

# THE GLOCAL CLASSROOM

SHARING THE COMDEV EXPERIENCE

Transforming Education Through Technological Innovation

Stellenbosch Seboka 25–26 March 2014



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

The Glocal Classroom is a collaboration between the universities of Malmö, Sweden, Flinders, Australia, Guelph, Canada, and Stellenbosch, South Africa.

The aim of the project is to bridge the existing gap between web-based learning, often understood as distance learning, and conventional forms of education on campus, by exploring innovative ways to combine the two. This will be achieved through a world series of seminars hosted by the participating universities.

The first seminar took place 25–26 March 2014, and was arranged by Stellenbosch University. With a diverse programme, highlighting many of the challenges universities are faced with, it served as an excellent starting point for the project.

In this document you will find interviews and reflections from the seminar. Our hope is that this material will serve as a useful reference at the end of the project.

## “If We Walk Together We will Walk Further”

**Antoinette van der Merwe, Senior Director for Teaching and Learning Enhancement, and Helmi Dreijer, Senior Director for Information Technology, both at Stellenbosch University, worked hard to put together the first out of four seminars to be realized in the The Glocal Classroom project.**

*How has it been going so far?*

**Helmi:** “We are really pleased! We were not sure whether all the technologies would work, and if the common theme would be successfully integrated. But yes, we are extremely pleased with the diversity in the presentations, from all levels of the university.”

**Antoinette:** “I agree with Helmi, I think on various levels we are very relieved with the programme. You always run the risk of people repeating the same over and over. For me what’s encouraging is that the conversation moved into pedagogy and how do we change the teaching and learning paradigms. Technology isn’t the only focus. We had different levels of discussions, from our high level keynotes, to practical case studies focussing on what could be realized in the practical learning and teaching for change.”

*What do you think is the biggest challenge in web-based learning today?*

**Helmi:** “I don’t think the challenges are singular. It’s a multi-faceted challenge that involves various levels. From an infra-structural point of view, there must be confidence that the technology platforms are stable and available; otherwise the lecturers will not adapt it and use it. There is also the time challenges; they know what they should do and how to do it, but how can we provide the necessary resources for them to develop the curriculum that fits with the environment? And then there is the funding and connectivity requirement for it. How do you provide students in an African or South African environment with bandwidth sufficiency?”

*Is broadband and Internet access an issue for you?*

**Helmi:** “Absolutely.”

**Antoinette:** “Not between universities, as you saw yesterday. Between universities we have a wonderful ten-gigabit per second broadband. Not in between the once in Africa, but between the once in South Africa. It’s going outside that network that remains a challenge. And off course as we heard yesterday, going that last mile – going to somebody’s home.”





**Helmi:** “And to a certain extent the South African rand is relatively weak, so that means that the technology and textbooks that we buy are very expensive relative to the currencies. And if you look at the participating rates in South Africa of how many students are actively participating in higher education, it’s a very low percentage. We need to use this technology to make it affordable for the country to get more people into higher education. Improve the access, improve the relevance of the student training, and insure that the quality and output of the curriculum meets the expectations.”

**Antoinette:** “And I think one of the challenges, as we mentioned, is changing the teaching and learning paradigm. Changing the teaching paradigms of lectures. Because if that’s the way you have been taught and that’s the way you have been teaching for 10-15 years it’s quite difficult to integrate that in your thinking.”

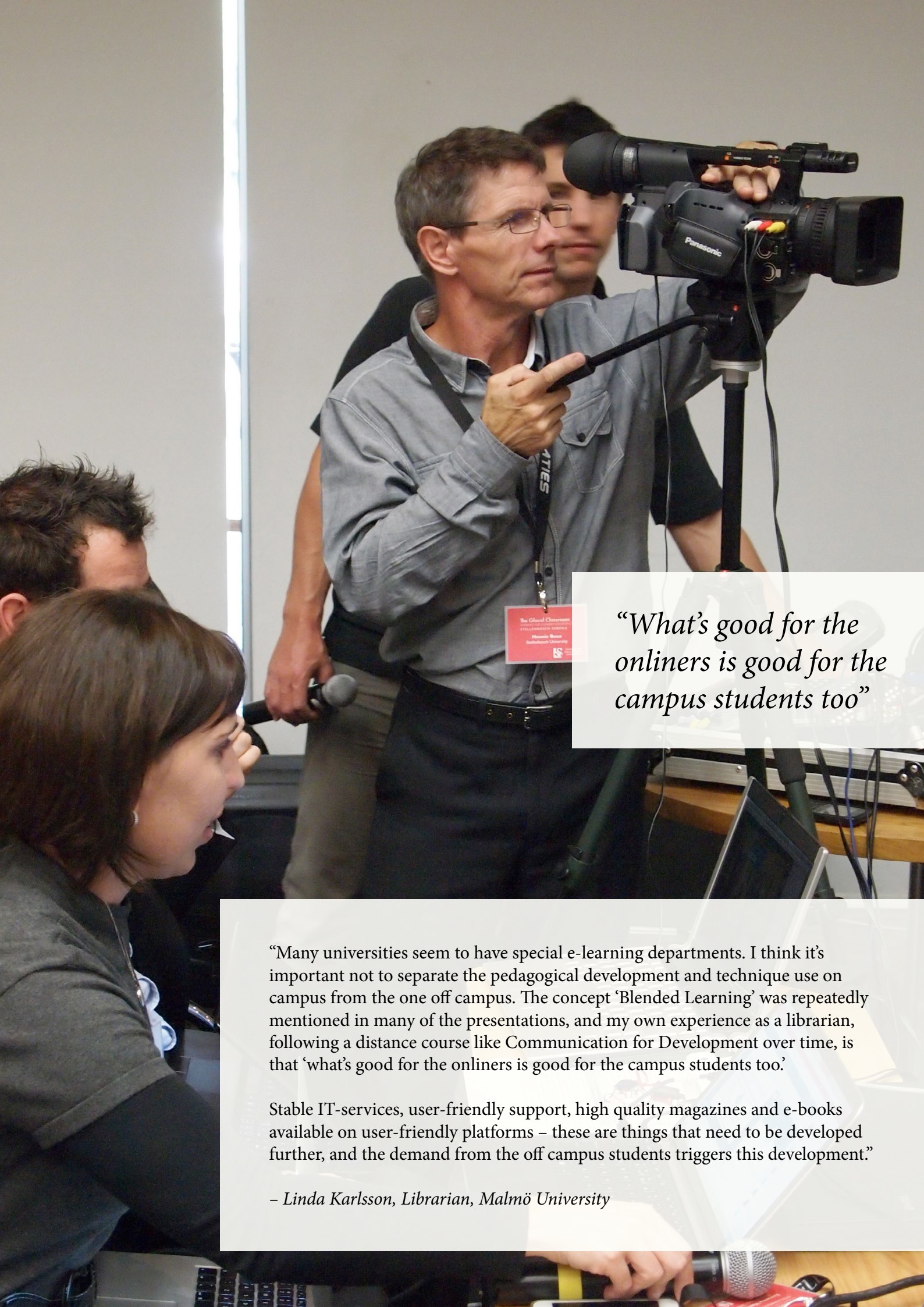
*What do you hope for in this project?*

**Antoinette:** “I think it’s an absolutely wonderful learning experience, on a variety of levels, firstly we can get students on these four continents to share experiences with each other within

the circle of the glocal classroom, and we can share our local South African knowledge with Flinders, Guelph and Malmö. I think for the students it’s an absolutely wonderful opportunity. And for the lecturers that will be involved it will also be an opportunity. For us behind the scenes, supporting people, it’s also a learning experience. We learn on different levels together with our colleagues.”

**Helmi:** “Not all institutions will learn the same aspects. I think we will learn different aspects from Malmö, as opposed to Malmö learning from us. It’s not one common theme of learning. We will learn and explore. We have taken this decision to walk down this road together, and as Antoinette mentioned, if we walk together we will walk further. I think that is the theme. Walking together.”





The Global Classroom  
INTELLIGENCE SERIES  
Hanna Åker  
Malmö University

*“What’s good for the  
onliners is good for the  
campus students too”*

“Many universities seem to have special e-learning departments. I think it’s important not to separate the pedagogical development and technique use on campus from the one off campus. The concept ‘Blended Learning’ was repeatedly mentioned in many of the presentations, and my own experience as a librarian, following a distance course like Communication for Development over time, is that ‘what’s good for the onliners is good for the campus students too.’

Stable IT-services, user-friendly support, high quality magazines and e-books available on user-friendly platforms – these are things that need to be developed further, and the demand from the off campus students triggers this development.”

– Linda Karlsson, Librarian, Malmö University





## The Power of Online Learning

More people should be able to enjoy the power of online learning. Especially those who already lag behind in access to sources for knowledge. But connectivity in for instance rural Africa is still a problem. These were some of the conclusions drawn at the Stellenbosch Seboka, which a couple of students from the master's programme in Communication for Development at Malmö University were able to participate in, me being one of them.

### The Privilege of Internet Access

Being physical at a geographically local location, but in touch with the whole world at the same time, that is at its essence truly glocal. To us, in developed countries like Sweden, access to the Internet wherever and whenever we want is what we expect. Also for our advanced university studies. But the concept is not given to everyone in the world. And online studies would mean even more to resource-limited students in rural Africa. "The more you have access to this the better you will do," Deidre Baartman, a young law student from Stellenbosch University commented during the two-day conference.

### Industry Presence Calls for Critical Reflection

Stellenbosch University, at least on the surface, seem to be resource strong. But as we understand, funding from public sources is not given in South Africa. Therefore the university has invited private finance partners. This was also clear during the conference, where multinational companies such as Google and Microsoft had a high presence, talking about their latest technology and how it would "save" Africa. Surely some visionary solutions: placing air balloons over Africa to increase connectivity could be interesting for the future. But a lot of the company content was commercial and calls for critical reflection in the university context.

### Physical Interaction also Important

I also had the chance to talk about my own experiences with online learning, explaining how I believe modern technology and social media makes cross-boarder communication finally possible for real. I would, however, like to conclude with this comment, picked up from the audience: "We can't learn everything from Internet. As social creatures we need physical interaction too."

– *Ulrica Hotopp, Student at the Communication for Development Master's Programme, Malmö University*





## Heard at the Conference

*“Today’s students will go to YouTube to find better explanations than teachers or parents can give”*

*“Communication is a process. It has to be owned by people. Not about bringing out information as fast as possible”*



## “I’m not Interested in Fighting a Platform War!”

**Mikael Rundberg is Adjunct and Interaction Designer at the Master’s Programme in Communication for Development at Malmö University. He has more than ten years experience of mediating the virtual classroom. Here he shares some reflections on the Stellenbosch Seboka, and future challenges in the field.**

*Did you enjoy the conference?*

“I was very impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm all speakers showed, teachers as well as representatives from the industry. It was great to see, although I hope that it doesn’t stop there. It would be very interesting to see collaborations between these parties around the new technique needs; a deepened discussion on how you can open up existing standards, for example.”

*Where there anything special you caught interest in?*

“I am myself very interested in the use of blogs, and I was inspired by the presentations by Mathew Smorenburg and Michael Rowe. They presented two good examples of student blogs implemented from the bottom and up. These blogs were successful thanks to the initiators ability to develop their own support functions. Mathew’s definition of the ‘admin a’ effect was also quite striking. With today’s quickly changing IT environment, we can’t be limited by inflexible systems. We need to work towards transparency and openness with the surrounding world if we want to engage students.”

*What do you think is the biggest challenge in web-based learning today?*

“I think we need to think more about mediating content. Web-streaming shouldn’t just be about transferring information, we need to think of content as expressing engagement. I want to see more qualitative work, teachers taking the role as producers and expressing their pedagogy in new ways. This requires access to multiple camera environments and userfriendly video-mixers, for example.

*Could you tell us a little more about what “mediating” means for you?*

“It’s about describing the physical room and the dialogue between people in pictures. I try to think of web-streaming as TV production where you use various forms to get your message across. And in this process I also think it’s important to encourage the person involved in the content to take on the role as producer and handle the camera. This is one of the challenges we are facing at Malmö University today. We are trying to build up an organisation that can enable more teachers to produce video material in the future.”

*How important is it to use the correct platforms or web-streaming services?*

“I’m not interested in fighting a “platform war.” Rather than discussing platforms, I’m interested in discussions on a design level. Today you can, more or less, multistream to several platforms simultaneously. I’m looking forward to discussing different takes on this in the project!”







Heard at the Conference

*“Communication is not an end but a means”*

*“Space of the teacher becomes the space of the learners”*

*“It’s not about technology, its about the organisation and the people behind it”*

## “Dear Administrators: Please Talk to the Teachers!”

The Seboka event at Stellenbosch was quite interesting and provided me with interesting food for thought for a researcher who is a relatively new professional in the field of ICT4D and global education.

### Dear Administrators, Please talk to the Teachers (and Vice Versa!)

Most participants of the event were not researchers or involved in classroom teaching. Administrators from student or IT services in the broadest sense and university managers dominated the discussions. This may explain to some extent that the discussion focused on teaching and training up to a point where it sounded as if educating students is the only business universities do these days. When one senior administrator told the story of how he visits academic staff who are not active on the university’s learning system at their desks, he made it sound as if he is waking up some lazy academics who fell asleep at their desks. It would have been interesting to learn more about incentive systems instead and how universities balance the ever-increasing demand on excellence in research, publication, teaching and service. I was wondering whether universities are trying out schemes along the lines of ‘Instead of two articles in top journals you can also submit two teaching evaluations in the top 10 percentage of evaluations’. If you want research grants, top publications, engagement with the outside world with consultancies or public speaking, be more honest about the time left for engaging with students-especially outside classroom teaching or marking.

### Engaging with Global Companies

Three major, global companies participated in the conference. They came to the stage with short, fast-paced presentations with YouTube videos including suggestive emotional music and they presented their latest gadgets, glasses and watches that can even take pictures. As they ‘care deeply about education’ these companies are ready to help universities. But how can you (or maybe you should not?) keep

some critical distance or opt out of mainstream systems, go open source or adopt low-tech, low-bandwidth options? It is easier said than done and it is easier said by academics with their shiny machines in their hands than done by cash-strapped, busy IT departments that need to keep an eye on university-wide larger systems. But it is still a bit scary to think how these companies already have a big foot in the emerging African education market door and are more than ready to cater to those who can afford their services-long- or short-term. It would be great to discuss these issues further and explore the nuances and grey areas.

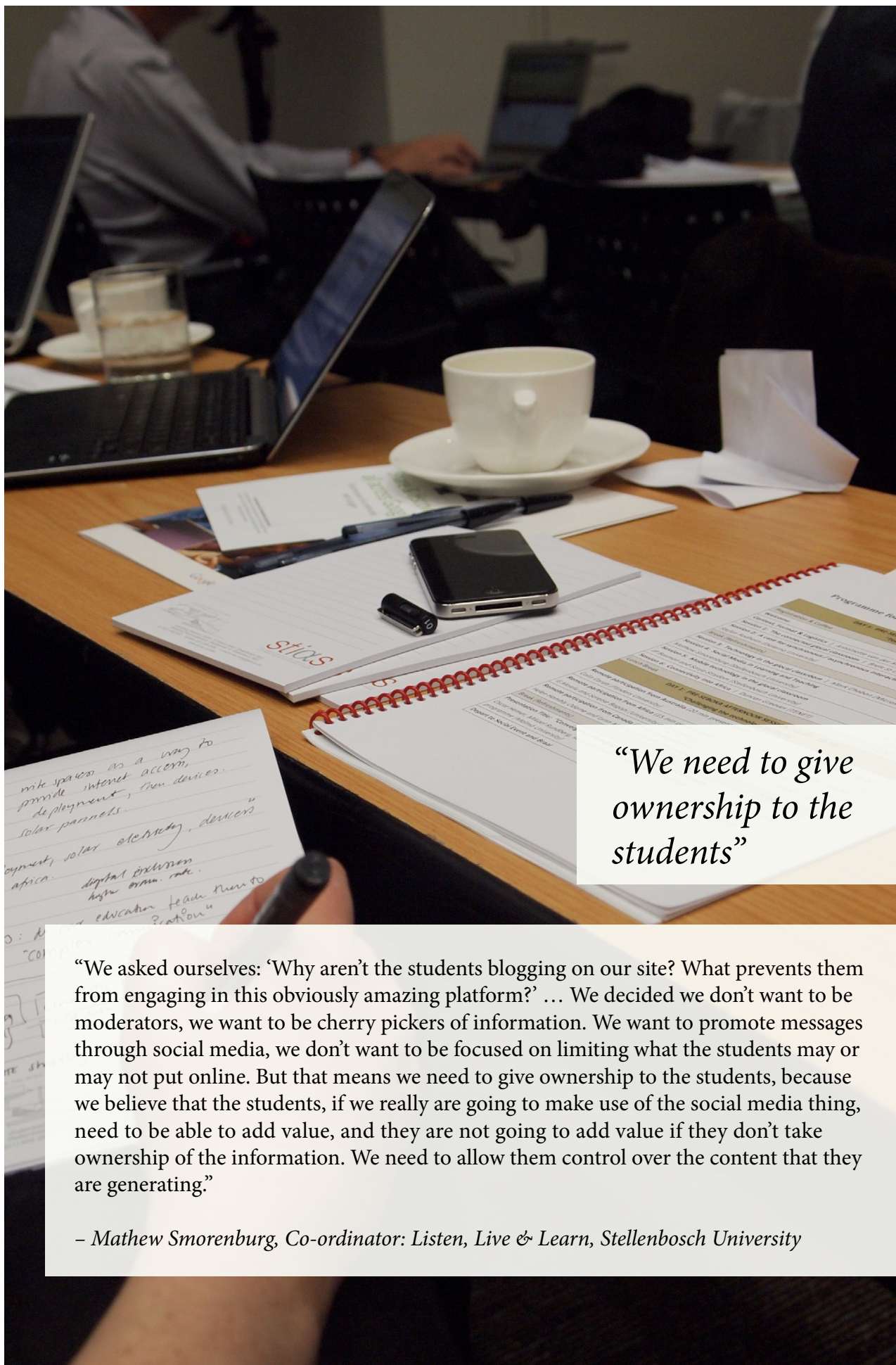
### Designing Interaction Beyond Learning Platforms and Inflexible Systems

Linked to the tech discussions above, the conference also provided some insights into the challenges of making a glocal classroom a meaningful digital and virtual experience. Again, there is an argument for a university-wide learning platform, for using systems that already work and that come with support etc., but sharing our ComDev team experience highlighted some of the pedagogical and design challenges that we have been engaging with for many years. The ComDev team focused on our close link to Interaction Design and how mindful we have been in designing our platform and interactions, integrated into our mandatory university-wide platform. It has been time-and staff-intensive and requires pedagogical and research input from academic and support staff, IT or the library. Finding the balance between quality and resource-constraints is not always easy and will remain a challenge for everything from the biggest MOOC to the smallest virtual classroom experience.

Overall, this was an interesting first part of our glocal classroom project and I am looking forward to continue the discussions in Guelph at the end of May!

– Tobias Denskus, Senior Lecturer,  
Malmö University





*“We need to give ownership to the students”*

“We asked ourselves: ‘Why aren’t the students blogging on our site? What prevents them from engaging in this obviously amazing platform?’ ... We decided we don’t want to be moderators, we want to be cherry pickers of information. We want to promote messages through social media, we don’t want to be focused on limiting what the students may or may not put online. But that means we need to give ownership to the students, because we believe that the students, if we really are going to make use of the social media thing, need to be able to add value, and they are not going to add value if they don’t take ownership of the information. We need to allow them control over the content that they are generating.”

– Mathew Smorenburg, Co-ordinator: Listen, Live & Learn, Stellenbosch University





*“The ‘Glocal Classroom’ is about bringing together ideas on how to work together with local knowledge in a global, virtual technology-driven classroom.”*

*– Prof H Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University*

*“Together we will explore how students in our classrooms can come together and actually co-orporatively learn. Learn from global perspectives and local solutions.”*

*– Cecilia Christersson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Malmö University*





## Art/iculture & Social Change – RLabs 28 March 2014

While in Stellenbosch, the Malmö University ComDev team took the opportunity to organise a seminar in collaboration with RLabs, Bridgetown. RLabs was founded by Marlon Parker in 2008 as an environment for community driven innovation and reconstruction, empowering people to make a difference in the lives of others. Since the activities at RLabs are deeply relevant from a Communication for Development point of view, it seemed like the perfect venue for a ComDev seminar.

It also served as a show case of how ComDev staff at Malmö University work with web-interaction during mixed onsite/online seminars.

The programme included speakers such as Marlon Parker – founder of RLabs, Jillian Reilly – consultant, writer and public speaker focusing on developing world issues, and Aryan Kaganof – South African independent filmmaker and the director of "An Inconsolable Memory," which was also screened.





## “Are We Making ‘a Difference’ Here?”

One of my personal highlights of our recent trip to South Africa was the discussion I had with (former) aid worker and author Jillian Reilly. We talked for about 45 minutes during our ComDev seminar at RLabs in Bridgetown.

We took her biography as the starting point to discuss aid work as a career, entering the industry before it really was one, becoming a reflective practitioner, leaving the industry and writing a very interesting book about it all.

“Shame – Confessions of an aid worker in Africa” focuses on Jillian’s personal journey from an eager volunteer in the first South African election after the end of Apartheid to being (or maybe more precisely: being identified) as an ‘HIV/AIDS expert’ in Zimbabwe.

Jillian enters international travel and development through the thriving ‘democracy industry’ of the post-Cold War 1990s. As a recent graduate from an American university she sets out to ‘do good’ in Africa through an internship with a South African NGO. Amid rapid social change and racist white neighbors Jillian quickly encounters some of those dilemmas, complexities and unresolvable situations that aid work always has to offer underneath a seemingly clear moral compass of ‘doing good’.

But only after her move to Johannesburg does she become a part of the rapidly growing development industry. She is primarily hired for grant and report writing and her first boss is fully aware of the situation: ‘Every NGO in Jo’burg is filled with smart, skill-less people like you’ (p.73).’

Jillian’s encounters of becoming an ‘AIDS expert’ without much of a technical, medical or programming background really captured my attention and I was wondering whether she was part of a last generation of aid workers who could enter and maintain work in the industry with good intentions and self-learning skills, but without a ‘background’ of development. As

much as professionalization is an important issue the question remains whether aid work has really become ‘better’ or more impactful.

Her relationship with a ANC activist is the entry point for reflections that combine her individual journey with key emerging discourses around aid work and aid workers: Her North American quest for a ‘vision’ and a personal and professional ‘plan’ (p.157) in a difficult cultural and political context (‘We’re not like you Americans who believe you have complete control over your lives’ as a workshop participant remarks (p.195); the challenge that HIV/AIDS prevention and education is not just an abstract ‘deliverable’, but ultimately deals with deep-rooted gender-, economic- and cultural biases.

In the end, Jillian Reilly is concerned about her well-being, close to a burn-out and tired of white lies to perform her expertise and leaves the aid industry. There is no grand finale, but a self-described end of a ‘coming-of-age’ story that is probably quite typical for the ‘unknown aid workers’ who have silently left the industry over the years.

In late March 2014 Jillian and I met for the first time in a small café on one of the picturesque main streets in Stellenbosch, South Africa. When she picks me up in her Landrover Discovery from Stellenbosch University’s modern conference facility there is an odd moment of cosmopolitan awareness of opportunity and potential privilege that both of us have enjoyed and that the global aid and education industries have facilitated in strange ways. Are we making ‘a difference’ here or wherever we travel, work, teach and talk?

*-Tobias Denskus, Malmö University*





A big thanks to Stellenbosch University and RLabs for having us,  
and for working hard to make these seminars successful events!

*– The Malmö University Crew*

Text and photo: Ulrica Kristhammar  
[www.glocalclassroom.wordpress.com](http://www.glocalclassroom.wordpress.com)