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**Report on Dialogue 3:**  
*Education for Development*

May 18, 2011, 6:30 - 9:00 PM  
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street

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**1: Overview**

On May 18th, 2011 the Engaging Diasporas in Development (EDD) held its third public dialogue. 114 participants attended the dialogue.

*Agenda*

The dialogue was entitled *Education for Development* and the agenda (see Appendix 1) covered three core themes:

- (1) What kind of education is needed for development,
- (2) How do educational projects create opportunities and choices, and
- (3) What is unique and inspiring about diaspora-led educational strategies for development?

*Media*

A series of 3 blogs and one narrative story were posted on EDD's new *Wordpress* site <http://engagingdiaspora.wordpress.com/> (see [Appendix 2](#) & [3](#)).

There were several members of the media present, including Kathleen Flaherty, who is recording all five sessions for the CBC Ideas series.

The event was a video recording of the event is available on the website – [http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/event\\_education\\_for\\_development\\_video.htm](http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/event_education_for_development_video.htm). In addition, there was a live Twitter feed - @SFU\_Diaspora

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#### *Summary of Proceedings*

The dialogue was opened by Shaheen Nanji who welcomed the participants on behalf of the traditional First Nations territories. She gave an overview of the project and provided a working definition of the diaspora for the conversation: people who live in Metro Vancouver who retain a sense of identity with a remote location. In many cases, in addition to feeling an attachment to another home, diasporas also feel a sense of attachment and belonging to Canada. This duality – or embodiment of diversity -- that diaspora possess is what gives them the empathy, cultural agility, and commitment to bring to bear on international development.

Dr. Joanna Ashworth presented the evening's agenda along with some working assumptions for the evening: education is an act of freedom and that education is a dialogue between people, based on the facts of their lives and should not and must not be a banking system that makes deposits of knowledge into others, whereas, development, simply put, is the process of change, from one state to another.

She went on to describe the central nature of education within development—that it empowers people and strengthens nations and is essential to the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As Joanna described, two of the eight MDGs pertain to education—namely, universal primary completion and gender parity in primary and secondary schooling. Moreover, education—especially girls' education—has a direct and proven impact on the goals related to child and reproductive health and environmental sustainability. Finally, she explained that education also promotes economic growth, national productivity and innovation, as well as values of democracy and social cohesion.

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#### *What kind of education is needed for development?*

Next, Joanna introduced her co-moderator for the evening, Umeeda Switlo of [CUSO-VSO](#). Turning the attention to the evening's storytellers, Umeeda introduced Randolph-Dalton Hyman, a PhD candidate within the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University whose roots in education are firmly planted in arts education, particularly dance.

A Jamaican-Canadian, Randolph is working to reinvigorate traditional African dance education in communities throughout Jamaica. "It was through dance that I discovered myself," he explained, "it took me to a world of spirituality, of politics, of discovery and to a sense of who I was and where I was going."

Nasra Mire was introduced next, a youth leader whose family journeyed from Somali to the Middle East before coming to Canada. Nasra spoke of how high school art classes helped her to find focus and drive. "It was in high school that I discovered a fascination for art," she said, "it helped me find a direction and find my place." Along with her sister Hawa, Nasra transformed her inspiration into a non-profit organization called [Point Youth Media](#). Designed to empower youth in Vancouver through art and media training, the organization also helps Nasra and Hawa retain a connection to their birth region as all of the training programs they develop in Vancouver are brought to East Africa.



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Youth in sport leader, James Kamau was up next and explained how his organization [Youth Initiative Canada](#) has been working to teach valuable life skills like self-discipline, teamwork and commitment to hard work to the African youth they aim to serve through sport. Born in Nairobi, Kenya to a community fraught with drugs, violence and poverty, James spoke of how his years playing Elite basketball gave him the opportunity to mentor youth through sport. Through his organization, he partners Canadian and African youth to create sustainable change.

Umeeda introduced Cecil and Ruth Hershler next, the founders of Education without Borders. “We started working with a local school when we were privileged white university students in South Africa in 1971,” Cecil recounted, “We didn’t forget about this school when we immigrated to Canada,” he said. Having rebuilt Fezeka High school, which is located in the township of Gugulethu, South Africa, the Hershlers have also worked to introduce art programs, engage in visioning with the teachers and students and are now turning their focus to improving academics.

“We tested the kids in grade eight in basic addition and subtraction,” Cecil explained. “No kid got more than 27 out of 100 in grade eight, they all got 0 out of 100 for multiplication. We brought a Canadian professor who had worked with aboriginal students in Canada, as well as in India and he brought with him five workbooks.” Cecil went on to say that this year, for the first time, four of the alumni from that grade eight class will have the chance to go on to university. He also emphasized the need for providing opportunities for students to engage in trades training at the high school level so that they can gain employable skills. Speaking to the reality of a 60% unemployment rate for young people under the age of 30, the Hershlers stressed that they are working to empower students to be able to start their own businesses and create jobs when they finish high school.



Joselyne Niyizigama John was introduced next. Joselyne is a native of Burundi who came to study at Simon Fraser University four years ago through the World University Service of Canada’s Student Refugee Program. “Education creates life choices and opportunities,” she said, “especially for individuals who are in impossible situations.” Retaining a very strong connection to the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi where she lived with her family for six years, Joselyne started the non-profit [Dzaleka Project](#) in order to raise funds and bring awareness to issues that refugees face. “Education means freedom for me to inspire others with my knowledge and power,” she said, “Part of what we do with the Dzaleka Project is to bring the stories of momentum [from the refugee camps] to the Canadian public.”

Picking up on this thread of seemingly impossible situations, Umeeda introduced Omar Kaywan from the non-profit [Beacon of Hope](#) that works to create opportunities for children in Afghanistan. “Education is the enabler,” Omar explained, “Our programs

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focus on street children who are tasked with being the breadwinners of their families through selling whatever they can find.” Through the support of Beacon of Hope, these children are able to go to school full-time and provide their families with nutritional food, in addition to taking part in extracurricular tutoring in math and English.



At this point, participants were asked to comment on anything they had heard that had surprised, moved or inspired them.

Directing her question towards Ruth and Cecil of Education without Borders, one audience member asked what was being done to ensure the organization does not take over the role of the local government, as well as how they are working

to make the project sustainable.

“We operate as an after school program,” Cecil explained, “so that we don’t interfere with the regular school system.” He further added that all their programs are voluntary and that no project is carried forth without the input and visioning of the school teachers and principals.

Another question was directed towards Beacon of Hope: “When I heard about your work, I thought ‘how come they pick *these* schools or *these* families in particular?’” Ferooz Sekandarpoor with Beacon of Hope responded that the families selected have been referred by the communities. “We hear their stories and interview them to make sure their stories are authentic,” she explained, “We provide school supplies to students who might otherwise not have the supplies to go to school.”

At this point, a community worker preparing to travel to Afghanistan for work made the following comment:

“It seems to me that when we build on our passions and the privilege that we have—whether it’s education or through being born in Canada or able to come to Canada—that that’s what is most sustainable and will give us the energy and the drive to help the world. What feeds us feeds the world.”

To this, Randolph-Dalton Hyman joined the conversation once again to speak about passion and the need to act and work from our passions. “Without passion, we are not really living,” he said.

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*Project Coordinator Mignon Alphonso with storyteller  
and PAC member Amos Kambere*

### ***What is unique and inspiring about diaspora-led educational strategies for development?***

Next Umeeda introduced Amos Kambere and Dr. Charles Quist-Adade to describe actions that diasporic leaders are taking here in Metro Vancouver.

First up was Amos Kambere, founder of the [Umoja Operation Compassion Society](#), which works to support new immigrants and refugees from Africa. “Education is key,” Amos said, “and I want to emphasize that we need to look at it from the perspective of the developing world. When you come to a developed country, you get access to opportunities that people back home do not have. You get your diaspora connecting to their local village and this impact expands and helps to develop the whole nation.”

Ghanaian-born Dr. Charles Quist-Adade was next. A professor at Kwantlen University, Charles’ research interests and community work are entrenched in explorations of Globalization. A self-proclaimed ‘transnational,’ he described his life in the global village. “Show by hands, which of you are chocolate lovers? There’s a good chance that the chocolate you consumed recently contained coco beans that I planted.” Describing his days as a boy planting coco beans on his aunt’s farm, Charles spoke about a scholarship for cocoa farmers that allowed him to complete his education all the way from grade school through to his post-graduate studies. “My biography was not written in isolation,” he pointed out, “I grew up with you. And now here I am, teaching the future leaders of my new country.”

Once again turning to the wider audience for their input, Joanna posed the question of *what is needed to empower the diaspora to innovate and grow our potential in the area of education and development?*

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Comments ranged from an expression of the need to connect more with the private sector to the need for more political will and sustainable partnerships with established organizations.

Audience member Charles Pearson, who works in the field of settlement, spoke about the need for development to start with children. He gave the example of a group of southern Sudanese from Metro Vancouver who returned to Sudan to help the situation there. “They speak the language, they know the culture,” he explained, “Guide us, give us training and we can go back and make change for those people.”

Another audience member, born in Afghanistan, spoke of going to school in a German-sponsored school and the power dynamics and fear that emerged when Russia invaded Afghanistan and targeted students who had gone to that school.

Finally, Nasra Mire spoke about the need for hands-on mentorship—for young people to go back to their home communities. “We need to recognize the work they are doing,” she said, “that it is valuable and can inspire other young people to do the same.”



*Members of Point Youth Media*

Dr. Farah Shroff was tasked with summing up the evening’s remarks. She acknowledged the amazing experience that had been shared by hearing from people who have lived lives that many people have only read about. “Each of our lived experiences informs us,” she said, “and we can take them to inform our government.”

Posing the question ‘does individual empowerment contribute to society as a whole?’ Farah talked about the “tense line” that is being walked. “Education holds this great promise,” she said, “but it’s not there yet.”

She also spoke of the power that is held in universities where people are able to stand up and speak out against unequal power structures. In concluding, she spoke of the need to learn from our heads, but also our hearts and the desire that many expressed to transform

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education by blending conventional academic skills with traditional indigenous knowledge.

Following a warm round of acknowledgements and thanks by Joanna and Shaheen, Randolph-Dalton jumped up once again to dance all of the participants around and out of the auditorium to the thumping of a familiar reggae beat.



#### ***Key Ideas that were learned:***

- ❖ Education is diverse—there is no one way to educate; education is more than just science, mathematics, reading and writing, art is also a component.
- ❖ Education is far greater than formal education; a holistic education must blend conventional academics with indigenous knowledge and values such as “seeing us all as one.”
- ❖ Culture plays a large role in development and in education—we must work to understand the needs and desires of individuals in order to provide an education that is relevant and meaningful.
- ❖ Education as freedom versus the privatization of education.
- ❖ The importance of recognizing and celebrating the by-products of education: self-esteem and confidence, belief in one’s self and a sense of capability in being able to reach one’s goals.
- ❖ The power of personal narrative in evoking change.
- ❖ The need to hear from students and teachers here in Canada on what works for educating members of the diaspora.

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#### ***Ideas for further exploration:***

- ❖ The tension that exists between those who remain in the home country and those who have left—how to build stronger connections and understanding.
- ❖ How the perspective and policies of governments relates to education for development.
- ❖ How education is changing and evolving.
- ❖ How educational initiatives can be sustained for the long-term.
- ❖ The connections between health and education.
- ❖ The liberating and oppressing forces of education.
- ❖ The need to empower the diaspora and encourage critical thinking towards educational systems in Canada and in the Global South; to have a more thoughtful consideration of what educational systems are being exported.
- ❖ Engaging the diaspora to invoke creativity in evolving educational institutions.

**SFU** SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
THINKING OF THE WORLD

# ENGAGING DIASPORA in development

Tapping Our Trans-local Potential for Change  
[www.sfu.ca/diasporas](http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas)

## Dialogue Program Education for Development

Wednesday, May 18, 2011 6:30 - 9:00 PM  
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street

### Project Co-Directors

**Joanna Ashworth**  
Centre for Sustainable Community Development, SFU

**Shaheen Nanji**  
International Development, SFU

### Dialogue Planning Committee:

**Shams Alibhai**  
BC Centre for International Cooperation

**Danielle Arcand**  
Office of Francophone & Francophile Affairs, SFU

**James Busumtwi-Sam**  
Department of Political Science, SFU

**Nadia Chaney**  
Poet, Artist, Educator

**Kina Chenard**  
Department of Political Science, SFU

**James Kamau**  
Youth Initiative Canada

**Joe Knockaert**  
Former Director of CIDA, Pacific Region

**Umeeda Switto**  
CUSO-VSO

Project Coordinator: Mignon Alphonso  
Research Assistant: Chloë Straw  
Social Media Coordinator: **Jinny To**  
Program Assistant: Kris Nordgren  
Craft Table Volunteers:  
Lucy Cameron & Oona Eager



### Dialogue Purpose

This dialogue is part of an ongoing public engagement series that examines the unique role of the diaspora resident in Vancouver who are committed financially and personally to development activities in the global south. Diaspora-driven development efforts have a powerful impact in the global south that reverberates here in Metro Vancouver. While often informal or grassroots, these initiatives demonstrate the benefits and unique strengths of the diaspora – cultural awareness of communities of origin and residence, fluency working in dual cultures, awareness of local issues and concerns (trans-local), and long-term personal commitment to projects and communities.

Tonight's dialogue will showcase the many ways Metro Vancouver-based diaspora-led efforts support education as an engine for change and development by creating choices for individuals and their communities in the Global South.

### The dialogue will explore three central questions:

- **What** kind of education is needed for development?
- **How** do educational projects create opportunities and choices?
- **What** is unique and promising about diaspora-led strategies for trans-local education for development?

Funding support provided by:

 Canadian International Development Agency / Agence canadienne de développement international **Canada**  
This project is undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).  
Ce projet est réalisé avec l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada accordé par l'entremise de l'Agence canadienne de développement international (ACDI).

Project partners:

  

with special thanks to Bruce and Lis Welch Community Fund.

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### Program

6:30 pm Welcome

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*Joanna Ashworth & Shaheen Nanji*, Co-Directors, Engaging Diaspora in Development Project  
*Umeeda Swtlo*, CUSO-VSO, Dialogue Co-Moderator

### Storytelling: What kind of education is needed for development?

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*Randolph-Dalton Hyman*, Arts Education for Social Change (Jamaica)  
*Nasra Mire*, Youth Point Media (Uganda)

### Dialogue (In threes & plenary)

Share a story about your own educational experiences:  
*What does education for development mean to you?*  
*In what way have you developed through education?*

### How are education projects creating choices and opportunities?

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*James Kamau*, Youth Initiative Canada (Kenya)  
*Ruth & Cedl Hershler*, Education without Borders (South Africa)  
*Joselyne John*, The Dzaleka Project (south East Africa)  
*Omar Kaywan*, Beacon of Hope for Afghan Children Society (Afghanistan)

### Dialogue:

*What are the opportunities of these and other approaches?*  
*What are the limitations? What should the priorities in education be?*  
*What can be learned from these and other examples?*

### What is unique and promising about the diaspora role in education?

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*Amos Kambere*, Umoja Operation Compassion Society (Uganda)  
*Charles Quist-Adade*, Kwantlen University (Ghana)

### Dialogue:

*What is needed to empower the diaspora to innovate and grow our potential in the area of education and development?*

### Making Sense of the Stories and Approaches

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*Farah Shroff*, Dialogue Weaver

### Thanks and Acknowledgements

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### Participatory Closing

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*Randolph-Dalton Hyman*

9:00 pm Adjourn

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Reception to follow in atrium

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### Speakers

**JOANNA ASHWORTH, EdD** is Associate Director for the Bolivia Community Economic Development project and advises community organizations throughout BC on multicultural dialogue planning. She is a senior research associate at the Centre for Sustainable Community Development. Joanna is also co-director of the Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change project.

**CECIL HERSHLER, MD** immigrated to Canada in 1974. Maintaining his link to South Africa, he helped bring Education without Borders into realization in 2002. In addition to his work with EwB, Cecil is a physician, storyteller, actor and board member of one other non-profit organization.

**RUTH HERSHLER** immigrated to Canada in 1974. Maintaining her link to South Africa, she helped bring Education without Borders into realization in 2002. In addition to her work with EwB, Ruth is a senior statistical analyst manager at the University of British Columbia doing research with the Human Early Learning Project (HELP).

**RANDOLPH-DALTON HYMAN** was born in the city of Kingston, Jamaica. He earned his B.F.A. degree in Developmental Drama in Education from Concordia University and his M.A. from McGill University in Educational Philosophy, specialization in cross-cultural dance education and social change. He is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Arts Education at Simon Fraser University. His research interests include international development, moral philosophy, ethics and aesthetics, and Jamaican dance.

**JOSELYNE JOHN** is a Burundian native and a former recipient of the World University Service of Canada's (WUSC) Student Refugee Sponsorship in 2007. She was sponsored by Simon Fraser University. Having been a refugee since she was 6, this opportunity for an education and her desire to make a difference has inspired the Dzaleka Project, a student-run organization with the primary objective to illuminate the situation of refugees and to change the lives of refugees in Dzaleka refugee camp in south East Africa.

**JAMES KAMAU** was born in Nairobi, Kenya to a community fraught with drugs, violence and poverty. After earning a diploma in community development from the Kenya School of Social Work, he fearlessly entered the world of activism and has spent the last nine years performing youth work and facilitating community development. His years playing Elite basketball in Kenya gave him the opportunity to mentor youth through sport, this experience combined with his passion for community work eventually led him to found Youth Initiative Canada in 2008, a multi-dimensional organization that partners Canadian and African youth to create sustainable change. James is also a life skills coach, an event planner and a social entrepreneur.

**AMOS KAMBERE** is the Founder of Umoja Operation Compassion Society, a non-governmental organization serving African immigrants and other nationalities in the Lower Mainland. He is the recipient of the United Way of the Lower Mainland VanDusen Community Service Award for 2008, as well as the Leader Newspaper's Mentorship Award for 2009. He is the author of a new book titled Celebrating Literacy in the Rwenzori Region.

**OMAR KAYWAN** is the Vice President for the Beacon of Hope for Afghan Children Society, a non-profit, non-political, charitable organization, created in 2006. It is operated by supporters of Afghan children in British Columbia, whose goal is to improve the future of children in Afghanistan by providing them with meaningful opportunities to realize their potential as future leaders. Omar immigrated to Canada in 2000 and has been a volunteer member of the society since 2008. After witnessing and experiencing the struggles of Afghan children in Afghanistan first hand, the society is a personal cause. Omar currently works in the mobile marketing and advertising industry. [www.beaconofhopesociety.org](http://www.beaconofhopesociety.org)

**NASRA MIRE** emigrated from Somalia to Vancouver with her sister, Hawa, while the two were in their early teens. Over the past four years, they have operated educational programs for young people that focus on expression and storytelling through digital media. Through the establishment of Point Youth Media, they have worked to engage young people in Vancouver and in East Africa. They plan to expand their programs into Tanzania, Kenya and hopefully one day into Somalia as well.

**SHAHEEN NANJI** is Director of International Development and Faculty Engagement at SFU. She co-directs Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change and oversees CIDA projects in China and Kenya. Shaheen is working on a Master of Arts in International Studies, with a focus on diasporic influences on development. Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Shaheen moved to Vancouver in 1989 and has firsthand understanding of the ways diaspora communities seek to give back to their birth nations.

**FARAH SHROFF, PhD** is a public health professional with over 20 years of experience in various countries including Thailand, India, Mexico, Costa Rica, Nigeria and others. Her major avenues of inquiry include social justice approaches to health and holistic mind-body practices. She has a keen interest in international health and is committed to creating a healthier world for everyone. Currently she is the first Director of Research at the Massage Therapists' Association of British Columbia. She was a founding member of the Ontario Midwifery Education Program and taught courses on public health, health promotion, embracing client diversity and more. She also teaches yoga, dance, self-defense and fun movement activities.

**CHARLES QUIST-ADADE, PhD** has a curiosity and passion for research that is not limited by international borders. Charles' projects include an exploration of African-Russian communities in post-communist Russia and research into teenage sexual and reproductive behaviour in eastern Ghana, Africa. He also teaches a web conferencing course on Globalization, which links his Canadian students with their peers in Ghana. His international research and teaching experience are an inspiration for students and faculty alike.

**UMEEDA UMEDALY SWITLO** works with CUSO-VSO as a public engagement officer for Western Canada and Western United States. She is a marine biologist, business entrepreneur, and community activist focused on HIV and AIDS and the environment. She came to the NGO sector from the entertainment sector and is a communications specialist. Umeeda is an Ismaili Muslim who came to Canada from Uganda when she was a teenager as a refugee in 1973.

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#### Photography

NARRATIVE 360 is a non-profit organization advancing the role of the documentary arts in civil society and supporting their development in the areas of photography, audio and literary journalism. The organization is committed to intellectual discourse regarding media representation of societies, cultures and communities, and supports work in the documentary arts as a way of understanding the social and cultural fabric of humanity. Narrative 360's last project was Kites, Guns and Dreams, a documentary photojournalism exhibition on Afghanistan that was exhibited in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.

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#### Suggestions?

##### *Seeking stories of Trans-Local leaders*

Are you or someone you know doing exemplary development work in the Global South while based in the Metro Vancouver area?

Please email us at [diasporas-info@sfu.ca](mailto:diasporas-info@sfu.ca)

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#### Next dialogue in the series:

##### *Human Security and Peacebuilding*

Wednesday, July 13, 2011 6:30 – 9:00 PM  
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

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**A is for Apple: Maintaining Relevance and Solidarity in Education**  
by: Nadia Chaney



*This post was written by Nadia Chaney, a Dialogue Associate at the Simon Fraser University Wosk Centre for Dialogue and a social artist who empowers community voice through radical dialogue.*

Education is a meaning-making venture. The content of a curriculum is always important, and, it is always housed in its own context. When context changes, meaning changes. So what happens to the meaning making operation of education when it crosses borders? I am interested in the complex relationships and nuanced interrogations of the question of identity that arise in particular as education moves across borders in the bodies of diasporic people. Of both historical and current importance, this question of identity in education confronts diasporic people here and around the planet. My own interest in this question comes from being a first generation Canadian with multi-faceted Indian roots and working as an educator in Bangalore, India. My arts-based empowerment work with PYEGlobal.org has been brewing on the Pacific Northwest Coast for 9 years. In 2009, when PYE partnered with Dream a Dream (.org) in Bangalore, I had an opportunity to explore some of these questions for myself.

The English word “education” comes from a Latin root, *ducere*, which means to draw out, or to lead forward. From a certain perspective, education can seem like

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a necessity, almost as important as food, water or family. It can offer access to work, security, and even personal fulfillment. In relation to this perspective and to what education offers, the context of leading and following is important to note: it raises certain questions about relevance and responsibility.

Images and metaphors *come with* and are embedded in curriculum and methodologies that are “exported” across borders. It is thus important to think about the assumptions that accompany these exported curriculums and how they affect the relevance and effectiveness of educational work in development.

“A is for Apple”

This is the way that a contemporary of mine learned the English alphabet as a child in Nigeria. There were no apples native to the region of his birth. What is the effect of this image when students cannot have a sensorial experience of the apple and have no cultural context for this ordinary metaphor in their process of language acquisition? The reality of this educational practice is dislocated, and the simplicity of the phrase (and thereby its function) is distorted. Through my own reflection, I have attempted to uncover the assumptions present in such educational moments and to uncover the potential opportunities for improvement that this kind of reflection can offer the educational practices of diasporic people working in the development sector.

These assumptions may appear in numerous forms. They may be in the content of the curriculum itself, as in A is for apple; they may be carried in the bearing and body of the teacher; they may exist in the location, building and furniture; or they may exist structurally in the changing methodologies that are used to teach (for example, a Canadian educator today may be repulsed by rote-learning, whereas an Asian educator may find it highly effective).

What makes education relevant? What makes it empowering? Empowering education in the development sector is self-reflexive, self-critical, and always returns to the lived realities of the communities. This is the only way to maintain its direction and momentum, while simultaneously offering opportunities for collaborative new directions and creativities. Otherwise, even the best intention runs the risk of dislocating power and identity and creating a sense that traditional or local knowledge is less worthy than an imported ‘otherness’.

Education can happen in formal settings or in the most informal, sometimes even accidental, moments. Wherever education happens, relationships are involved, in various combinations of student, teacher, state, community, and family. Education happens for many different reasons, and with different intended

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outcomes. Whether someone is being educated into a specific way of thinking, in order to leverage that education for power, or in order to empower themselves and their communities, there is always some kind of transfer of meaningful information. The manner in which this transfer takes place is at the core of education, under the auspices of what we call development.



Some of the questions we must ask when we are talking about change-making or empowering education are:

**How is the history of the place and its inhabitants (human and non-human) taken into account by educational practices?** For example with English-language instruction, people's choices are broadened in terms of access to employment, travel and higher education. However, traditional knowledge and indigenous languages can also be lost in this process. How can these risks be brought to the forefront of curriculum decisions in order to mitigate cultural disintegration? How can power differentials (i.e., between student's communities and state-sanctioned institutions) be acknowledged and transformed, if not balanced?

**Does education attempt to make people "more like us"?** Cross-border education carries presumptions with it that can be hegemonic and overwhelmingly value-laden. When do teachers and educators actually learn from their students? In the case of cross-border education, are educational practices *returning* to the country of residence? If not, what assumptions and practices prevent this direction of learning and knowledge transfer? How can an

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exchange of educational practices (traditional, grassroots, trade-oriented, as well as formal) be emphasized, so that the learning is multilateral?

In a truly educational relationship, the learning is mutual: all parties involved bring their meaning-making apparatus and collaboration occurs. Understanding grows between people as cultures interact and intersect. Sadly, many educational relationships refuse or fail to honour this co-learning, and education is tainted with status-based values and the hierarchies of permission they engender. Too often education is condescending and uni-directional, rather than empowering and visionary. In an empowering scenario, neither party would be presumed to have less, or be less worthy than the other; neither would have the “answers” and both would be open to learning and transforming as the encounter of education happens. In a cross-border interaction the learning of each other’s languages is one way to facilitate this.



When diasporic people *return* to their country of origin after years or generations, some of these questions are nuanced in interesting ways.

I recall my Hindi lessons at a rural campsite at Ramanagar, in Bangalore, Karnataka. A young man and myself had a mutual desire. I wanted to learn the language of my ancestors’, to reconnect myself to a past that had been out of reach. He wanted to learn the “mother” tongue that had been implanted in me, English. We held keys to each other’s empowerment. Our interaction happened

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in a large group, and was entertaining for hours. There was a German volunteer at the camp. Her interaction with learning Hindi was very different.

I am hungry for a language that is somehow mine-and-not-mine—that lingers on my tongue but resists expression, the language of grandmothers I never really knew. For her, the language learning is technical, functional. There is a different quality when educating in a place that has been imagined as home versus a place that is foreign or exotic.

The lessons between myself and the young man at the camp were hilarious, as both he and I were vulnerable in our struggle to learn in front of the group and equalized in the goals and contexts that created that vulnerability. Teasing, jokes, laughter, helping and alliance washed over the field, but something else was there, too, more subtle: the intimacy between student and teacher flowed between us like a kind of music, and was freely given and taken.

This is the gift that diasporic, especially first generation emigrant educators, like myself, can bring. The need to learn is as strong as the desire to teach. Some power, in this sense, is rebalanced. It is a humbling and stunning experience to return to the place you are from, where the stories of your grandmothers live, but where you have no place, no access, and no language. The migrant stories come back with you, and the place rises up to meet them—there are intense negotiations in this moment. In other visits, with family or as a tourist, I did not receive the kind of inception that I required in order to make sense of this tumult of sensation, these questions of identity that have raged in me since birth. But in the world of education the negotiation of relationship is the matter at hand.

Diasporic people may have more embodied access to the historic realities of the local cultures. But, there is always the danger that we essentialize the diasporic educator and assume that sensitivity, which may also not be the case. The key is to look for this impetus in diasporic development workers and encourage it. The stories of diasporic people are stories extracted from the past and are often disconnected from the lived reality of people living in their country of origin. Similarly, the stories of the country of residence may include hegemonic agendas that are unconscious to the diasporic person.

The question of identity negotiation is of paramount importance for all educators. This question should not be left out when thinking of diasporic peoples in development.

Change- or choice-making education requires that the choice of what and how to learn remain ultimately in the hands of the people being educated. What role do

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diasporic development workers have to play in ensuring that this relationship-based educational work is possible for education in development? Can diasporic development workers spearhead a change towards more mutual educational practices in the sector in general? The conversation must continue.

*Nadia Chaney is a social artist empowering community voice through radical dialogue. Much of her work focuses on issues of identity, diversity, participatory process and non-violence. She works as a poet, emcee, musician, arts empowerment facilitator and educator, social justice activist, text editor and writing coach. She is also a dialogue associate at the SFU Centre for Dialogue.*

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### Joselyne's Story

By Chloë Straw, with Joselyne Niyizigama John



*This post was written by Chloë Straw, Project Research Assistant with additional content from Joselyne Niyizigama John, President and Founder of the Dzaleka Project.*

What does education mean to you? For Joselyne Niyizigama John, a fourth year Health Sciences student at Simon Fraser University, education means one essential thing: freedom. A native of Burundi in East Central Africa, Joselyne was forced to flee from her home at the same age that most children enter the first grade. She and her family of twelve would spend the next fourteen years in refugee camps, first in Tanzania and then Malawi, while a civil war raged in Burundi.

“When you are in the camps, all you can think about is how you can’t go anywhere”, she explains. Despite working hard to complete her primary and secondary schooling while in the refugee camps, Joselyne grew up knowing that her prospects for further education were limited if she were to remain in the camp.

“Refugees living in the camps have three options”, she says, “they can live in the camp and forget about exploring other parts of the country; they can go back to

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their country of origin; or they can be sponsored by a community or a country that is willing to commit to making a difference in their lives.”



For Joselyne, the third option became her reality. Successful completion of secondary school, in which she earned exceptional grades, and a year of competitive exams and interviews culminated in a two-year scholarship to Simon Fraser University provided by the [World University Service of Canada](#). Taking full advantage of the opportunity for higher education, Joselyne completed a certificate in leadership, which she quickly put to work in forming the [Dzaleka Project Club](#). Named after the camp that she lived in for six years in Malawi, the Dzaleka project is a student group that aims to raise funds and bring awareness to refugee issues.

“I love to do actions that inspire others to do more, dream more and become more. I am grateful for the ability to inspire with knowledge and empower through opportunities that education facilitates”, she says. “I have a strong desire to make a positive difference in the lives of others.”

One can be sure that while Joselyne is busy speaking about the lack of rights for people living in refugee camps or explaining how quickly a family’s monthly food ration runs out, concern for her own family back in the Dzaleka camp remains front of mind. At a time when the Malawian government is considering a forced repatriation of all refugees, members of the camp desperately seek a way to support their own survival. “When the monthly rations of food run out too early, it becomes a struggle to survive until the next distribution”, she says, “my father is

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not even allowed to work. I received terrifying news recently that he was arrested because he was found in town trying to search for a job.”

Speaking to the impossible task of balancing her concern for her family with the pressing demands of her studies, work and community leadership role, Joselyne touches on the conundrum that many members of the diaspora experience. “It is a struggle for identity”, as she describes it, “but education is reality changing.”

Thinking back to only a few years ago, when her days were spent lugging heavy buckets of water and questioning her future, Joselyne describes how the last two years have been a transformative experience for her. “The World University Service of Canada has given me a chance for an education and privilege to regain my freedom and discover opportunities to empower others”, she says. “The challenge remains, however, of bridging the gap between my past and present to determine my true identity. I am building a connection to my country”, she says, “I hope to return one day to meet it.”

*To find out more about the Dzaleka Project, please see the [Facebook Page](#), the [official website](#), or the [Facebook Group](#)*

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**Public Dialogue: Educational Strategies for Development Through the Eyes of the Diaspora**

**By Chloë Straw**



*This post was written by Chloë Straw, Project Research Assistant.*

This Wednesday, SFU’s public engagement series “Engaging Diaspora in Development” presents its latest public dialogue. This event is called “Education for Development”, and the program is shaping up to be a lively evening, showcasing the many ways diaspora-led efforts support education as an engine for change and development in the Global South.

Hearing from members of the diaspora—that is people and communities that have retained an attachment to their homeland or region through family history or

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culture—will serve to explore how local efforts here in Metro Vancouver are supporting local efforts in the Global South.

As Shaheen Nanji, SFU’s project co-director puts it, “The people leading these educational initiatives are Canadians – perhaps first, second or third generation—who are living and working here in Metro Vancouver. They are using their knowledge of the “local” scene worlds away and are driven by their passion to help improve the lives of others in the Global South.”

Using the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#) as a starting point, participants will explore and debate how education empowers people and strengthens nations. We will hear the stories of individuals like Omar Kayman, who are working tirelessly to deliver opportunities for a brighter future for the children of Afghanistan. James Kamau will tell us how his years playing elite basketball in Kenya inspired him to found [Youth Initiative Canada](#) and reach out to young people in communities fraught with drugs, violence and poverty. [Joselyne John](#) will speak about the realities of young people living in refugee camps and what education means to them.

We’ll hear from Jamaican-born Ph.D. candidate and dancer Randolph-Dalton Hyman who is using traditional African dance as an educational and cultural tool for social change and explore grassroots initiatives for strengthening student success in mathematics in South Africa. These and other storytellers are sure to engage and inspire, leading the way to a thoughtful discussion of current educational initiatives and what Canadians can do to support them.

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As Dr. Joanna Ashworth, the project's other co-director says, "It's time that Metro Vancouver residents woke up to the incredible force for good that is the diaspora who are committing time, energy and creativity to support solutions to economic and social struggles in the Global South. Individually their stories are inspiring and collectively they add up to a formidable force for positive change in the world. Canadians of all backgrounds and origins needs to recognize and support these heroic efforts to help." What questions do you have? What stories would you like to share about the transformative power of education?

**Wednesday, May 18th from 6:30 to 9:00pm at SFU's Wosk Centre for Dialogue.**

*Funding support provided by the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and presented by Simon Fraser University, with community partners CUSO-VSO and the BC Council for International Education.*

## Appendix 3: Stories

### To Raise A Child You Need A Whole World

My story started after the fall of the Taliban when my husband decided to go back to our homeland for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Due to the Russian, my family and I were forced to flee from our country in 1982 and, after spending a year as refugees, we finally immigrated to Canada.



I owe my racial and cultural identity to Afghanistan, as well as a value that is deeply embedded in my heart and soul: *never live owing someone*. I have always wanted to clear my conscience by giving something back to Afghanistan, but didn't know what would be beneficial until fairly recently. Sitting with my circle of friends and our usual conversations about Afghanistan and its long lasting problems, it just clicked in my mind: we need to start with young children. We need to implant love, care and kindness in their hearts.

Before leaving to Afghanistan, my husband asked me "What would you like me to bring you back from Afghanistan?" I had been waiting for this moment all week. I said, "Well, what I want from you will not cost you money, but time and effort". He said, "All right tell me what it is" and I responded, "Can you please find out if there is still an early childhood centre in Kabul?"

A month of waiting passed by, and then I got my present. It was a small clip of children at Kabul University, the only pre-school in Kabul at that time.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0XthzEzVQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0XthzEzVQ)

After watching this clip, I became astonished, silent, and drowned in my thoughts. I was amazed by the message these children were sending all the way to the other side of the world: "We hate war."

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The nursery rhyme they sing is very unusual for their age. We forget that the circumstances and environment that surround a child play a significant role in shaping their thoughts and beliefs.

The words of this song penetrated deep down in my heart and soul and inspired me towards the work I continue to do today. These children look like any children—playful and happy, but in the mist of happiness they convey their powerful message “We Hate War.”

Do they want too much from the world? Do we adults give them any other choices, but war? These are the questions that dominate the activities of my life. They lead my dreams, my mind and my writings. I will never stop thinking about them. I will do anything to let the world know about these forgotten children who only ask for their rights to peace.

Our world would be a wonderful place if every penny that is spent on bullets, guns and tanks went to food, homes, book and pens instead. To build the world is much cheaper than to destroy it. Illiteracy is the main cause of all devastations in Afghanistan. Have you ever thought which is more expensive—books or bullets?

*Shahnaz Qayumi has a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education and Psychology and has taught extensively at universities and colleges in Kabul, Afghanistan and throughout British Columbia. A mentor to the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada and the producer of Caravan TV, a local Afghan language channel on OMNI Television, she is also a board member of Partnership Afghanistan Canada, a non-governmental organization. In addition to developing an ECE program for Family Empowerment of low-income families in North Delta, B.C., Shahnaz has also initiated a project in partnership with Kabul University to develop and deliver Early Childhood Education curriculum. The project engages experts from Partnership Afghanistan Canada, the University of BC and Kwantlen University College and aims to train more than 100,000 teachers and assistants in Afghanistan.*