

Institution: Lancaster University
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Transformations in African Writing: Stimulating Creativity and Enabling Transcultural Exchange
1. Summary of the impact <p>Creative Writing research projects funded by the British Council have created a transformative educational environment for African writers, developing life-changing training programmes. Designed and delivered by the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University, and led by Dr (now Professor) Graham Mort, these projects pioneered eMentoring and new online teaching pedagogies, engaging directly with over 300 African writers across 9 African countries, whilst creating outreach activity through a literary festival that engaged writers from 18 African countries and the UK.</p> <p>Three phases of cumulative practice-led research have helped to nurture a new generation of African writers with each project leading into the next:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crossing Borders (2001-06) – connecting writers across 9 African nations, involving 300 writers linked to 36 UK mentors; 2. Radiophonics (2007-09) – creating exploratory forms of public debate and fiction through radio in Africa and reaching over 5 million listeners; 3. FEMRITE (2011-) developing and stimulating female writing in Uganda through training programmes.
2. Underpinning research <p>The underpinning research for these projects began in Uganda in 2001. Mort's six-week British Council writing residency at Makerere University (Kampala) in 2001 involved direct contact with Ugandan writers and led to his report identifying a sense of isolation amongst writers, a lack of training opportunities, limited awareness of contemporary literatures in English and few literary resources or opportunities for publication. The concept of <i>Crossing Borders</i> as a means of connecting, supporting and stimulating the creativity of such writers emerged from this active, participatory research on the ground. It was then activated in 9 sub-Saharan African countries, engaging over 300 writers and 36 UK mentors in a writing skills development programme. Writers gained tuition in IT in local British Council centres then, through live workshops and online writing tutorials, were able to progress to higher levels of study.</p> <p>A major literary festival in 2005 spurred the transfer of this methodology to training in radio writing (2007-9) and then to further writing and editorial training projects (2012-). Thus, insights from a reflexive cycle based on action-research principles led to the creation of a transformative educational environment with impact upon a new generation of African writers. This process is ongoing and continues to inform new developments today.</p> <p>Drawing on his research findings from the projects, Mort's essay 'Crossing Borders and Beyond' in <i>Moving Worlds</i> (2006), explored grassroots literary development, political commitment, situated learning and transcultural aspects of virtual exchange. A second article, 'The Reflexive Muse', (2006), winner of the international prize for excellence in the peer-reviewed journal, <i>The International Journal of the Arts in Society</i>, developed ideas underpinning electronic exchange and interventions in the emergent text, exploring such issues as the placement of mentors and participants within a metafictional pedagogic context – 'a semiotic web' – whilst exploring the dynamics of virtual exchange.</p> <p>In 2005, colloquia led by Mort at the <i>Beyond Borders</i> literature festival in Kampala were recorded and collated into a British Council report detailing the developmental needs of emergent writers in sub-Saharan Africa. This document highlighted the need for the interactions of literature with</p>

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debates in developing societies and the educational needs of writers themselves. It played a significant role in the design of a major new project for radio, *Radiophonics*, that led to exploratory public debates – a new form of situated research in Africa – via the medium of FM radio, featuring newly commissioned and exploratory short fiction.

Research into African radio broadcasting was undertaken in 2006 by Mort and Dr. Kate Horsley to facilitate these new projects. This included understanding historical contexts and making visits to radio stations in Kampala in 2006 to discuss the new and rapid expansion of commercial FM in Africa and the potential role of literature in developing democratic debate.

Mort's paper 'Under The Sun' was published in the peer-reviewed journal *The International Journal of the Arts in Society* in 2010, drawing directly on research with African writers, exploring key interactions of the project and positioning them in relation to literary criticism in the West, showing how African writers viewed their work as instrumental in societal change whilst developing notions of creative writing research as situated and open-ended in the domain of public broadcasting.

In 2012 Mort ran diagnostic workshops in Kampala as part of the *Reading Uganda Festival*, following a new eMentoring project, *Lancaster/Uganda Friends*, linking postgraduate mentors to emergent Ugandan writers. In 2012/13 he interviewed writers, editors, publishers, and staff at National Curriculum Council in Uganda, exploring the presence of Ugandan texts and forms of English usage in education. This fieldwork directly informed the design of a new editorial training and publishing project, *Sticking to My Footsteps* that led to the setting up of an in-house editorial group at FEMRITE and the publication of an eBook.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Funding: *Crossing Borders* and *Radiophonics* were funded by the British Council in London and their Directorates throughout sub-Saharan Africa. These funds accruing directly to Lancaster through annual awards – project grants and buyout - totalled £285,000. The later projects with Femrite in Uganda were funded by Lancaster University Friends Fund and the Faculty Research Fund.

Outputs

1. Mort, Graham, 'Under the Sun: Creative Writing, Broadcast Media and Debates for Social Change in Africa', *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, 2010, 5 (5000 words). Research quality indicated by publication in peer reviewed journal.
<http://ija.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.85/prod.559>
2. Mort, Graham, 'The Reflexive Muse', peer-reviewed journal, *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, Vol. 1, 2006, <http://www.arts-journal.com> (5,500 words). Research quality indicated by status as winner of the journal's International Award for Excellence in the Arts.
3. Mort, Graham, 'Crossing Borders and Beyond', *Moving Worlds*, international journal of transcultural writing and criticism, Vol. 6 (1), June 2006, pp 96-109. Minimum 2* quality indicated by publication in peer reviewed journal.
4. The website of the Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research features extensive archives of *Crossing Borders*, *Radiophonics*, the *Beyond Borders* festival, *Crossing Borders Magazine*, blogs of research visits, and two projects with Femrite Uganda, including profiles of writers and an eBook of their work. www.transculturalwriting.com
5. *Under the Sun*, Uganda, 2008 eight x 30-minute broadcasts, featuring new stories and studio debate of social and political issues Sanyu FM; *Under the Sun*, Nigeria, 2009 – 12 x 30-minute broadcasts, Inspiration FM, Raypower FM, Radio Nigeria. Archived at:
<http://www.transculturalwriting.com/?proj=velit-excepteur>
6. *Crossing Borders Magazine*, 2007-8, an online journal edited by Becky Clarke and containing original poetry and fiction with essays by publishing industry professionals. 12 issues of the magazine archived at:

<http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/magazine/index.html>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The 3 Phases: *Crossing Borders* (2001-6); *Radiophonics* (2007-9); *FEMRITE* projects (2011-).

Reach: *Crossing Borders* extended from Uganda to Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The *Beyond Borders* literature festival in Kampala (2005) featured 48 delegates from 18 African countries and 12 UK writers; 31 *Beyond Borders* delegates were interviewed on BBC World Service *Network Africa*, whose broadcasts have a pan-African audience.

Radiophonics (2006-2009) engaged with teachers, writers and school students in Kampala and 4 major Nigerian cities. *Under the Sun*, broadcast in Uganda and Nigeria, reached audiences of over 5 million, using fictional scenarios to engage the public in live studio discussion with writers and experts on social issues.

Recent projects with FEMRITE in Kampala reached over 30 writer participants. *Writing Uganda Festival* (2011) reached new audiences in Kampala. The *Lancaster/Uganda Friends* project (2011) and *Sticking to My Footsteps* project (2012) created website features and an eBook of new writings. These projects, their creative outputs and resources are featured on the very extensive Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research website at Lancaster, which receives over 900,000 hits each year from 60+ countries, showing considerable engagement with audiences beyond academia that is both ongoing and increasing annually.

Significance: Sequentially-linked projects in Africa have brought about cultural enrichment for writers there. They have enabled intensive writing and IT training opportunities, allowed access to publication and broadcast, whilst enhancing quality of life through recognition, increased personal and professional confidence, improved educational attainment, and engagement with contemporary social debates through literature. The projects gave a voice to many emergent writers from impoverished countries with very poor literature infrastructures (little educational provision, few bookshops, libraries or publishers) and continue to do so. New audiences were created and a sense of isolation and lack of opportunity have been replaced by a realisation of achievement, possibility, community and connection.

African beneficiaries included trainee writers (300+); writers published in *Crossing Borders Magazine* (72); writers published as Mallory book titles (4); delegates invited to *Beyond Borders* festival (60); participating school students (150) and teachers (48); international readers; researchers interacting with our websites, radio audiences for the *Under the Sun* and BBC World Service *Network Africa* broadcasts. Writers involved in the projects won prestigious prizes such as *Commonwealth Short Story Prize* 2003 (Jackee Batanda), the *Macmillan Prize for Literature* 2005 (Glaydah Namukasa), the *Caine Prize* 2007 (Monica Arak de Nyeko) and many more have published books and in journals. These are unprecedented, groundbreaking achievements by inexperienced writers taking to a world stage. The significance of the research for African writers is illustrated by the comments of a *Crossing Borders* participant, Glaydah Namukasa: 'Crossing borders has nurtured a new generation of African writers and in so doing created a new face to contemporary African literature. The cross-cultural interaction between African writers and professional mentors/writers from UK has been key in advancing participants' creative writing that is continuing to impact the international literary scene.'

40 **UK mentors** worked on the projects and were engaged in education and cultural exchange that enriched their own writing and understanding. All visited Africa to run workshops; all were trained in online mentoring. As mentor coordinator Sara Maitland stated, the projects benefitted the UK participants by 'expanding their experience of transcultural writing and a particular pedagogy for Creative Writing'.

The projects led to further training provision with African writers and agencies, informed by the original projects and targeting key development needs in the field of writing, editing and publishing.

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These have engaged individuals – developing performance, publication, writing and editing skills – and empowered the commercial and developmental agencies they belong to, such as Flint Media Productions in Nigeria and FEMRITE in Uganda as Chidi Ukwu, producer of *Under the Sun*, Nigeria attests: ‘We and our media production business grew immensely from the experience of Radiophonics in Nigeria; our application of literary process as thermostat – not just thermometer – of social and cultural realities, has been that sharper. . . Since Radiophonics and the “Under the Sun” series, we have had more healthy interaction with UK funding and development partners.’ At times the projects directly met the training needs of the participants: ‘It was therefore fortunate that your 2012 workshop focused on Editing skills which was already in our strategic plan. Three of the participants are now part of the editorial team for the FEMRITE e-Journal. Also, one of the participants is a member of the FEMRITE Editorial Board. Your trainings have therefore contributed not just to the members of the organisation but to institutional capacity building’ (Hilda Twongeirwe, FEMRITE Director).

The projects extended and significantly extended the activities of the British Council in Africa, leading to a new scale of engagement with writers and interacting with societal change through an innovative synthesis of education, colloquia, performance, publishing and broadcasting. Their success is illustrated by the comments of Philip Goodwin, British Council Director for East and West Africa:

‘Beyond Borders [literary festival] ... was probably one of the largest contemporary writing events to happen in Africa in this generation. We believe that these projects (*Crossing Borders* and *Radiophonics*) remain unique in their approaches to engaging with contemporary writing in Africa; as such they have contributed positively to changing perceptions about the UK and to developing writing talent’.

Ongoing Significance: The projects funded by the British Council had significant impact at the time they were commissioned and left a legacy of achievement and continuity. A 2012 survey with a random 15% (approximate) sample of participants from *Crossing Borders*, *Radiophonics* and the *Femrite* projects showed that: on average, 88% recorded enhanced professional development, 92% enhanced personal confidence and achievement, 93% enhanced sense of cultural exchange and understanding, 99% reported enhanced creative writing skills, 80% felt their public profile as a writer had been raised, whilst 80% had gained significant access to publishing. From the projects that took place from 2001-2009, 92% of the participants surveyed reported that the projects continued to be a significant influence upon their lives and work. One illustration of the ongoing legacy of the research is the comment from the Zimbabwean novelist Chris Mlalazi, whose novel about the genocidal Gukurahundi killings of the 1980s was the subject of a feature in *The Guardian* in summer 2013 [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/16/zimbabwe-running-with-mother-robert-mugabe>] that ‘I am just fresh out of the 2013 Iowa International Writing Program where I had the opportunity to work on what is going to become my fourth book, and it all started with Crossing Borders!’

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Director of Literature, Literature Department, British Council
2. Crossing Borders Project Officer, British Council
3. British Council, Regional Director, East and West Africa
4. Project participants and mentors featured in Crossing Borders and Radiophonics Writers Gallery:
<http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/writers/index.html>
5. Testimony of Beyond Borders participants BBC World Service interviews:
<http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/about/beyondborders/interviews.html>
6. Leading participant and prizewinning writer in Crossing Borders
7. Femrite Women Writers Association, Kampala
8. Feedback, testimonials and statistics gathered from stages of the original projects and Lancaster University surveys carried out in 2011 and 2012.