainees discussed the change in their beliefs; 'One of the participants who went to Malaysia for the initial training.' Prior to the training, the AMTTs stated that 'he did not allow the students to explain things, but after return he had a different behaviour with students and wanted them to explain issues' (adapted from an interview with MTTs 1 February, 2013). For example, she continued 'if he talks about a mobile phone, he asks the students to explain it' (adapted from an interview with MMTTs 1 February, 2013). Other participants directly spoke to the changes that occurred in themselves. One of the AMTTs stated, 'Now I think that it is good to ask the students regarding the issues first and let them talk. If we listen to them they can be motivated to learn the issues better. So now the AMTTs try to motivate the Afghanistan students.' Others stated how initially they did not like the new approach but later '... realized that we should respect the ideas of the students and do not be violent with them' (adapted from Practicum Feedback Cohort 9, 2012: 4). Furthermore, one of the AMTTs discussed 'changes in methodologies of teaching and relationship with students are the big changes' (adapted from Practicum Feedback Cohort 4 2011: 3). These statements were later confirmed in interviews with lecturers (MMTTs) and participants (AMTTs). These new pedagogical approaches were occurring while at the same time the shared empathetic training relationship was being co-constructed. Thus, best practices might not have been readily accepted if the shared relationship had not existed. Later discussion of further evidence of the Master trainees' acceptance of these modelled practices will be discussed in the interview and feedback section. While these statements are not quantifiable most MMTTs involved in the practicum in Kabul confirmed changes in the participants' attitudes and actions (adapted from interviews with MMTTs 1, 2, and 3 March, 2013). In addition, this is triangulated with the practicum reports prepared by the Malaysian mentors. The next factor which emerged from the data analysis was the changes in attitudes towards the education of women.

#### *Inclusion of women in education*

'Girls had been forbidden to attend school throughout the Taliban regime. Even in the small northern part of Afghanistan where girls were still permitted to go to school and women were still permitted to teach, little or no investment had been made into schools or teacher development, as resources were channelled into fighting an internal conflict (Spink, 2005: 7).' One of the male AMTTs said 'I can't believe a female lecturer was teaching male students' (adapted from an interview with MMTT 2 March 2013). During the initial four weeks, women sat at the back and the men wouldn't mix. The men stated the women had to 'sit at the back' because they didn't like the women showing their back to the men. However, the MMTTs created mixed gender groups. Initially there were grumbings in their mother tongue about it. However the MMTTs emphasised the importance of 'sharing and learning from one another, regardless of the gender, to become effective master teacher trainers.' This sentiment was also reinforced by the other Malaysian trainers during their sessions. This reflective approach was indeed, crucial in the changes of their mind set. MMTTs 1 and 2 provided the opportunity for the female AMTTs to participate in discussions and express their thoughts and ideas. Culturally, for Afghanistan men, women should never lead, consequently the MMTTs had to study the AMTTs' body language as not everything the men said was translated. Assumptions were made about female trainers but as the MMTTs discussed it was just a lack of exposure and opportunity.

Their original perception of MMTT 2 was that she was not a Muslim because she did not cover her head. However, after co-constructing a shared relationship with her the AMTTs realised that MMTT 2 was a Muslim, like the rest of them. The MMTTs did not believe the segregation of women was an Islamic pedagogical approach but rather a cultural one. So, the MMTTs modelled reflective practices, multicultural practices and collegiality between men and women. This is in conjunction with going to Malaysian mosques and seeing women being able to pray there (forbidden in Afghanistan) where these experiences changed the AMTTs. The results of these changes, in practices and the shared relationship, were evident in the feedback, course evaluation questionnaire feedbacks and case study AMTTs interviews. When the Malaysian mentors met Cohort 1 AMTTs after almost 2 years, the male AMTTs allowed the female MMTTs to express their opinions freely, unlike when they first came to Malaysia. The male MMTTs listened intently and respectfully. This shows a huge change in the AMTTs' mind set. The male AMTTs did change their attitudes thus, mingle and work as a group of master teacher trainers. Acceptance, respect and tolerance were evident among the MTTs. One of the three female MMTTs was a single lady, and when they met again, she was found her to be more open-minded and confident where she shared a lot information during the reflection sessions of the workshop. Even her appearance had changed for the better where from wearing all black, to wearing more pastel coloured attire. More importantly, the male AMTTs changed their attitudes. An example of this was discussed by the AMTTs. One of the AMTTs who had never had much interest in or even thought about girls education until he went for training, stated that, '...When I saw how girls and women strive to learn and contribute to the development of Malaysian society I wanted my own sisters and daughters to have those opportunities'. These sentiments raised another factor particular to the Afghanistan context that of diversity and peace in a multicultural nation.

#### *Peaceful Multiculturalism/diversity*

Malaysian practises a co-educational and multicultural education, and this surprised the AMTTs. Despite being a diversified country, Malaysia is regarded as a peaceful country as she practises respect and tolerance which leads to freedom in exercising their religion, beliefs and culture. Afghanistan is presently a culture of fear due to post-war conflict rather than a culture of religion (Anderson and Kooji, 2007: 11; Spink, 2005: 7). However, in Malaysia they saw such freedom both from conflict and religion. Hence, the Afghanistan participants felt safe in Malaysia as they observed Malaysian women could go shopping alone, drive a car, mix with other ethnicities, make decisions in their choice of attire, and pray in the women section of the mosque, among other things. This is in contrast to the situation in Afghanistan where the place of women in Afghanistan is not of a religious condition but rather a culturally imposed customs based on over 40 years of war (Spink, 2005:5). On one occasion when MMTTs 1 and 3 accompanied the aMTTs from cohort 1 to one of the mosques in Shah Alam, Malaysia, one of the female participants wept after prayer. When MMTT 3 asked the reason, the AMTT stated 'I feel free here it is so quiet no noise (meaning explosions)'. She then said, 'in Afghanistan we are one people but a lot of fighting.' Malaysians assume Afghanistan people were more pious due to their history of great Islamic thinkers. Unfortunately, 40 years of war had ravished the soul of people. The AMTTs were surprised that in Malaysia, there are sections for females to perform prayers. In Afghanistan there is no section in the mosque for women to pray as women are expected to perform their prayer at home. This slight variation and

exposure by the MMTTs of how a similar religious culture can be so different than the fragile home context, changed their attitudes and approaches.

These changes were discussed in the case study interviews. MMTTs 3 and 4 saw a change in thinking. The AMTTs transformed from a closed group of trainers, based on the fear instilled during the war, to a more open one, towards other ways of teaching and experiences. Afghanistan is presently a culture of fear (Andersen and Kooji, 2007:11). However, after exposure to the Muslim practices in Malaysia, they changed. Exposure to a multicultural and peaceful co-existence facilitated changes in the way the AMTTs acted, behaved, and thought. As evident in the feedback several AMTTs stated 'it gave me the lesson of unity and patience. I saw an accident that both sides did not fight with each other and instead they hugged each other after the accident which was very amazing'(adapted from Cohort 5 Feedback 2011). Others reported that 'sometimes I am thinking why are Afghanistan people are not more like Malaysians. They are different people in the same physical environment.' Furthermore, one MTT said, 'in Malaysia there were three ethnic groups of people and are unique people, are very patient. It gave me the lesson of unity and patience' (adapted from a conversation with MMTT3 September, 2012). This results in AMTTs changing their approach in class to create a more inclusive educational environment. One reported, 'I now talk a lot about non-discrimination in the Teacher Training College as we have different ethnic groups' (adapted from Cohort 3 Feedback 2011). While these incidences are small, together they create a strong argument not just for modelling reflective best practices but in conjunction with an empathetic co-constructed shared relationship. Ultimately, a Master Teacher Trainer could model best practices. This does not equate to the trainee incorporating best practices. A more intimate relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding better opens teacher trainees from fragile educational contexts to receiving the pedagogical knowledge. This is based on equality and a co-constructed relationship rather than a power relationship.

#### *Altering Teaching beliefs, attitudes and approaches*

The feedback and observations discussed in the case study interviews revealed a wealth of changes in beliefs, attitudes and approaches to students and colleagues. After returning back from Malaysia one of the AMTTs discussed how he 'has established a friendly mutual relationship with other teachers. It means I have discussed with other teachers to ask from me if they don't know anything and share their ideas and thoughts with me.' (adapted from a conversation with Cohort 6 April 2012). This illustrates how attitudes to teacher identity and students changed, during the training sessions in Malaysia. The second area that changed was the AMTTs' approach to training. 'I was thinking that the only method that should be used in the class is the lecture while I was convinced after the training in Malaysia that I can use teaching aids' (adapted from Practicum Feedback 2012: 5). Another AMTT stated that they learnt from the MMTTs and now have changed their relationship with their teacher trainees back in Afghanistan. This AMTT stated '...a symbol of good trainer is MMTT 1. Her attitude, behaviour and personality had a good effect on my own personality. Now I am very close to my teacher trainees and my attitude has changed' (adapted from Cohort 4 Feedback 2011: 3). Finally, AMTTs discussed changes in not just their approaches and attitudes but interactions with students in class. 'I have become more patient. Before, I was very violent against my teacher trainees who asked difficult question or were impolite against me. But now not only I try to respond him/her nicely, but even if they insult me I don't get angry.' Another AMTT stated 'I

changed my style from a teacher-centred style to a student centre style as a result of the knowledge and skills I got from Malaysian teachers'(adapted from Practicum interviews April 2012: 5). Therefore, the feedback statements reiterated that it was not just classroom practices and teacher modelling but a shared socio-cultural context.

Another AMTT explicitly stated 'Due to similarities in Malaysian and Afghan cultures and traditions, I now use Malaysian examples in the class' (adapted from a conversation with Cohort 6, 2012). Another stated 'In Malaysia I saw the people who were hard working and now I am committed to be hard working and cut my spare time and instead do something.' This training project helped him learn patience and tolerance and develop better attitude. "I used to rely on the traditional methods based on lectures'. Others stated '*All the AMTTs learned these and I am honestly saying that they are now implementing whatever they learned there from you guys. If we look to the other hand (vice versa) you have been familiarized with Afghanistan people, the culture, custom and their attitude. You have been to Afghanistan so many times that gave you a lot of experience regarding training and learning process*' (adapted from translated email response January 2013, see Appendix 2). Separately these statements were anecdotal and lack causality however when triangulated with the other data and interviews this created a strong argument for the factor of empathetic co-constructed MMTT and AMMT relationship being an aspect of successful training in fragile contexts.

## Future Implications

To build an empathetic co-constructive relationship for educators from fragile contexts several factors must occur. Empathy comes from understanding students outside of the formal classroom. Inclusive education that allows for diversity can only occur when attitudes are altered through exposure, reflection, and positive modelling (Garmen, 2005:6). "Our assumption was that the promise of teaching literacy while shifting how men and women interact on a daily basis might enable a small-scale societal change in attitudes towards women's rights" (Andersen and Kooji, 2007: 4). However, there are other aspects needed when teaching students from marginalised, fragile contexts. Below are the four areas which require empathy so that a co-constructed relationship could occur.

- 1) *Sharing Relationship*
- 2) *Building an inclusive empathetic relationship with students*
- 3) *Inclusion of women in education*
- 4) *Peaceful Multiculturalism/diversity*

Often, as Spinks (2005:3) previously stated that there have been educational programmes which failed. It was not due to curriculum design, materials or best practices. Rather it was due to the intrinsic need for empathy and a shared relationship based on a true socio-cultural understanding. In most classrooms the issues inherent in inclusive education are based on socio-economic, gender and racial or ethnic factors (Jones and Fuller, 2003). However, the Afghanistan context, which unfortunately is not unique to many countries in the world, is a fragile context. This means the destruction, post-traumatic stress is embedded into their collective psyche. Fortunately, this case study of the master teacher trainer training programme conducted from 2009 till 2013, illustrates a new factor needed to facilitate students in these fragile contexts. Many studies conclude that teachers are key to the success of inclusive education, yet candidates are still leaving initial teacher education without the



skills, knowledge, or attitudes needed to work with all of their future students (Jones and Fuller, 2003: 14). Some have 'a heart for diversity instruction' but lack the knowledge and skills of how to go beyond scratching the surface with students (Edwards and Kuhlman, 2007:9).

Most articles rarely discuss the emotional or personal side of teaching as it is easier to assess and quantify best practices. However, the researchers strongly believe that empathy for the participants' socio-cultural home context as an important new social cultural factor, did influence the trainers' effectiveness in their training. This is because, it is this small part of the internal changes that influence both the trainers and the trainees' lives and how they connect to one another.

### **Appendix 1: Response One translated email**

Dear sis Nora, W Salam, happy heard from, I really miss you and the whole MAEPA family in Malaysia. (I) hope this piece finds you and your family happy and healthy. In regards to the question I have replied all of them only in one essay. "I have attended MAEPA from 2009 until the last cohort of MAEPA 3. The experience and learning which I have from MAEPA is marvellous. Working with Malaysian trainers especially with Madam (MMTT 1), Madam (MMTTs 2) and Madam (MMTTs 3) was a golden opportunity of me in my whole life so far. Relations and empathy of all of the trainers particularly of madam Nora really impressed me whether it was during the official hours or after or before that.

*Her good relation and empathy led to this issue to call her my sister. Every time I came to Malaysia as MAEPA interpreter, I never felt I am far away from my family. Even I had a larger family with included at least 30 sister, brothers and even a personality same as mom (Ustaza Qamariah) along with my other Afghan colleagues. Madam Nora is exceptional, it was due to her hard working and good relation that I really felt free to contact her anytime and anywhere I needed help to solve my problems. It was a good friendly and learning environment, so I really learned invaluable things from her professional and personal behaviour.*

May Allah bless her."

Regards,  
Your bro  
Mohammad Q. A.  
MAEPA interpreter

### **Appendix 2: Response Two translated email**

From: **Sha\*\*\* y\*\*\***

Date: 8 January 2014 12:49

Subject: Where there any special relationships created between you and the MAEPA trainers

Dear ustaza MMTTs 1, regarding your last question I would say that special relationship between MMTTs and MAEPA trainer meaning (You) created when the MMTTs were running out of money (per diem), their per diems were delayed with some reasons. They were about to protest, but you resolved that problem with a very nice manner. After that, AMTTs trusted and relied on you and whatever you said they

accepted that. The learning took place very well because of trust and reliability. When there is reliability between trainer and participants so definitely better learning takes place and it affects the learning context a lot.

Dear sis, throughout the training of MAEPA, the trainers, especially you were very friendly, punctual, kind, had a very nice attitude with the participants, you created conducive environment for learning during your training. *All the MMTTS learned these and I am honestly saying that they are now implementing whatever they learned there from you Guys.*

*If we look to the other hand (vice a versa) you have been familiarized with Afghanistan people, the culture, custom and their attitude. You have been to Afghanistan so many times that gave you a lot of experience regarding training and learning process.*

Sis I don't know whether I have answered your question or just beating around the bushes haaaaa

Your brother you\*\*\*\*\*

### Appendix 3

#### QUESTIONS FOR MMTTS at IPIKand IPIS

**1) Did you get to know the participants? How?**

*Yes. Self-introduction by each and every participant during taaruf session.*

**2) Did the women sit at the back at the beginning?**

*Neither they sat at the back nor the front seats but the middle.*

**3) Did the men's attitude towards women change from 1<sup>st</sup> cohort to last?**

*Yes*

**4) What was their reaction to female lecturers?**

*They can accept and gave full cooperation.*

**5) How did they react to Malaysian multicultural education?**

*Positive and participants intended to apply Malaysian experience*

**6) Did students ever meet your family?**

*No*

**7) How did the participants perceive you? (mother etc.)**

*As colleague*

**8) Did you learn from the participants?**



Yes

### 9) Did you try to connect materials to their life?

Yes

## REFERENCES

- Afghanistan MoE, (2005) Literacy and NFE Curriculum Framework report, Ministry of Education, Kabul.
- Andersen, S. and Kooij, C. (2007) Adult literacy education and human rights: a view from Afghanistan, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, vol. 5, no.3, pp. 315-331.
- Boendermaker, P.M., et al., (2003) Core Characteristics of the Competent General Practice Trainer, a Delphi Study, *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, vol.8, pp.111–116.
- Brodsky, A. E., Portnoy, G. A., Scheibler, J. E., Welsh, E. A., Talwar, G. and Carrillo, A. (2012), Beyond (the ABCs): Education, community, and feminism in Afghanistan, *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 40, pp.159–181.
- Central Statistics Office, Afghanistan Transitional Authority, and UNICEF (2003) Available: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html) [July, 2013].
- Dupree, L. (1980). *Afghanistan*, Princeton, NJ:Princeton University Press.
- Edwards, S. and Kuhlman, W. (2007) Culturally Responsive Teaching: Do We Walk Our Talk? *Multicultural Education*, July 2007, pp. 45-49.
- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2009) *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers*. Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.
- Garman, M. (2005) Six key factors for changing pre-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity. *Education Studies* vol. 38, no. 3, pp.275-286.
- Jones, T. and Fuller, M. (2003) *Teaching Hispanic children*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., and Lunenberg, M. (2005) Teaching teachers – Studies into the expertise of teacher educators: An introduction to this theme issue, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 107-115.
- Lederach, J., (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press.
- Miller, W., and Crabtree, B. (1999) Depth interviewing. In B. Crabtree, and W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research in primary care: Multiple strategies* (2nd Edition) (pp. 89-107). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Rogoff, B. (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Spink, J. (2004c) A study of attitudes in Afghan classrooms. Unpublished paper, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul.
- Spink, J., (2005) Education and politics in Afghanistan: the importance of an education system in peacebuilding and reconstruction, *Journal of Peace Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 195-207.
- UNESCO, (2004) *The Plurality of Literacy and Its Implications for Policies and Programmes*; Education Sector Position Paper.
- UNESCO, (2006) *EFA Global Monitoring Report, Literacy for Life Summary*, p. 29.
- Yin, R. K. (2003b). *Case study research: Design and methods* (third edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.