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ABSTRACT This paper offers a critical review of the role of the International Network for Learning and Teaching geography in higher education (INLT) in the production of geographical knowledge. Through an examination of the Network’s membership and activities, it explores some of the ways in which INLT—as a global virtual group—may be inadvertently perpetuating geographies of oppression through, for example, assumption of Anglo-American modes of educational standards and practice; reinforcement of existing unequal/inequitable social relationships; predominance of English language; and a reliance on technologies that favour wealthy nations and institutions. The paper sets out practical suggestions for postcolonial membership and activity structures designed to overcome difficulties with the Network’s existing power/knowledge geometries.

KEY WORDS: Virtual groups, postcolonial, critical geography, oppression, knowledge production, educational capacity-building

Introduction

Establishing the network was the easy bit; the challenge resides in developing and sustaining it to meet its intended aims. (Healey et al., 2000, p. 219)

Information technology is not a magic formula that is going to solve all our problems. But it is a powerful force that can and must be harnessed to our global mission of peace and development. This is a matter of both ethics and economics…. I urge everyone in a position to make a difference to add his or her energies to this effort. (Kofi Annan, 2002)

[W]e need to attend to the structural imbalances in the circuits of production of geographical knowledge. (Robinson, 2003, p. 280)
In their Editorial of March 2006, David Higgitt and Martin Haigh raised questions about the role of *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (*JGHE*) as a vehicle for disseminating good practice in an international context. They observed that “the whole spectre of internationalization can be seen as an uncritical acceptance of the globalization project that threatens to overwhelm traditional approaches with a hegemonic discourse of Western ‘best practice’” (p. 3). They concluded by saying that not only does *JGHE* look forward to more contributions from countries hitherto underrepresented, to more international collaboration, and more comparative perspectives but also “the journal hopes to do more to explore and critique the pedagogic dimensions of the internationalization project”.

In this paper, I take up this challenge and set out a critical geography of the role of the International Network for Learning and Teaching geography in higher education (INLT) in the production of geographical knowledge.¹ My analysis draws from an examination of INLT leadership, membership, meeting and communication patterns since the Network was founded in 1999. It is apparent that the structural characteristics and day-to-day realities of the educational establishment both within and outside the Anglo-American-Australasian² core are echoed in problematic patterns of association and activity within INLT. Thus, as a global virtual group, INLT may be contributing inadvertently—and against the Network’s own ambitions—to educational and cultural colonization as well as to an intellectually limiting consolidation of Anglo-American and Australasian dominance. One ambition of this paper is to alert INLT members to the possible consequences of failing to address the uneven landscape of the Network’s activities. Moreover, joining postcolonialism’s³ fundamental quest for strategies that oppose colonizing and centralizing tendencies (Prasad, 2003, p. 7) and acknowledging Blomley’s (2006, p. 88) pointed cautions regarding uncritical critical geography, I step beyond a “pious appeal to progressive/emancipatory/liberatory alternatives, without specifying these in detail” to set out for discussion some suggestions for *practical solutions* to problems associated with the Network’s existing power/ knowledge geometries. Though I focus on INLT I think that many of the issues it must now grapple with are common to other global virtual groups in education—and more broadly.

**INLT—Aims and Activities**

INLT is an international, voluntary and ‘virtual organization’ whose mission is to improve the quality of learning and teaching geography internationally. Though its members are united in their passion for better learning and teaching, the Network is made up of university teachers who are more or less spread around the globe; who meet infrequently; whose involvement is not central to their day-to-day professional activities; and for whom there are no financial rewards for involvement. In that membership is free of charge, that barrier to international collegial association is eliminated but participating in many activities (e.g. meetings, online collaborations) does come at financial and technological cost. In short, however, INLT is an international cooperative venture that endures through the goodwill of its members.

INLT was formed in Honolulu during 1999 at a specially convened meeting of 28 geographers particularly interested in educational matters. Ken Foote and I worked with Mick Healey to establish the Network, which grew quickly at first, reaching 188 members in 2000. It has recorded modest but steady growth since then (see Table 1).
The Network has a ‘flat’ organizational structure comprising three ‘Co-Chairs’—Professor Mick Healey (UK), Professor Eric Pawson (NZ) and Dr Michael Solem (USA)—who are responsible for overall leadership, and then there are all the members. There are no intervening levels of leadership or management.

INLT was established:

- “To promote innovative, creative, and collaborative research as well as critical reflection on learning and teaching of geography;
- To facilitate the exchange of materials, ideas and experiences about learning and teaching of geography and to stimulate international dialog;
- To create an inclusive international community aimed at raising the profile and status of learning and teaching of geography” (INLT, 2006).

I have emphasized the terms ‘exchange’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘international community’ to make the vital points that INLT is not intended to be an organization for a few and is not intended to foster a unidirectional, ‘colonizing’ flow of cultural ideas and resources.

The Hawai’i symposium that established INLT also selected six projects for development and implementation. These were:

1. Publication of discussion papers in JGHE.
2. Establish a communication network.
3. Develop a database and clearinghouse.
4. Explore and establish links with other organizations and projects.
5. Link student projects internationally.
6. Establish a pilot project to explore learning and teaching strategies.

Of these, the first, second and fourth have proved relatively successful. A series of papers was published in JGHE shortly after the Hawai’i symposium (vol. 24, no. 2); after meetings in Glasgow (vol. 30, no. 1); and there was a flow of INLT-related manuscripts to the journal in late 2006 following the Brisbane IGU conference (this issue).

The communication network seems to have worked well. An email listserv was established at Flinders University soon after the Hawai’i meeting and has moved recently to the University of Canterbury; a website was constructed and has been hosted successively at the Universities of Texas, Colorado and Canterbury; and a twice-yearly newsletter is now produced at the University of Gloucestershire and broadcast by the University of Canterbury. Because INLT has no current source of funding, no hardcopies of the newsletter are distributed. The Network did have an online discussion forum, accessible through its website, but this fell into ‘disrepair’. Despite the demise of the discussion forum, the INLT’s tendency to favour electronic means of communication—mainly its listserv and website—is consistent with the experience of many other cooperative scholarly ventures.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>INLT members</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>188</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>223</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>252</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>277</td>
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Table 1. INLT growth, 2000–2006
Finally, workshops and meetings have been held in conjunction with professional conferences in the United States and the United Kingdom. And links with other organizations have been established. For example, in 2004, INLT was involved in joint meetings with the IGU’s Commission for Geographical Education, the Higher Education Research Group of the RGS-IBG and JGHE.

While projects 3, 5 and 6 never really got under way (Healey, 2006, p. 70), two other collaborative international projects did emerge from INLT activities. One examined learning styles in 12 universities in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US (see, for example, Milicich et al., 2003; Bradbeer et al., 2004). The other was a web-based international collaborative learning project that led to the founding of the Online Center for Global Geography Education, directed by Michael Solem.4

Having described INLT, I would now like to start thinking about it as a global virtual group and more importantly about its role as an agent of global educational justice or injustice.

INLT as a Global Virtual Group

INLT is one of a growing number of a ‘global virtual groups’ (GVG)—conglomerations that I believe are poised to become increasingly important in twenty-first-century higher education.

A global virtual group is an organization or team that:

- functions interdependently;
- comprises members who are geographically dispersed and who may differ nationally, culturally and linguistically; and
- relies partly or entirely on technology-mediated communications rather than face-to-face interaction to accomplish tasks (Zakaria et al., 2004, p. 16). The technology that underpins global virtual groups need not be solely computer based. Other technologies like phone and fax may be involved.

Some examples of global virtual groups with educational purposes include: the UNIGIS consortium of British, European and North American universities offering courses in geographical information systems (Foote, 1999); the European Union’s Learn-Nett collaborative training network for teachers (Henri & Pudelko, 2003, p. 480); NAFSA: Association of International Educators—an association of 9000 international educators at 3500 institutions across 84 countries; and Universitas 21, which is a grouping of 20 universities in 11 countries whose purpose is to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between member universities.

There is a substantial emerging literature on virtual organizations (Dyrkton, 1996; Brey, 2003; Sieber, 2003; Goggin, 2004; Putnik & Cunha, 2007) and their benefits (Crawford, 2002; Hayashi, 2004, p. 5). Amongst their prospective contributions to higher education GVGs offer means by which universities and other institutions encountering both financial problems and difficulties serving students well (Hay et al., 2000; CIES 2004) can collaborate to share resources and develop new solutions to emerging challenges. As Universitas 21 (2007) points out on its website, networks can create opportunities on a scale that no single member would be able to achieve independently.

While scholars have not been uncritical of GVGs, pointing, for example, to the infrastructural (De Beer, 2001), identity (Mitra, 1997), educational (Cogburn & Levinson,
2003) and cultural difficulties they raise (UNESCO, 1998; Morris & Meadows, 2004), they appear to have given little or no consideration to ways in which the groups themselves might contribute to postcolonial practices. This seems to be a significant oversight for, without proper care, the promise of GVGs may be blighted by processes that include individual and group marginalization and cultural ‘imperialism’. These involve, for example, assumption of Anglo-American modes of educational standards and practice; reinforcement of existing unequal/inequitable social relationships; predominance of English language; and a reliance on technologies that favour wealthy nations and institutions (Smith, 2003; Matei, 2004). It is increasingly clear that GVGs simultaneously offer prospects of both empowerment and marginalization (Sieber, 2003, p. 51) and means by which existing inequities may be maintained and intensified (Annan, 2002).

It is salutary to remember too that global virtual groups are emerging against a background in which there is a crisis in education in many developing countries. As Yatta Kanu observes in a 2005 paper in the *International Journal of Educational Development*, these countries are often places with deteriorating facilities; inadequate teaching materials; and instructional personnel who are poorly educated, overstretched, underpaid and demoralized. Consequent appeals to external agencies for assistance are answered in ways that see a few Western countries dominate knowledge and resources by virtue of their ownership of scientific systems, new technologies, premium universities, and—once again—the dominance of English language as the medium of instruction and research (see, for example, Paasi, 2005; Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2006). These patterns and trends are creating a neocolonial situation in which academics and institutions in developing countries find themselves dependent on academics and agencies from a small group of wealthy nations.

Moreover, and importantly, countries like the US and the UK are consolidating their position as academic ‘superpowers’, partly as a result of their early and deep access to information and communication technologies, a point illustrated perhaps by the links established in 2000 between Rupert Murdoch’s News International and Universitas 21. As Murdoch said at the time:

> News has taken a strategic decision to enter the … market using our global distribution platforms, our advanced technologies, and our marketing reach …. A mutually profitable partnership between leading providers in higher education and one of the world’s leading media companies is a very strong proposition. (News Corporation, 2000)

At the same time as these relations of dependence and dominance are secured, so academic superpowers are both building links with universities in other countries to enhance their global reach and participating in a form of cultural imperialism. As Kanu (2005, p. 494) notes:

> …international academic relations in the postcolonial and global era are characterized by a new orientation to curriculum as an international activity comprising western universities transferring educational ideas and practices to the developing countries, often without taking into consideration factors such as the political climate, traditional beliefs and cultural values, the economy, and social class.
Although we need to remember that colonizing discourses may be uniquely interpreted and reinvented to yield hybrid local outcomes (see, for example, Tomlinson, 1999), the power/knowledge geometry of the global educational and research environment does appear to feature Western approaches to scholarship being transferred, by various means, with little regard to local context. Here, by some way of example—and reflecting other interests of mine (see, for example, Israel & Hay, 2006)—I cannot resist quoting an anonymous South African clinical investigator cited in The Lancet (in Horton, 2000, p. 2234) scorning ways that some Western institutions and agencies seek to impose their values:

Some researchers feel aggrieved by the high-handed attitudes of major journals to ethical standards in developing countries. Greater recognition of socio-political, economic, religious, and cultural factors must be taken into account before a ‘westernized’ judgment is made that the research was unethical.

More than this, as Jenny Robinson points out in her 2003 paper on ‘Postcolonializing Geography’, engagement in international publication continues to be weighted heavily against scholars away from Anglo-America and Australasia (see also Paasi, 2005 but consider Berg & Kearns, 1998 for an alternative view). Robinson makes the point that, despite editors’ best efforts to overcome this difficulty, subtle—and not so subtle—assumptions about appropriate forms of inquiry and scholarship continue to see contributions from outside those areas marginalized.5

Now, I would like to turn to some of the characteristics and activities of INLT—as one global virtual group—within this oppressive array of educational and scholarly dependence, dominance and cultural imperialism—and begin to think about the Network’s postcolonial potential. If I might follow Jenny Robinson (2003, p. 275) again, what I seek to do is bring some further attention to the parochialism of INLT and then to make some suggestions about ways in which we might move the Network towards a more engaging transnational scholarship. To use Richie Howitt’s (following Deborah Bird Rose) eloquent phrase, my intention is to work in ways that aspire to enable the ‘ethical availability of each to the other’ (personal communication).

What Are The Problems With INLT?

In 2000 Mick Healey, Ken Foote and I (Hay et al., 2000) set out five challenges the INLT faced. These were:

- meeting the needs of participants;
- promoting and increasing numbers of participants;
- extending beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins;
- raising finance and sponsorship to support projects; and
- persuading volunteers to put in the time and effort needed to maintain and develop the INLT.

And as Mick Healey (2006) has made clear recently, each of these remains an abiding challenge. Notwithstanding the importance of the other four, I shall focus on the third point on this list, extending INLT beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins, resolution of which I suggest might also support points one and two.
As my discussion of INLT activities might have suggested, there are significant imbalances in the Network’s membership. In 2004, 87 per cent of the INLT members were from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK or USA (Healey, 2006, p. 72). On 1 March 2006, this figure had fallen to 80 per cent, although it is worth noting that still three-quarters of the Network’s electronic membership comes from just four countries: Australia, NZ, the US and the UK (see Table 2). In 2000, INLT members’ email addresses indicated participants from at least 16 different countries. On 1 March 2006, listserv membership stood at 277, with participants from 20 different countries. Notwithstanding the clear gender imbalance, leadership of the INLT also has a distinctively Anglo-American and Australasian cast (see Table 3).

I reviewed the 12 INLT Newsletters produced regularly since October 1999 (final issue examined: May 2006) to see what and how many articles referring to activities away from the US–UK–Australia–NZ axis had appeared (see Table 4). And in no slight intended to the Newsletter editors—who have and continue to perform a valuable service—I found that in the past seven years there have been only 10 news items or notices of such activity. The bulk of material has focused around activities in the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand.6

Reflecting, and perhaps consolidating, these leanings of news, membership and leadership, is the pattern of locations of INLT events over the past seven years and the pattern of participation in those (see Table 5). The 2004 International Geographical Congress workshop attracted delegates from 11 countries whilst the most recent gathering

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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>277</td>
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Note: aSome email addresses provide no location details although in some cases it was possible to link subscribers to countries on the basis of personal knowledge of their email addresses.

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<th>Co-chair</th>
<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mick Healey</td>
<td>1999–2007</td>
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<td>Ken Foote</td>
<td>1999–2005</td>
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<td>Iain Hay</td>
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<td>Michael Solem</td>
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<td>Eric Pawson</td>
<td>2005–2007</td>
<td>NZ</td>
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in Brisbane drew participants from only six—the usual four plus Canada and Singapore. With causes that lie in the structural characteristics and day-to-day realities of the educational establishment both within and outside the Anglo-American-Australasian core (e.g. availability of travel and subsistence support for some countries’ scholars; programme that may fail to meet the needs of all prospective participants; international differences in academic schedules), this pattern of participation points to a geography of disconnection that INLT must recognize as problematic and strive to overcome.

Although the uneven distribution of electronic technologies is well documented (Dutta & Roy, 2004, p. 143), participation in many INLT activities requires access to the Internet. For instance, the INLT workshops at Hawai‘i, Glasgow and Brisbane (see Table 6) have relied on the web, the listserv, and person-to-person email to achieve the ends of preparing collaboratively written papers. Preliminary work conducted electronically is later consolidated through face-to-face workshop activities. It might be argued that this reliance on electronic technologies is not misplaced, because for university-based scholars the ‘digital divide’—that is, the inequalities in access to computer-based information and communication technologies and in the capacity to use them effectively (Samaras, 2005, p. 84)—may not exist to the extent that it does for the general population. However, Mendler et al. (2002) have made it clear that significant problems do exist in the global ‘South’.

It seems evident from its patterns of leadership, membership, meetings and activity that the power/knowledge geometry of INLT is characterized by a disengagement from the world outside the US–UK–Australia and New Zealand. At the same time INLT is not

<table>
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<td>IGU CGE Meeting in Korea (repeat)</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>IGU CGE Meeting in Korea</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>Environmental Studies in Czech Geographical Education</td>
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<td>Disciplinary Perspectives on Overseas Fieldwork</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>South East Asian Geographers Association conference (Thailand)</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIS in the Field (Costa Rica)</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>Teaching Geography in and about Europe (Poland)</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Hawai‘i</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers</td>
<td>Plymouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>International Geographical Congress</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Denver</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>International Geographical Union</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
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apparently a mechanism by which Anglo-American and Australasian approaches to education are actively ‘colonizing’ the developing world. However:

While the rapid spread and declining costs of IT offers the world’s have-nots a chance to ‘leapfrog’ stages of development, it also raises fears that its growth will follow existing fault lines of social and economic inequality and possibly even intensify prevalent patterns of social exclusion. (International Labour Organization, 2001)

As an organization in which experiences, ideas and resources are being exchanged and disseminated predominantly amongst geographers from Anglo-America and Australasia, largely through electronic means, it does not seem unreasonable to regard INLT as a mechanism that has the potential to implicitly and inadvertently favour wealthy nations and institutions; contribute to the persistence of unequal and inequitable relationships; and confirm the educational centrality of scholars from a small group of countries. As such, and despite the very best intentions of its founders and members, INLT may unwittingly act as an instrument of oppression— that is, a mechanism by which processes such as marginalization and powerlessness are made real (see Young, 1990 for a broad discussion of the faces of oppression).

Let me return briefly to a mention of matters of justice and postcolonialism. Just as I believe most of us seek to establish non-oppressive practices in our classrooms and other educational institutions (see, for example, Sholle, 1992; Hay, 2001), so I think we have a responsibility to ensure that the global virtual groups and networks in which we are involved—groups like INLT—do not become places where processes of injustice are activated, enabled or perpetuated. One key part of postcolonialism is about implementing strategies that stand in opposition to colonizing and centralizing tendencies. It is about disrupting unfair and unjust arrangements through political, economic and cultural decolonization (Prasad, 2003, p. 7). But it is clear that making the INLT an effective agent of postcolonialism is about more than social justice.

Drawing from Anshuman Prasad and Puchkala Prasad’s (2003, p. 291) work on the postcolonial imagination, central to postcolonialism is the desire to “critically address the Eurocentricism of the First World academy with a view to reforming [it] and making it more

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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32 (11 countries)</td>
<td>43 (6 countries)</td>
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receptive to non-Western cultures and epistemologies”. To borrow from Chakrabarty’s (2000) marvellous book title, postcolonialism is about “provincializing Europe”.

One of the unintended consequences of current INLT patterns of membership and activity is the apparent exclusion of ‘non-European’ voices from international dialogue and exchanges. Rectifying this would have at least two significant implications. First, it would help those of us involved with the Network to better acknowledge the ‘locatedness’ of our own geographical knowledges and practices, and second, in an important related point, it might help us avoid a potentially limiting parochialism to knowledge and educational practices (Robinson, 2003). Just as scholars on the margins have long had to do, INLT members may find value in engaging with educational approaches and understandings generated in a broader range of other places. A deeper engagement with the attitudes and approaches of the rest of the world might help us to acknowledge more comprehensively the non-universality, or ‘provincialize’, our own attitudes and approaches and heighten our appreciation of their potential limitations. More than this, engagement and exchange offer the potential to develop educational capacity in ‘local communities’—both South and North.

I think it is clear that we need to intensify work to place INLT as a viable, productive postcolonial virtual group. But while it is apparent that global virtual groups simultaneously offer prospects of marginalization and empowerment and means by which existing inequities may be reduced, maintained or intensified, few scholars seem to have given attention to practices that might be adopted within these groups to contribute constructively to a ‘postcolonial project’.

I would like to encourage us—as geographers attuned to issues of distance, difference and exclusion—to take up this challenge. I would like us to think a little more about arrangements that might allow Network members to work effectively together across national, cultural, organizational and geographical boundaries; to meet current and prospective members’ needs; to exchange ideas; and, in consequence, to develop capacity—in both South and North. I would like us to find means of making INLT a model of postcolonial educational and political practice and an exemplar for other virtual groups. How are we to avoid INLT being part of a globalization that is, to draw from Kofi Annan once again, a web of commerce, communication and cooperation that provides opportunities for some and marginalization for others (UNCTAD Secretariat, 2000)? How can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we avoid INLT being part of a globalization that is, to draw from Kofi Annan once again, a web of commerce, communication and cooperation that provides opportunities for some and marginalization for others (UNCTAD Secretariat, 2000)? How can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor? And, if I might refer to comments made by Eric Sheppard in his keynote presentation at the Brisbane IGU, just how can we prevent it from being a network that unintentionally widens the gap between rich and poor?

Postcolonial Practices?

In his own recent reflections on INLT, Mick Healey (2006, p. 72) noted that “only modest inroads into diversifying membership have been achieved” and that “the desire of the INLT to move beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins largely remains a challenge to be met”. He suggests—with some reservations—that these difficulties might be overcome by:

- conducting proceedings in languages other than English, although the English dominance is in line with practices at most other international conferences;
holding meetings outside the ‘usual’ countries—though he suggests this raises problems of ‘viability’; and

- linking INLT meetings with major international conferences, such as IGC when they are held outside Anglo-America and Australasia.

These are sound ways of facilitating interaction through face-to-face meetings and I support them all as useful means of making INLT more inclusive. I would also like to propose a few others that may also render the Network a more effective agent for educational capacity building. Some revisit a few of the ideas for INLT projects that were raised in 1999—though in new ways I hope.

For the sake of clarity, and for little other reason, I have structured my points around: introductions, participation and collaboration, development, and recognition. To begin, it is vital to introduce INLT to new prospective members from as broad a range of places as possible and ensure they are able to be involved in its activities. Unless there is broader representation within INLT, the argument that the interests of existing members need to be met to sustain the Network can be raised as a case for maintaining the status quo—a position that clearly will continue to disenfranchise those geographers who are already marginalized.

**Introductions**

- **Create and circulate low technology information packs.** Let me begin with something entirely simple and mundane, yet practical. Basic hard copy/video/DVD/.pdf promotional or informational materials concerning its intentions and activities might heighten INLT’s profile in areas where it is currently unknown.

- **Develop international students/alumni as members.** Many international students who study geography and related disciplines in Australia, NZ, the US and the UK return to their home country to teach in universities. Just as INLT would benefit from their membership, those students could find real long-term value in becoming involved with the Network during their postgraduate studies. INLT collaborations with academics from underrepresented countries might emerge and be supported by the personal relationships that often endure between former students and their supervisors. To be successful, virtual groups require trust and relational bonds between members (Kimble *et al.*, 2000). These are often developed during international educational experiences.

- **An online ‘dating service’** could attract a new and more diverse range of members by enabling scholars to find international learning-and-teaching collaborators and reviewers, to exchange ideas and stimulate dialogue. This might also help address issues such as that identified by Solem & Ray (2005) that three-quarters of American professors (‘lecturers’) of geography have no experience with international teaching collaborations. The service might be extended to facilitate teaching arrangements in which scholars from all world regions (including, for example, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia) contribute to courses in other parts of the world, and the host university provides accommodation for instance. Region-specific courses offer an obvious initial opportunity for such arrangements.

- **Exploit colonial ties.** In a suggestion that struck me as deeply ironic, and not a little problematic, a postgraduate student from the Democratic Republic of Congo studying at my university suggested that INLT might be able to achieve its ends by exploiting the historical colonial links between many African nations and people...
and institutions in European countries. His view was supported by student colleagues, many of whom hold senior government positions in their home countries. Students from Indonesia pointed to their own Dutch connections and those from Cambodia noted Russian associations. The point they all were making was that it might be easier to first ‘grow’ INLT in Europe and then take advantage of existing networks into other areas. In this way, systems and associations established in colonial times could be used to achieve postcolonial ends. However, there does appear to be a real risk with this strategy that some of the inequalities and flows of ideas and resources constructed in colonial periods might be reproduced.

- Engage with national and regional disciplinary organizations and departments (i.e. link into existing networks). At present, most INLT activity is conducted on an egalitarian, person-to-person basis. There might be value in more actively forging links with existing disciplinary and professional bodies and appropriate agencies in underrepresented countries, perhaps making initial connections through networks that existing INLT members have. These might include, for example, the new Regional Network for Southeast Asia, Australasia and the Southwest Pacific (SEAASWP), details of which are set out in Hirsch (2006).

**Participation and Collaboration**

- Encourage broader national/gender representation amongst Directors.
- Establish INLT regional representatives or chapters. INLT might seek out or nominate a single person in each country associated with the Network to be that nation’s ‘corresponding member’ or ‘reporting representative’. Alternatively, and perhaps more usefully, regional groupings could be established, each with its own representative. Collectively, these INLT members would be charged with helping to ensure a two-way flow of information between the INLT’s global membership and local members.

At the moment, the flat structural character of INLT means that responsibility for the Network’s success or failure rests at one time in very few hands and very many. Moreover, because many individual members have no claim to ‘situational authority’ or positional power within the Network, they may not feel sanctioned to act in their own country in ways that advance the interests of the Network there. The creation of national or regional representative positions offers the prospect of empowering a larger number of individuals to work with INLT and would make available national focal points for Network communication and other activities.

Alternatively, autonomous regional chapters of INLT might deal with issues of local importance and meet with other chapters on regular bases (perhaps every four years) to exchange ideas and consider matters of shared significance. The regional chapters could be asked to develop their own programmes and resources, perhaps in consultation with relevant other chapters.

- Offer local, national and international workshops/sessions at professional conferences away from the Anglo-American-Australasian axis. Conference and meeting timing to allow participation outside Anglo-American axis. These two points about meeting location and timing are self-evidently related. Paradoxically, virtual organizations depend on face-to-face communication—to
initiate and consolidate relationships and to build trust. As Handy observes: “Virtuality requires trust to make it work: Technology on its own is not enough.” He goes on: “A shared commitment still requires personal contact to make it real. . . . The more virtual an organization becomes the more its people need to meet in person. The meetings however are quite different. They are more about process than task [and] more concerned that people get to know each other than that they deliver” (Handy, as cited in Kimble et al., 2000, p. 6). Moreover, global virtual groups and teams seem to require a rhythmic sequence of regular face-to-face meetings to be effective (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). Mick Healey (2006) made the suggestion earlier this year that INLT meetings need to get away from their current Anglo-American and Australasian heartland but expressed reservations that such meetings might not be viable. However, I think the argument might be sustained that existing meetings are not really viable for geographers from most countries of the world. It is around this point that some key difficulties for INLT arise. As I hope I have made clear, if INLT members are to avoid the organization involving scholars from only the wealthiest (and most English-speaking) of nations, the Network needs to be prepared to coordinate and be involved in activities away from its current intellectual axis. Initially, it might be appropriate to continue to link INLT meetings with professional geographical conferences but on a cycle that embraces a more diverse array of national societies, drawing first from those organizations with which INLT already has some connections. These might include, for instance, the National Association of Geographers India or the South East Asian Geographical Association. This may help forge subsequent links with an even broader range of institutional and international networks.

- **Carry an international perspective to the development of learning-and-teaching resources.** INLT needs to regard more seriously geography educators and knowledge producers outside the ‘core’. First, and simply, rather than thinking about engaging with students in our own classes only, members might try to change perspective a little: designing lessons that encourage students to collaborate with their peers in other parts of the world; and using the INLT to subject resources, innovations and ideas for learning materials to international peer review. It was only as I was writing this paper that I realized a lost opportunity of this sort. My university requires that every topic (‘subject’) be reviewed every five years. My School does this rigorously and this year I had the opportunity to send out two of my own topics for external review. And where did I send them? Loughborough and Adelaide. . . . If we each take a more truly international perspective in the development of learning-and-teaching resources, we may gradually overcome the structural biases that sometimes deny recognition to high quality programmes outside the ‘core’. Second, Network members could also consider producing and distributing materials in different languages— perhaps in collaboration with colleagues from the ‘South’. Because knowledge and language are enmeshed with one another (Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2002) collaboration with colleagues from non-English-speaking backgrounds—mediated if necessary by multilingual colleagues—offers the potential to enrich and expand all parties’ scholarly horizons. It might even improve our writing (see Mitchell, 2006)!
Seek out primary research for publication through INLT. To encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences regarding learning and teaching geography, INLT could more actively encourage and solicit individual works and symposia from ‘The South’ for journals—such as JGHE. It is worth noting here that JGHE is devoted “to geography teaching in all institutions of higher education throughout the world” (JGHE inside front cover. Emphasis added). As such, it seems an exemplary outlet for INLT-based work.

- Use low-technology options whenever possible.
- Lobby finding agencies to support international collaborations to help overcome the apparent reluctance of agencies such as the United States’ National Science Foundation, the United Kingdom’s Economic and Social Research Foundation and Australia’s Research Council to support such work.

Development

- Develop a coordinated ‘World Libraries’ programme. The World Archaeology Congress runs a ‘World Libraries’ project which oversees book gifts to targeted libraries. Although this activity might carry various stigmas it is one that warrants consideration as a means of distributing valuable educational resources and encouraging further international engagement.
- Encourage publishers, such as Taylor & Francis, to provide (more) free copies of JGHE to targeted libraries—or perhaps to make freely available selected JGHE materials via the INLT website.
- Develop materials to assist grant-writers to secure additional funds to develop resources for international audiences. INLT members aiming to produce learning-and-teaching resources might find it useful to have access to outline materials and arguments to help improve their prospects of securing funds that will allow those resources to be developed with, exchanged with, or distributed to, international colleagues.
- Develop materials to assist textbook authors to negotiate publication contracts (e.g. insert paragraphs) that provide free book copies to targeted libraries. On the basis of consultations with publishers or publishing lawyers, frame up sample paragraphs that could be added by authors to standard book publishing contracts to ensure that new textbooks find homes in libraries they might otherwise not see.
- Make training and teaching materials available to targeted individuals, libraries or agencies through digital and distance learning media (e.g. film, CD). Professional development and teaching materials produced for local use could be circulated more widely.

Recognition

- Publishing in journals of the ‘South’. There is considerable and widespread pressure to publish in top-ranked ‘Anglo-American’ journals—an emphasis that applies particularly for more junior scholars, establishing an unfortunate model of practice for professional development. Not only does this pressure centralize the ‘North’ and marginalize the experiences of scholars from the ‘South’ but language barriers can make publication—and interpretation—for ‘Southerners’ very difficult
(see, for example, Horton, 2000; Gutiérrez & López-Nieva 2001; Hones, 2004; Timár, 2004; Paasi, 2005). Though I appreciate the institutional and individual difficulties (e.g. rewards for research output, journals’ economic imperatives, academic promotion), INLT might consider working to overcome this by directing publishable works associated with its activities to journals of the ‘South’.

- Create and publicize incentives and rewards for exemplary collaborations. Finally, just as JGHE recognizes high-quality scholarship through its award for promoting excellence in teaching and learning, so INLT might establish awards to recognize and perhaps encourage individual and team service that advances its mission.

**Conclusion**

INLT is a global virtual group whose development and patterns and activity mirror an academic and functional world characterized by particular sets of power relationships, technological possibilities and histories of relationship. Reflecting that situatedness, the Network may unwittingly support disempowering and marginalizing relationships. It is clear now, however, that ignorance and unintentionality must give way to practices that better facilitate the exchange of material, ideas and experiences and that more inclusively embrace an international community of geographers.

INLT has in place vital and valuable mechanisms that provide the opportunity for such effective intra-organization communication and for the development and exchange of innovations and ideas. These include its listserv, newsletter and website. Self-evidently, the Network needs to maintain these and the high levels of communication that go with them. However, it seems clear that INLT members need to give very serious consideration now to ways of expanding the Network’s reach whilst trying to minimize the risks of creating relationships of dependence, dominance and cultural imperialism. Failure to act deliberately and constructively is to knowingly risk further ‘centralizing Europe’—or, more accurately, centralizing Anglo-America and Australasia; expanding the gap between the educational ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’; and wilfully positioning INLT as an ‘instrument of oppression’.

I would like to think that INLT, like other virtual organizations, is here to stay. As technologies of communication continue to improve, so too grow the prospects of more, and increasingly effective, groups operating without propinquity. As a pioneer virtual organization in geographical education, INLT is well positioned to seize new opportunities that will emerge. However, core challenges we face in achieving the potential of global educational networks lie in ensuring that the exchange and cooperation they promise is just, symmetrical and empowering; that they do not reproduce colonial relationships; and that they do not marginalize the work of geography educators away from the Network’s current core. I believe that, as geographers, we are well positioned to take up these challenges. I hope we are prepared to do so.

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Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented as the 2006 *Journal of Geography in Higher Education (JGHE)* annual lecture at the IGU conference held in Brisbane, Australia.
2 Australasian is used here to refer to Australia and New Zealand together.
3 I use the term ‘postcolonial’ in the sense of an ‘overcoming’ of colonial relations rather than as a reworked continuation of colonialism.
4 Full details are available at http://www.aag.org/Education/center/cgge-aag%20site/index.html
5 I have not conducted an analysis of the contributions to *JGHE*, but in light of recent concerns about geographies of knowledge production (see, for example, Simonsen, 2004; Timár, 2004; Vaiou, 2004; Rodríguez-Pose, 2006; Fall, 2007), that would be a valuable study of its own. It would be interesting to determine whether the journal’s regional commissioning structure and its unique refereeing arrangements make a difference to patterns of manuscript receipt and publication. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned too from the practices of journals like *ACME* for instance, that make a point of trying to break down some of the linguistic and corporate barriers to geographical knowledge production.
6 As an aside, it is interesting to note that despite Canadian membership of at least 14 within the Network, there were no items from Canada.
7 It might also help meet the challenges set out by Hay et al. (2000) and discussed earlier by increasing the number of INLT participants and better meeting their needs.
8 Professor Sheppard’s talk ‘Quandaries of Critical Geography’ suggested that critical geography knowledge production has its own geography, organized around Anglo-American centres of calculation and English-language scholarship.
9 A gender analysis of membership would also be interesting.
10 The ideas are not all mine. I should acknowledge the recent published work of Michael Solem and his co-authors (Solem et al., 2003) as well as valuable conversations I have had with Claire Smith, the current President of the World Archaeology Congress, and with several of my international postgraduate students. Readers are also referred to Horton’s (2000) article that sets out some interesting editorial strategies for bridging North–South information divides.
11 This may raise some concerns about intellectual property that are beyond the scope of this paper.
12 But see also the caution in the discussion later in this paper under the heading ‘Recognition’.
13 Horton (2000, p. 2235) suggests that North/South journals be ‘twinned’. This strategy might be considered by *JGHE*.

References


