ELP Seminar Series Spring 2021
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Perceptions and experiences of learning in school, home and neighbourhood spaces and implications for pedagogy in urban Tanzanian primary schools

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Rhona Brown is a Doctoral Researcher in the School of Education, working in collaboration with the Sustainable, Healthy, Learning Cities project at the University of Glasgow. Her PhD research explores perceptions and experiences of learning in school, home and neighbourhood spaces and the implications for pedagogy in and around two urban Tanzanian primary schools.

She has worked in education, as a teacher, teacher educator, programme manager and researcher, initially in Europe and then in Tanzania and Sri Lanka. Prior to starting her doctoral studies, she was the Head of Education Programmes for the British Council Nepal.

Rapid urbanisation and increased access to education present unique challenges for pupils and teachers in urban primary schools in Tanzania. The widely recognised issue of large class sizes, combined with common depictions of teacher-directed pedagogies have resulted in the default characterisation of Tanzanian primary children as a passive, homogeneous mass.

This presentation is based on my wider doctoral study investigating pupils’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences of school, home and neighbourhood learning spaces and exploring the implications of these for pedagogy. The study aims to increase the visibility of children in accounts of schooling and learning as well as allowing space for them to be seen as whole people, with commitment, responsibilities, ambition and curiosity, who learn, develop and contribute at home and in their communities as well as in the classroom.

In this study, pedagogy is seen as both ideas and practice according to Robin Alexander’s conceptualisation. His assertion that “a culture does not stop at the school gate” acts as a prompt to explore pupils’ experiences across home and school spaces. To do this, I apply a spatial lens, drawing on Doreen Massey’s spatio-temporal approach which sees space as socially produced and relational.

The study uses multiple methods with children participants including drawings and maps, photo-elicitation and home-school walking interviews as well as teacher semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. A hybrid inductive-deductive approach was taken to thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of key themes or trajectories which produce home, neighbourhood and school spaces, and that need to be negotiated by pupils and teachers in those places.

In particular, I focus on ‘trajectories of togetherness’, where togetherness is a cultural phenomenon shaping home, school and neighbourhood spaces. I will present the different ways that togetherness and its facets are perceived and experienced in and out of school by children and adults, and what the implications are for the places it co-produces and the learning that takes place or could take place there. We will see that though “a culture does not stop at the school gate” (Alexander, 2000, p. 29-30), it also does not enter fixed and unchanged.