

# **A study of a focused, critical approach to pupils' images and perceptions of Africa**

**Margaret Lewis**

**2016**

**Global Learning Programme**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to assess the impact of a focused, critical approach to pupils' images and perceptions of Africa using their partner school in Malawi as a focus. It began by assessing their initial perceptions. There followed a series of linked activities focusing on understanding and challenging stereotypes, which concluded with pupils being assessed again using the initial assessment method. The findings proved interesting, and raised a number of further questions regarding the importance of global learning in schools and the need for a clear pedagogical approach.

# Contents

- 1 Introduction ..... 5
- 2 Literature review..... 7
  - 2.1 Global citizenship education..... 7
  - 2.2 Images and perceptions ..... 8
  - 2.3 School linking ..... 8
- 3 Methodological approach ..... 10
  - 3.1 Data collection methods ..... 10
  - 3.2 Ethical considerations ..... 11
  - 3.3 School and sample..... 11
  - 3.4 Activities..... 11
- 4 Findings ..... 15
  - 4.1 What do you know about Africa?..... 15
  - 4.2 What would you see at our partner school?..... 17
  - 4.3 Questionnaire responses about other countries ..... 18
  - 4.4 Questionnaire responses about link school and community ..... 21
- 5 Conclusion ..... 27
  
- Appendices ..... 29
  
- References ..... 35

# 1 Introduction

This study took place in a small rural primary school in north-west Kent. The aim was to see whether a series of focused activities could challenge pupils' perceptions of Africa and encourage them to think more critically about images of Africa. Pupils were from varied socio-economic backgrounds, although predominantly middle-class and white. I have been a teacher in the school since 2004 and, for the past seven years, have led on global learning and co-ordinated the school's partnership with another school in Malawi.

The school's link with a school in Malawi arose from the need to provide a focus for implementing the global dimension within the curriculum (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2005) and wanting to learn about 'a locality in a country that is less economically developed' (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1999). In 2008, along with a number of schools in Kent, we were approached by a charity that sought to link schools in the UK with schools in Malawi. Our link with a rural school in Malawi was established later that year. The charity's aim was to improve education in schools in Malawi, so although there was some initial exchange of ideas and learning between the two schools, the main focus was on fundraising to provide equipment and improve the school buildings.

A new head teacher at our school in 2010 and the award of a joint curriculum project grant from the British Council in 2011 led to priorities being steered away from material assistance and cultural exchange towards more equal participation in joint curriculum work. To facilitate this, both schools jointly agreed topics through which we could share our learning and adopt the attitudes surrounding equity, cultural appreciation and social justice.

We carried out various evaluations of our joint learning projects, focusing on knowledge and skills-based learning rather than pupils' perceptions and values. At the end of the second year of our joint curriculum project, I carried out some research, as part of an MA module, to assess pupils' perceptions of our link school. The research showed that, despite in-depth learning about life at our link school, pupils continued to hold paternalistic and stereotypical views of their partner school and its locality. The research implied that pupils were unable to separate what they knew about their partner school from the dominant representation of Africa featured in literature and the media. Furthermore, it suggested that a 'soft global citizenship' approach to global learning did not provide learners with the skills to challenge the powerful images and representations they encounter outside their school life (Andreotti, 2006).

After some discussions with staff at our school, we realised that we had to change our approach to effect a fundamental shift in thinking. This research looks at the impact of a series of focused activities designed to challenge pupils' stereotypical ideas held about Africa and the activities' impact on the pupils' perceptions of their partner school in Malawi. The activities draw on the work of Kolb (1984), in that pupils are asked first to discuss a picture or issue in groups, they then share their ideas with their class before all Key Stage 2 come together to share their ideas and reach conclusions. They then use their new thinking to approach the issue/picture again.

This research is shaped around three research questions:

- 1 What are pupils' initial perceptions of Africa and of their partner school in Malawi?
- 2 To what extent do the activities impact on pupils' perceptions of Africa and their partner school?
- 3 In what ways do activities that challenge stereotypical images engender a more critical understanding in pupils?

This research began by assessing 'What are pupils' initial perceptions of Africa and of their partner school in Malawi?'. This was then followed by a series of six activities that focused on

helping pupils understand the concept of 'stereotypes', and reflect critically on what they see and hear about Africa. Pupils were then assessed using the same methods as before to find out 'To what extent will these activities impact on pupils' perceptions about Africa and their partner school?' Analysis of the data then helped identify 'In what ways do activities that challenge stereotypical images engender a more critical understanding in pupils?'

By encouraging pupils to reflect critically on what they saw and heard through a series of focused discussions and activities, it was hoped that this would lead them to: have less negative perceptions of our partner school; be able to encounter difference positively; and therefore have a greater understanding of global issues.

This research has wider implications than ensuring that pupils develop a relationship with our partner school in an ethical way, and engender feelings of empathy and intolerance to social inequalities. The ever-present charity advertisements in the media portraying Africans negatively means it is increasingly important that schools are equipped to challenge these stereotypes to ensure pupils have a fair and equitable view of the world and global issues.

This paper starts by discussing the sometimes contested meaning of 'global citizenship' and some of the debates around how schools should approach the teaching of it. This is followed by a look at children's images and perceptions, and the debate around school linking. The methodological section outlines the activities pupils took part in and the data-collection methods. The data analysis is divided into four sections that analyse pupils' perceptions before and after the activities. It concludes by looking at the summary of the key findings and their implications for global learning approaches in schools.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Global citizenship education

Over the past 30 years, there have been various initiatives from the government to help schools incorporate learning about far-away places and, latterly, development issues (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2005; Qualification and Curriculum Authority, 2008). Many NGOs have also produced frameworks and resources to facilitate learning about these issues; one of the most notable being Oxfam's 'Education for Global Citizenship' (2006). In addition, Development Education Centres provide independent support for schools delivering global learning. There are a number of terms used to describe teaching and learning about global issues – for example: the global dimension; global citizenship education; education for sustainable development and global learning – which some claim has resulted in confusion about their definitions (Bourn, 2014a; Oberman et al., 2014; Hunt, 2012).

However, there have been critics of these approaches: Martin (2008) argues that there are political as well as educational implications inherent in the government and NGO's attempts to address global issues. The educational element seeks to promote critical thinking by providing children with the knowledge, skills, understanding and values that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice and discrimination locally and globally (DfES, 2005). However, Martin argues that there are political dimensions to this, primarily, the need to meet the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2000), and that these competing agendas produce a dichotomy that reproduces colonial power relationships and reinforces stereotypical views of southern countries (Martin, 2008). Spivak contends that the whole process of globalisation is just a continuation of colonialism and that global development issues are western interests projected as the world's interests (Spivak 1990, cited in Andreotti, 2007).

Andreotti (2006) cites a need for a critical approach to global citizenship teaching rather than the 'soft' approach, which does not challenge how people's perceptions of other cultures are 'coloured' by their own belief system. In seeking to explain how people view the world, Lakoff (2006:25) refers to:

*'the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality... They structure our ideas and concepts, they shape how we reason, and they even impact how we perceive and how we act.'*

Spivak argues that in order to have an 'ethical encounter with the Third World', one must unlearn their privilege (Spivak, 1990, cited in Andreotti, 2007). Kapoor (2004:642) defines this as 'stopping oneself from always wanting to correct, teach, theorise, develop, colonise, appropriate, use, record, inscribe, enlighten'. A critical approach to global learning will therefore need to involve continual challenging of ideas and assumptions in order to uncover power relations involved, and questioning whose interests are being served, for teachers as well as pupils. In Brock et al.'s (2006) research on six US teachers in a cross-culture learning experience, he talks about displacement spaces as being places we move into 'whereby we see things differently'. This is similar to Fiedler's (2007) 'postcolonial learning spaces', and De Souza's (2007) 'sites of continuously contested meaning, construction and negotiation'. Fiedler (2007:50) suggests that schools need to provide learning environments that are about 'analysis, reflection, action, understanding and transformation of knowledge'; something that, he goes on to argue, is not prevalent in schools, where the dominant education system is about 'accumulating preconceived academic knowledge'.

The launch of the government-funded Global Learning Programme in England in 2013 sought to address some of these issues. The programme aims to develop a national network of schools where CPD is provided for teachers in order to help them familiarise pupils with the concepts

of interdependence, development, globalisation and sustainability, with an emphasis on social justice rather than charity, and to stimulate their own and others' critical thinking on global issues.

## 2.2 Images and perceptions

The need to challenge children's perceptions in order to prevent the development of stereotypes has long been recognised (Wiegand, 1992; Graham and Lynn, 1989; Disney, 2004).

*'Without intervention infants are liable to accept uncritically the bias and discrimination they see around them. Stereotypes promoted in advertisements and stories of war, famine and disaster in the media further distort perceptions. At the same time, the influence of parents and peer group pressure may also serve to confirm negative views'* (Scoffham, 1999:134–5).

As Borowski (2011) argues, we are faced constantly with negative images in the media as a result of fundraising initiatives from INGOs. The images used are designed to evoke compassion or pity in order to raise funds. Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) argue that the media is responsible for a 'preponderance of negativity' about Africa. They claim that stories in the media about Africa focus on: political and financial corruption; tribal wars; and Africa being synonymous with poverty. They lay the blame for this firmly on 'the selection process in news and information production, which makes for bias in representations' (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:18).

One of the aims of including some form of global learning in the curriculum has been 'questioning and challenging assumptions and perceptions' (DfES, 2005) and 'challeng[ing] misinformation and stereotyped views' (Oxfam, 2006). However, there are arguments to suggest that this approach is not enough to overcome pupils' perceptions of Africa (Borowski, 2012; Bourn, 2014a). As Mahadeo and McKinney argue, 'it is also important to realise that what is not re-presented or is excluded can be just as important or more so than that which is included in the meaning process' (2007:15).

Therefore, it can be argued that a critical pedagogical approach, drawing on the work of Paulo Friere (1972) and Henry Giroux (2011), is required to challenge these dominant assumptions. Adults, as well as pupils, need to 'unlearn'.

## 2.3 School linking

Since 2000, many schools have seen a link with a school in 'a country that is less economically developed' (DfEE, 1999) as a way of fulfilling the requirements of the then National Curriculum, by helping them incorporate learning about global issues into the curriculum (Hillier, 2006; Bourn, 2014a; Disney, 2008; Leonard, 2012). The Department for International Development (DfID), through the British Council, facilitated many of these links and provided funding for teacher exchanges:

*'by entering into a global partnership pupils will gain a fuller understanding of other countries and cultures, as will their teachers'* (British Council, 2012).

However, there have been critics of these links; many have argued that North–South links reinforce colonial lines of power (Martin, 2007; Burr, 2008; Disney 2004; Zemach-Bersin, 2007; Andreotti, 2006; Bourn, 2014b). Burr quotes a participant at a conference saying: 'First you came to us as missionaries, then you came to us as colonisers, now you come to us as linkers' (2008). Critics of the linking process claim that it is driven by the interests of the 'North', and



perpetuates a dependency culture in the 'South' and a paternalistic attitude in the 'North' (Burr, 2008; Leonard, 2012; Martin, 2007; Bourn, 2014b). This suggests that for schools to have a successful link, great care must be taken to ensure there is equality in the partnership, regular dialogue between the schools and a culture of mutual learning; in addition the question of fundraising or donations must be carefully thought out (Hillier, 2006; Burr, 2008; Bourn, 2014b; Martin, 2007; Pyle, 2015).

### **3 Methodological approach**

I adopted an action-research approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) in this study. I used this approach to assess the impact of a sequence of activities designed to challenge pupils' perceptions of Africa to see if this had an impact on their perceptions of their partner school in Malawi. Reflection and analysis of the data would then inform future global learning teaching practice.

At the time this research was carried out, the school's joint curriculum project with our partner school was focused on inequality'. During the period of time the research was being undertaken, pupils continued to explore issues of inequality; however, there was no specific mention of our partner school, to ensure that any change in their perceptions was a result of the activities they carried out rather than acquiring any new knowledge of their partner school. Some of the activities referred to Malawi along with other African countries, but Malawi was accorded no special significance.

The research used the same qualitative and quantitative methods to assess pupils' perceptions at the beginning and at the end of this project.

#### **3.1 Data collection methods**

Before the research was started, I discussed the purpose of it with the pupils, emphasising to them that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.

Using an activity from 'How do we know it's working?' (Allum et al., 2008), pupils were given an outline drawing of Africa, and asked to draw and write anything they knew about this continent. They were encouraged to do this in pairs or groups, however a few pupils chose to do this on their own. This activity provides both qualitative and quantitative data, as comments can be classified under different headings, for example: natural environment; economic; culture; etc., and the percentages of comments in each section can then be calculated.

This activity was again repeated on the same day, but this time, using a blank piece of paper, pupils were asked to write and draw everything they knew about our partner school. Analysis of this activity used the same format as before.

These activities were designed to find out what pupils know and think about Africa. Ideally there should be a balance of comments across the categories that demonstrates an awareness of the diversity in all aspects of life in any African country. As we know from previous research, many pupils hold stereotypical perceptions of Africa (Wiegand, 1992; Graham and Lynn, 1989; Disney, 2004; Scoffham, 1999). When the activities were repeated at the end of the study, pupils' responses would indicate whether the global learning activities had had an impact on their understanding and awareness of the diversity within and between African countries, and had challenged their preconceived perceptions.

All pupils taking part in this research were then given a questionnaire that consisted of nine questions using Likert scale answers; these were mostly four- or five-level responses. There were also three questions that provided more qualitative data: the reasons for their response; the purpose of the link with our partner school; and how they felt about our partner school. Finally they were asked to list the reasons why they felt equal or not equal with the partner school.

The activities outlined above, including the questionnaire, were anonymous, which meant I couldn't track individual pupils' responses. In addition, five pupils were absent for the repeat

activities, which equated to 6%. Some pupils, particularly the younger children, did not answer all the questions, which may also have had a small impact on the results.

This research took place over eight weeks. The first week involved collecting baseline assessments of pupils' perceptions using the methods outlined above.

Over the next six weeks, pupils and teachers took part in six activities that were designed to challenge their assumptions of people and places, and to begin to question critically what they know or what they see. These activities drew on the work of Kolb's learning cycle (1984) in that pupils in each class reviewed what they knew or understood in groups, they then discussed as a class, reflecting on new ideas or new information that was given to challenge their ideas; the three classes then gathered together to share their new ideas, where opportunities were given for pupils and teachers to test these out.

The last week was spent collecting data using the same methods as above. These were then analysed to see if pupils' perceptions had changed as a consequence of these activities.

## **3.2 Ethical considerations**

All data collected in this research was anonymous. Pupils were only asked to say whether they were male or female on the questionnaire, and as a result it was felt that consent from parents/carers would not be needed. All participating staff gave their informed consent to this research. The school and the partner school have been anonymised.

## **3.3 School and sample**

This research was undertaken in a small village primary school that is situated near a large commuter town in the South East of England. There is little ethnic diversity and most pupils are from middle-class backgrounds. All 83 Key Stage 2 pupils took part in the research, with an equal mix of male and female pupils.

## **3.4 Activities**

In the next section I outline the activities that pupils took part in.

### **3.4.1 Week one: Manipulating opinions**

For the first week, we looked at how opinions can be manipulated.

In groups, pupils were given contrasting pictures of the same country (they weren't told they were the same country) and asked to discuss where they thought they were from.

After they shared their ideas, pupils learnt that the images were from the same country. They were then asked who might have taken the pictures and why, and what a true picture of Malawi was.

When the three classes had discussed their conclusions together, they were presented with two more pictures and were asked again where they thought they were taken and why.

### **3.4.2 Week two: Stereotypes**

In groups pupils were asked to discuss stereotypes and prejudice, and then as a class to come to an agreement on definitions.

They then discussed why stereotypes and prejudice are harmful. For example, they are often based on faulty information, they get in the way of knowing people as individuals, and they can lead to serious misunderstandings.

Pupils were told that even though it is easy to fall into the habit of using stereotypes to pre-judge people, there are ways to reduce stereotypes and combat prejudice. One way is to check our own thinking – to be careful of jumping to conclusions based on generalisations or others' opinions. Another way is to challenge stereotypes politely when we hear them by offering evidence that the stereotype is false.

The teacher modelled some statements that 'bust' the men-hate-to-cook-stereotype, for example:

- I don't like to stereotype, so I can't agree with you. My brother makes the best bread I've ever tasted.
- I don't like to stereotype, so I can't agree with you. I'm sure there are many men who like to cook.

Definitions were agreed together: judging someone or something before knowing it is actually true; making a judgement without knowing everything; jumping to conclusions; assuming everyone or everything is the same.

This stereotypical statement was read out and pupils asked to 'stereo-bust' it.

- Women make the best nurses because they are more caring.

Responses: some men could be more caring than women; good nursing isn't about caring, it's about efficiency; a man might be more intelligent and be able to look after people better.

Finally pupils were asked to reflect on the following:

- Do we get into the habit of stereotyping?
- Stereotyping could be built into the history/culture of a country.
- Are there stereotypical images of whole racial/religious groups?

### **3.4.3 Week three: Bias in the media**

Pupils were asked to discuss how we are influenced by the media. For example, do they want certain types of trainers because of adverts; and are they put off going on a train because of a train crash on the news? They were asked to give an example of a time when they had been influenced by advertisements, newspapers or the television.

After the class fed back, all the groups were given the same picture and some groups were asked to think up a positive caption for it while the other groups a negative caption.

After the classes had shared their ideas together, two more pictures were shown with ideas taken for positive and negative captions followed by a short discussion about the implications of believing everything that you read.

### **3.4.4 Week four: Where is this place?**

This activity was based on an idea taken from one of Oxfam's Global Citizenship themes.

Each group was given a set of statements and asked what country they refer to and why they thought this (they are all descriptions of England from Kenyan (A, C) and Greek (B, D) children).

**Table 1: Descriptions of England from Kenyan and Greek children**

<b>A</b>	They eat frogs and snakes. There are no pickpockets. There are no black people. Guns come from there.
<b>B</b>	There are big forests. They have large roads. They have beautiful coins. They have very tall mountains.
<b>C</b>	Their policemen wear red and black uniforms. They live in flats. There are many factories. There are lots of churches and hospitals.
<b>D</b>	There are lots of old things. They have a nice climate. There are many shops. It has a large population. The people speak a beautiful language

A spokesperson from each group fed back on what country they thought was being referred to and why they thought this. The results were:

### **Year 3**

- A – Germany – lots of guns still from war
- B – Brazil – they have big forests
- C – Brazil or Russia – they are big countries
- D – Fiji – (boy's name) told us about it

### **Year 4/5**

- A – Afghanistan – guns come from there because there was a big war there
- B – Japan – they have all these things, we've seen it on the news
- C – Hong Kong – police wear uniforms and there are lots of factories
- D – Spain – there are lots of old things there

### **Year 5/6**

- A – France – they eat frogs
- B – Switzerland – there are big mountains and lots of forests
- C – Canada – police wear a red/black uniform
- D – Italy – nice climate, lovely language

After all groups had given their reasons, the answer was revealed. They were then asked if they were surprised and where these children had got their views from. The idea of stereotypes was discussed having first been brought up by one of the children.

### **3.4.5 Week five: Did you know?**

As a class, pupils were asked various questions, for example:

- Which famous African people can you name?
- What industries do you know of in African countries?
- What kind of factories are there?
- Do people in African countries have the same technology as us?

In groups, pupils were given 'fascinating facts' about Africa or African countries. They then shared these facts with the rest of class.

For example:

- Did you know ... Nigeria has its own communications satellite?
- Did you know... that in 2004 the Opportunity International Bank of Malawi introduced the use of special cash cards that read your fingerprints to check your identity?
- Did you know... that every year Nigeria produces more movies than the UK or the USA?
- Did you know... that in Kenya you can make payments, receive your wages and save money using your mobile phone?

One member of each group related the fascinating facts to the rest of Key Stage 2 pupils. After this they were asked if they knew any of these facts before, whether they were surprised and, if they were, why they hadn't associated these facts with Africa.

### **3.4.6 Week six: Images of Africa**

For the last week, all three classes started together. They were shown pictures of various contrasting parts of Africa and asked to suggest where they were from.

There followed a general discussion about how Africa is portrayed and why. Pupils were then shown the Africa-for-Norway radi-aid video.<sup>1</sup> This is a spoof charity single asking Africans to donate radiators to Norway.

In the discussion after the video it quickly became apparent that the KS2 pupils were too young to really appreciate this video. They couldn't see how it challenged the image of Africans despite a considerable amount of prompting and questioning.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://africasacountry.com/2012/11/radi-aid-africa-for-norway/>

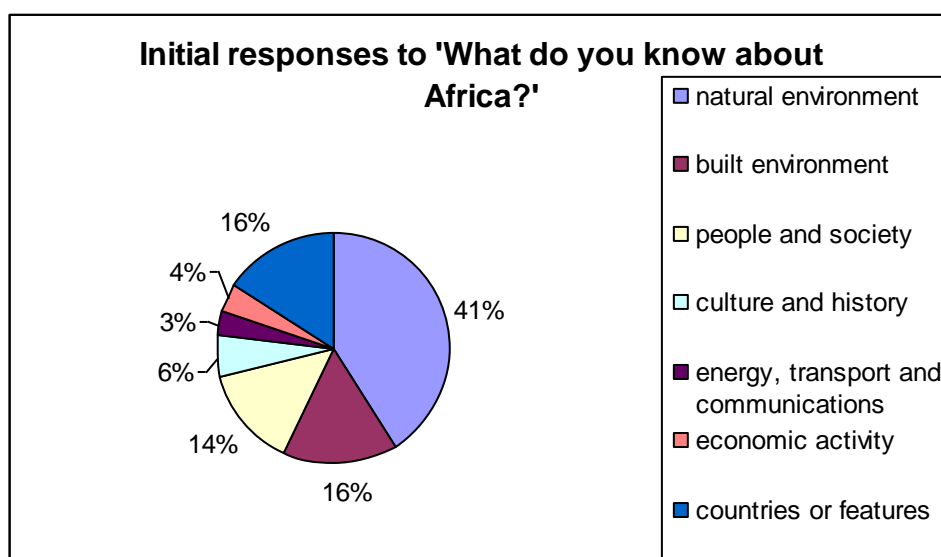
## 4 Findings

This section looks at pupils' initial perceptions of Africa and their partner school, and then, by comparing their responses to those collected after the activities, assessing the impact of these activities on their perceptions. Repeat responses to the questionnaire will give an indication as to whether activities that challenge stereotypical images engender a more critical understanding of global learning issues. 83 pupils took part in the initial responses and 78 in the repeated responses.

### 4.1 What do you know about Africa?

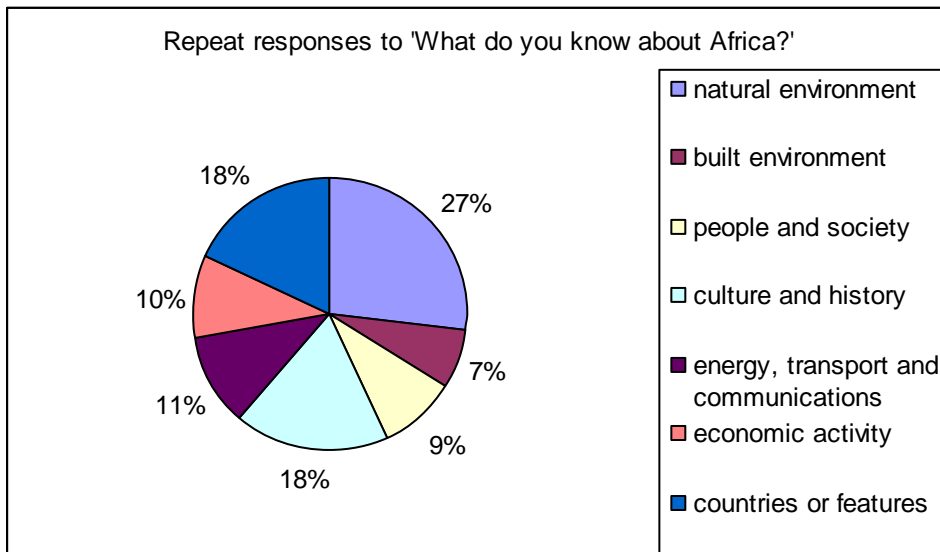
In this section we look at pupils' perceptions of Africa, and how these changed before and after the activities, using the resource from Allum et al. (2008) as described previously.

**Figure 1: Initial responses to 'What do you know about Africa?'**



The comments recorded in the initial activity (Figure 1) clearly show pupils had a narrow perception of Africa. Almost half of the responses concerned the natural environment and tended to be either a list of the animals found in parts of Africa, or comments about the weather being 'boiling hot', although there was evidence that some pupils had an awareness of the different natural landscapes in Africa, referring to shrub land, deserts, rivers and forests (Appendix 1). Comments about the built environment, and people and society were the most negative, with references to poor people, poverty and mud huts. There was only a small percentage of comments (13%) about culture and history, economic activity, and energy and transport.

**Figure 2: Repeat responses to 'What do you know about Africa?'**



As can be seen in Figure 2, comments were more equally balanced across all the categories in the repeat activity. There were fewer references to poor people or houses and more positive comments. Many pupils had included the names of African football players. In addition, pupils demonstrated a greater awareness of other famous people from Africa. The increase of comments about communication technology is unsurprising because one of the activities pupils took part in concerned surprising facts about innovative technology being used in many African countries. However, what was surprising were the comments about children starting school at seven o'clock, only moving class if they pass their exams, and the naming of many more different countries and features found in Africa (Appendix 1). These had not been part of the activities.

**Figure 3: Responses to 'What do you know about Africa?'**

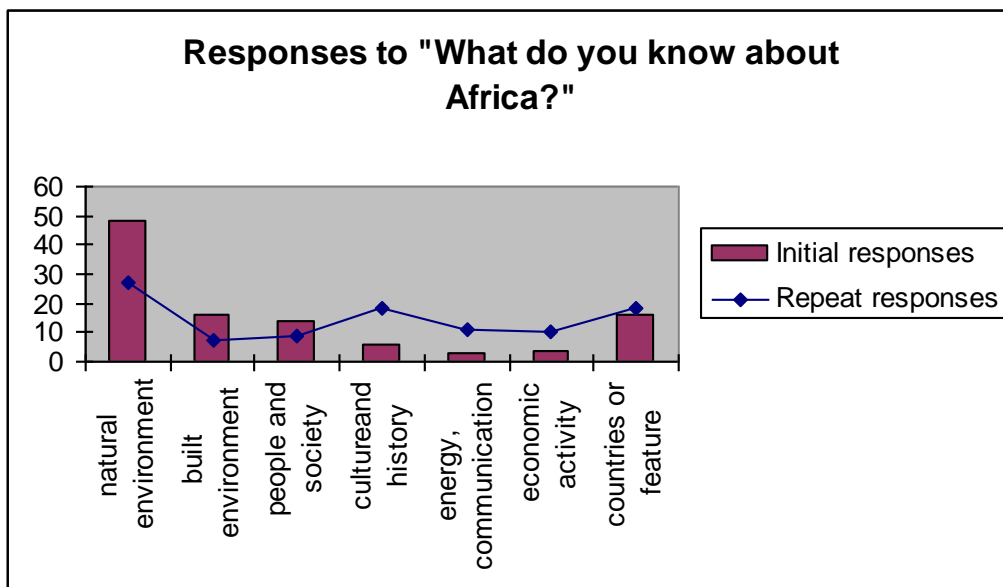


Figure 3 shows the initial and repeat responses to 'What do you know about Africa?', and the comparison between the different types of responses can be observed.



## 4.2 What would you see at our partner school?

This activity was designed to see if the activities challenging pupils' perceptions of Africa had an impact on how they viewed their partner school in Malawi. The activity was very similar to the previous one, except pupils were given a blank sheet of paper to draw and write about what they would see at their partner school.

**Figure 4: Initial responses to 'What would you see at our partner school?'**

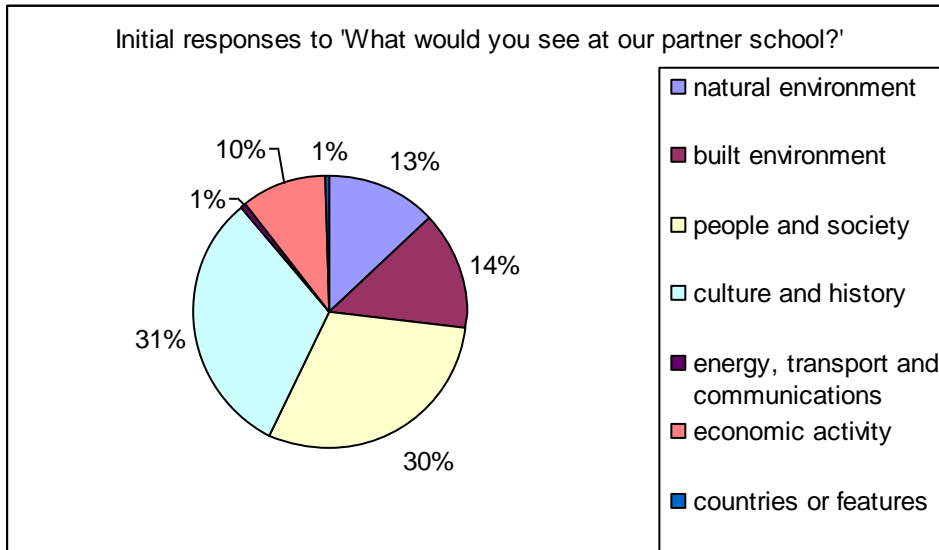


Figure 4 shows pupils' initial responses to 'What would you see at our partner school?' Apart from culture and history and economic activity, there is a fairly even response throughout the categories. There are a number of negative responses (Appendix 1) that refer to it being a poor country, there not being very clean water, no taps, no shoes, not good hospitals, people not being able to afford to buy food, no cars and no phones.

**Figure 5: Repeat responses to 'What would you see at our partner school?'**

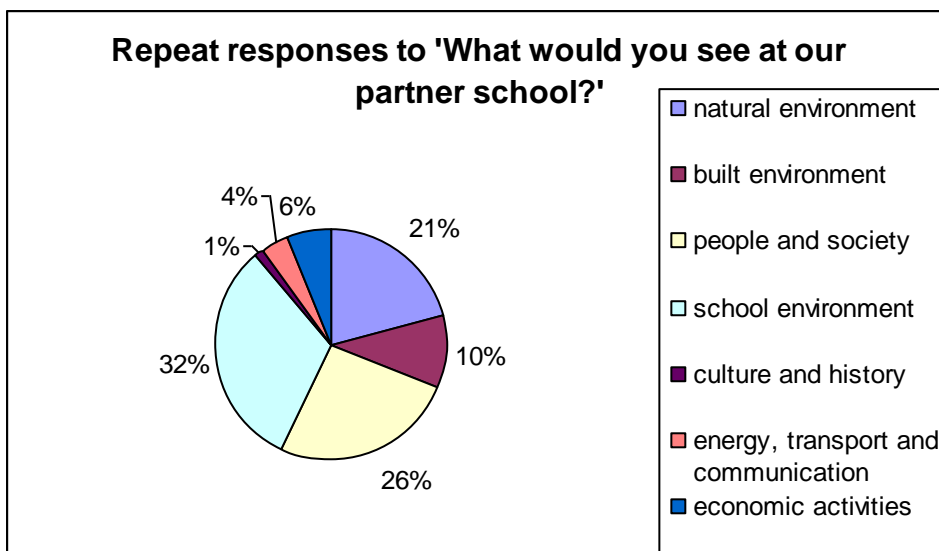


Figure 5 shows the repeat responses to 'What would you see at our partner school?'. There is little difference in pupils' repeat responses in Figure 5, although there are more comments about economic activities and these mostly concern farming. What is significant is the fall in

negative responses (Appendix 1). There were some – there is no fresh water, not having proper clothes, not as much money – however these were in the minority.

**Figure 6: Responses to ‘What would you see at our partner school?’**

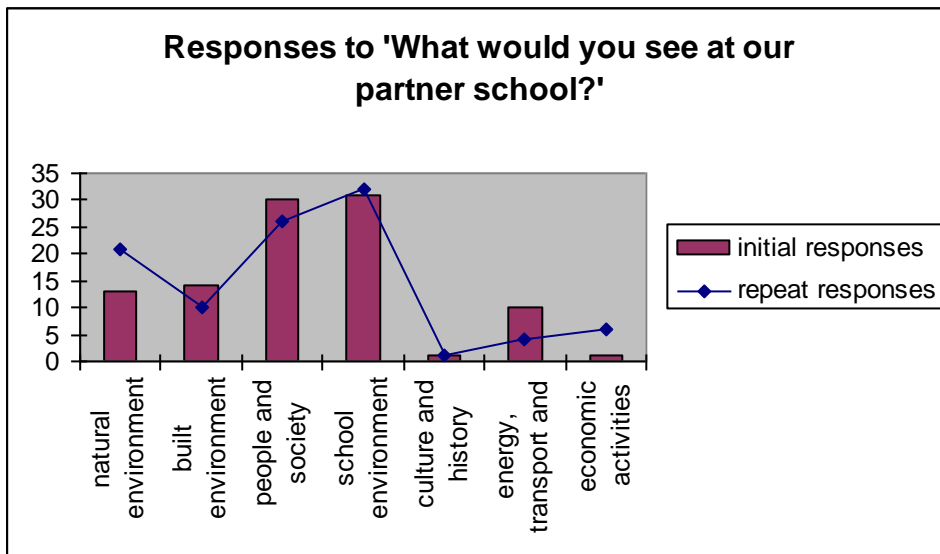


Figure 6 shows the initial and repeated responses to ‘What would you see at our partner school?’, and the comparison between the different types of responses can be observed.

### 4.3 Questionnaire responses about other countries

In the following section, I describe pupils’ questionnaire responses. 83 pupils completed the initial questionnaire and 78 completed the final one. The questionnaire began by asking about other countries in general, it then moved on to asking questions about Malawi before focusing the questions on their partner school in Malawi (see Appendix 3).

#### 4.3.1 Questionnaire responses about learning about people in other countries

Pupils were asked about learning about people in other countries. In the initial questionnaire shown in Figure 7 below, 82% of pupils agreed or agreed strongly with the question: do you think it is important that we learn about how people live in other countries? This percentage increased by 5% in the final questionnaire and the number of pupils who answered ‘strongly agree’ rose by 20%. Whereas nine pupils were not sure when questioned initially, only one was unsure in the final questionnaire. What is surprising is that, when first questioned, 4% of pupils disagreed or disagreed strongly. In the final one, 11% disagreed or disagreed strongly. The reason for this is unclear, although the data shows that more pupils disagreed in the lower Key Stage than in the upper.

**Figure 7: Is it important that we learn about how people live in other countries?**



Pupils were asked to comment on the reasons for their response. Approximately 75% of the baseline responses focused on learning:

- we need to know what is happening in other countries
- to improve our knowledge
- to learn about people different from us – you might need this knowledge
- it is good to learn about other countries because you might go to that country and not know what to do.

Just over 10% of the comments were negative:

- because you don't want disease to happen to you
- some countries are not nice
- other countries might be poor and ill.

10% of comments talked about helping other countries:

- to stop them being poor
- to help them.

Three pupils thought the reason we should learn about other countries was to help them appreciate how lucky they were.

In the final questionnaire, over 80% of the comments focused on learning. There was only one negative comment:

- If you go on holiday to different countries, you need to know if there is corruption there.

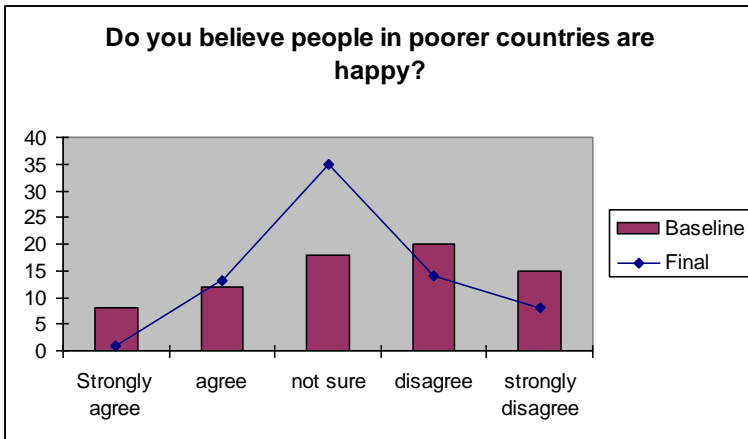
There was a slight increase in referring to 'helping' other countries:

- if something bad happens, we can help them
- to help the poor.

#### 4.3.2 Questionnaire responses on perceptions of people in other countries, in particular in Malawi

In the questionnaire, pupils were asked if they believed people in poorer countries were happy; their initial responses and their responses after the intervention can be found in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Do you believe people in poorer countries are happy?**



While the number of children who disagreed that people in poorer countries were happy fell in the final questionnaire, what is notable is the increase in pupils who were not sure: rising from 25% to 49%. Arguably, this marks a positive attitudinal change because it demonstrates that pupils are not equating lack of economic resources with happiness. It could be argued that this illustrates that they are viewing people as individuals with different circumstances.

Figure 9 compares the initial responses and responses collected after the activities to how rich pupils thought people in Malawi are. In the initial questionnaire, 61% of pupils felt that most people in Malawi were poor; this fell to 30% in the final questionnaire. The increase in responses to an 'even mix of rich and poor' and 'don't know' suggests pupils are increasingly aware of the diversities found within countries.

**Figure 9: How rich are people in Malawi?**

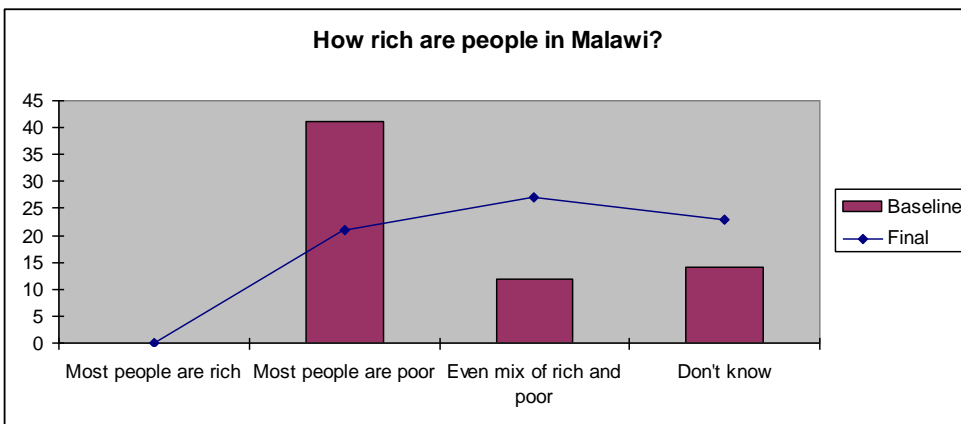
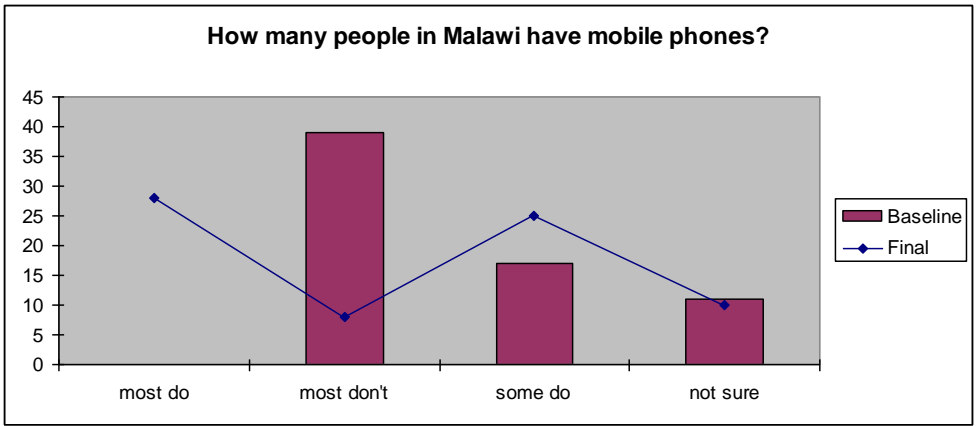


Figure 10 shows the initial and final pupils' responses to how many people have mobile phones in Malawi. While the number of pupils who were not sure how many people in Malawi have mobile phones hasn't really changed that much, the number of pupils who felt that most people did not have them fell from 57% to 11%. When first questioned, no pupils thought that most people in Malawi had mobile phones, however, in the final questionnaire, 39% thought they did.

**Figure 10: How many people in Malawi have mobile phones?**

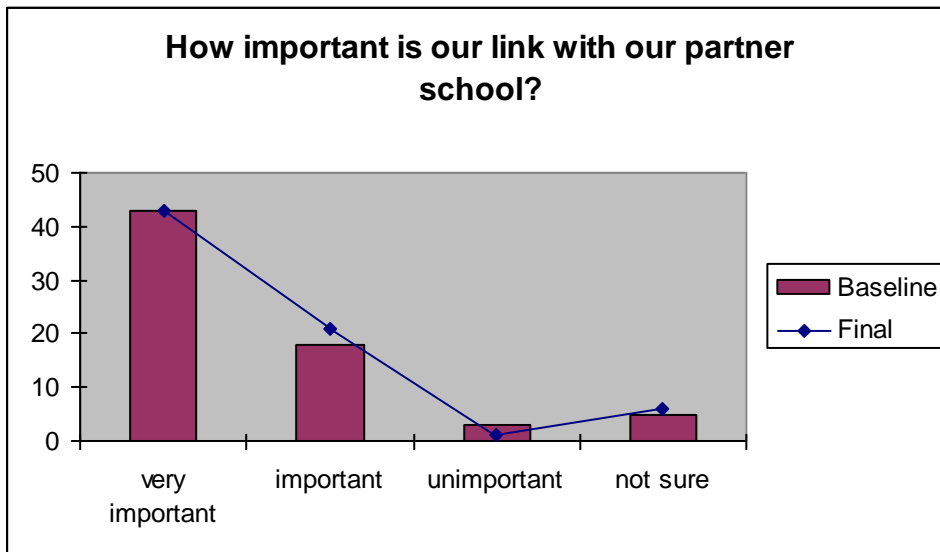


**4.4 Questionnaire responses about link school and community**

**4.4.1 How important is our link with our partner school?**

Figure 11 illustrates how pupils view our link with our partner school in terms of importance. This remained unchanged between questionnaires, with the majority of pupils viewing it as important.

**Figure 11: How important is our link with our partner school?**



Pupils were asked to comment on what the purpose of the partnership was.

In the initial questionnaire, 64% of baseline responses were about learning from each other:

- learn about them so they don't seem so far away
- to see what life is like there
- learn and teach each other
- help their and our education.

21% referred to us helping our partner school:

- help them raise money
- donate money
- help them lead a happy life.

8% of responses referred to friendship:

- friends – it is a welcoming family
- friendship.

4% mentioned the purpose was to make us realise how lucky we are.

4% of responses were classified as negative:

- they are poor
- not a good partnership.

In the final questionnaire, responses referring to learning were 75%:

- share what we do and they share with us
- to understand how different countries live and learn, and to help us decide if the world is an unequal place
- to compare learning
- share ideas.

Only 11% mentioned helping our partner school:

- how they survive and how we help them
- to help them.

7% mentioned friendship and 7% felt the purpose was to 'understand how lucky we are'.

There were no comments that I classified as negative.

#### 4.4.2 How clean is the water at our partner school?

Pupils were asked how clean the water was at their partner school. This question was included because one of our previous joint curriculum projects with the partner school was about water. Again, Figure 12 shows there is very little change in pupils' responses apart from a rise of 9% of pupils who felt there was some clean and some dirty water.

Figure 12: How clean is the water at our partner school?

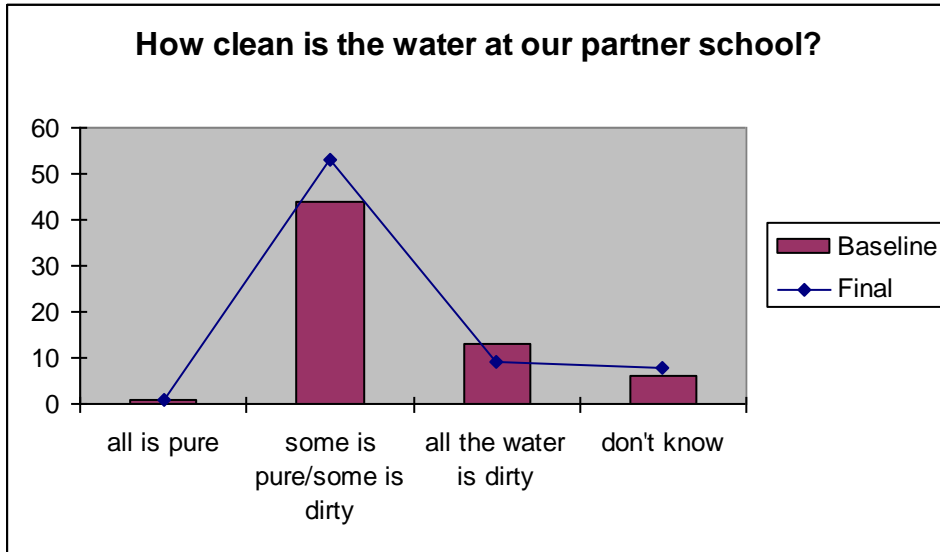
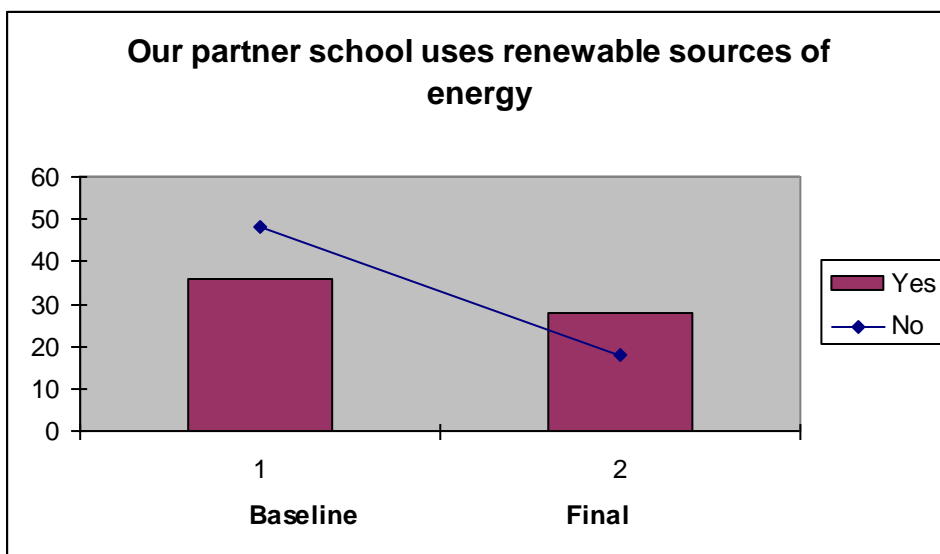


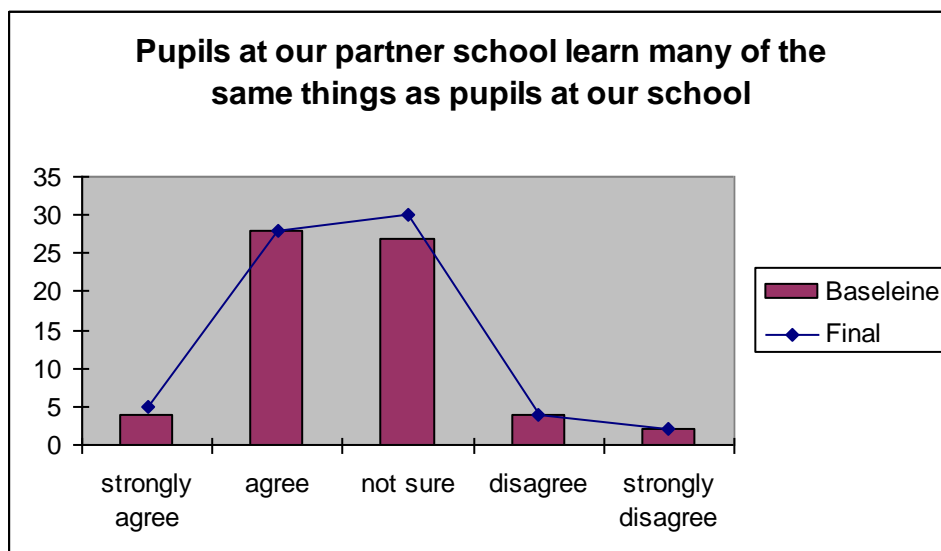
Figure 13 shows pupils' responses to questions about renewable sources of energy. Energy had been our joint curriculum project in the previous year and I wouldn't have expected the responses to change because our focus had moved to inequality. However, 17% more pupils thought our partner school used renewable energy sources in the final questionnaire than in the first one. Indeed, they have solar panels and, in the previous year, pupils saw pictures of how they are planting trees to replace trees used for firewood.

Figure 13: Our partner school uses renewable sources of energy



Our pupils were asked whether they learned the same things as pupils at our partner school. The responses to this question in Figure 14 remain largely unchanged between the two questionnaires.

**Figure 14: Pupils at our partner school learn many of the same things as pupils at our school**



Pupils were then asked how they felt when they looked at pictures, or heard about life, at the partner school.

In the initial questionnaire:

25% of comments referred to feeling sad:

- sad they don't have much.

21% of comments were positive:

- happy to learn
- happy to see them, they are always smiling
- good – I want to know more about them.

21% referred to feeling sorry for them:

- upset and sorry for them
- sorry they have bad houses.

14% mentioned feeling happy and sad:

- sad how they live, but they look happy
- sad but they are still as happy as us.

13% of the comments referred to feeling lucky:

- I feel lucky we have clean water.

5% mentioned helping them:

- feel sometimes they need a bit of help
- I want to donate lovely things.

In the final questionnaire:

31% of pupils used the word 'sad'.



28% referred to feeling happy and sad. As one comment said, 'confused because some people have more money than others and that's not fair. We should all be equal.'

17% of the comments were classified as positive:

- interested because they have a different life
- slightly jealous because they get to work outside
- shocked sometimes about how much we have in common.

14% used the word 'sorry'.

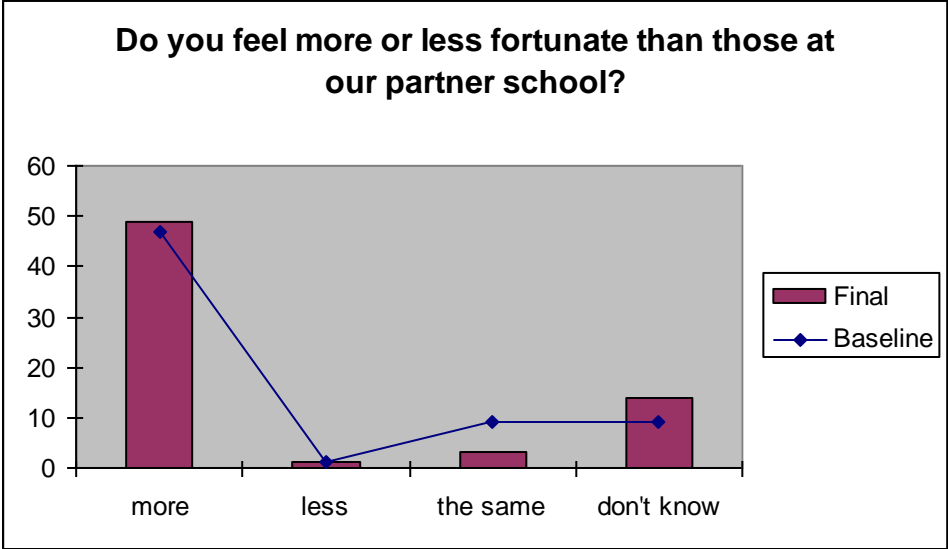
7% mentioned feeling lucky.

Only one comment mentioned the word help:

- I wish I could help them.

Pupils were then asked whether they felt more or less fortunate than those at our partner school. Figure 15 shows their responses to this question are very similar between questionnaires, the only change being in the final questionnaire: 8% less pupils didn't know, while 8% more pupils felt the same.

**Figure 15: Do you feel more or less fortunate than those at our partner school?**



Pupils were then asked to give their reasons.

In the baseline questionnaire, nearly all the responses referred to having more than our partner school, this included: money; bigger houses; electronics and clean water. Only three comments omitted any reference to these: 'we are the same, we have loving families'; 'I don't know. I don't know them'; 'They are happy'.

In the final questionnaire most responses again mentioned having more, however 26% acknowledged that at times our partner school may be more fortunate or the same: 'They are sometimes more fortunate than us and sometimes we are, so it evens it out'; 'All have good and bad points'.

The final question asked pupils to list the ways they felt equal and unequal with our partner school, and responses can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2: Pupils' perceptions of how they feel equal to pupils in our partner school**

Base Line		Final	
Equal	Unequal	Equal	Unequal
school house friends teachers people family	money water don't walk to school food hard jobs time we start school computer weather clothes cooking houses	friends homes school sports happiness people phones family rights cars	right to be safe doctors population money water food computers television electronics school equipment class size people look down on them rainy season

Table 2 shows pupils' responses to the instruction: 'Our joint curriculum project this year is inequality. List the ways you feel equal and unequal with our partner school.' Responses to this were hard to quantify at times, I felt that some of the responses were about difference rather than inequality; for example, the weather and the time we start school. In the final questionnaire, pupils listed more things they felt equal with our partner school, however they also thought of more things that were unequal too. It is hard to say whether this difference was a result of the activities we did or our joint curriculum project.

## 5 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to see if using a critical approach to pupils' images and perceptions of Africa would help them 'unlearn' their preconceived ideas and would then help them to view their partner school in Malawi through different 'frames' (Lakoff, 2006).

Initial responses to 'What do you know about Africa?' are consistent with research (Borowski, 2011; Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007) that claims the media is responsible for dominant representations of Africa. Pupils had a very narrow interpretation of Africa that focused on animals, 'hot sun' and poverty.

However, the repeated responses, collected after pupils had taken part in activities that challenged these stereotypical views, demonstrated a much wider interpretation of Africa. Pupils' responses covered more areas; they were able to name more countries and economic activities – with an increase of culture and historical responses – and relied less on the natural environment. The fact that pupils referred to countries and made references to information that hadn't been included in the activities – 'they start school at seven o'clock' – raises many questions. Is it possible that, by raising awareness of the diversity found within Africa and drawing their attention to many positive aspects of Africa, pupils were then able to draw on their knowledge of Africa rather than rely on stereotypical representations that dominated their thinking? Have they begun to think more critically about images and perceptions, and to rely more on their own knowledge and understanding of Africa rather than that which is portrayed in the media? Will it impact on their responses to charity appeals? If we didn't continue to encourage critical thinking of images and perceptions over the next six months, would their responses revert to the initial ones? If we now move the focus to gender inequality, will pupils be able to transfer their questioning of dominant images and perceptions to this issue, or will their initial responses be the easy option of those that they have been exposed to in the media or the social norms of their socio-economic group? It would be interesting to repeat this activity in a few months' time to see whether real attitudinal change has taken place or whether wide-held perceptions of Africa again dominate their initial responses.

Pupils' initial responses to 'What would you see at our partner school?' also illustrated negative perceptions, with repeated reference to what they didn't have, rather than what they did have. Responses to 'What is the purpose of our partnership?' reveal a paternalistic attitude, with 21% referring to 'helping them'. This supports the postcolonial discourse that argues that school linking reinforces colonial power relations and stereotypes (Martin, 2007; Burr, 2008; Disney, 2008; Bourne, 2014b). The repeat responses are interesting; there is a rise in the number of comments about the natural environment, however these tended to be about the weather and rainy seasons rather than a list of animals. The built environment comments referred to the houses found there; they stated what they were made of, but did not use any negative language to describe them; just observations of what they were like. Comments that were categorised as 'people and society' referred to 'not as much money'; 'don't have proper clothes' and 'not fresh water', however these only constituted 2% of the comments compared with 14% negative comments in the initial responses. What was interesting was that almost all the negative comments in the repeated responses were from Year 3 pupils, the youngest taking part in this research. There were fewer comments regarding 'energy, communication and transport' and 'economic activity', however, again, these were observations rather than negative comments – for example, 'walk to school' rather than 'walk a long way'. It can therefore be argued that by focusing on positive aspects of Africa and encouraging critical thinking about what they know, pupils were able to transfer this to their perceptions of their partner school.

It seems that what has emerged from this research is that pupils were becoming more accepting of difference rather than viewing it as the 'Other'. It can therefore be argued that activities that challenge stereotypical images do engender a more critical understanding of global learning

issues in pupils; however one concern that I have is pupils' responses to 'It is important we learn about how people live in other countries'. These tended to be 'to learn more'; 'so we know what is happening there' or 'in case we visit that country'. Should we be more explicit about the importance of global learning? Emphasise that in a few years they may be meeting, working, communicating with people from very different cultures; making decisions about global matters or being affected by global events? Would KS2 pupils be able to understand the implications of this?

This has been a very useful piece of research for our school and has wider implications for how other schools approach global learning. This research supports the argument that in order to have an 'ethical encounter with the other', pupils and teachers need to unlearn their preconceived perceptions first (Spivak, cited in Andreotti, 2007). It also raises many more questions about the nature of global learning and its importance in schools if paternalistic and stereotypical attitudes are to be challenged.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Responses to ‘What do you know about Africa?’

Type of response	Initial responses	% of total responses	Repeat responses	% of total responses
<b>Natural environment</b>	Landscape: desert, lakes, savannah, deltas, rivers, jungles, beach Climate: hot Animals: giraffe, elephants, lions, leopards, zebra Plants: sweet corn, mangoes, crops, trees, palm trees, sunflowers	48%	Landscape: deserts, jungles, beaches, rivers, savannahs, rainforests Climate: mostly hot Animals: zebras, wildebeests, crocodiles, elephants, lions Plants: cocoa beans, lemons, palm trees, crops, bananas, sweetcorn	27%
<b>Built environment</b>	Huts, mud houses, schools, rich areas with tall buildings, villages, supermarkets, shops	16%	Farms, schools, lots of cities	7%
<b>People and society</b>	Water pumps, poor people, Ebola, jolly music, black people, poverty, friendly people	14%	50% rich 50% poor, war, brown skin, large populations, black skin but some people are white, go to school at seven o'clock, dirty water, play football, if they don't pass their exams they don't move classes, Ebola, water pumps, poor houses, showers, friends	9%
<b>Culture and history</b>	Pyramids, Nelson Mandela, temples	6%	Cleopatra, Nelson Mandela, first heart transplant was in South Africa, pyramids, Desmond Tutu, Mo Farah, Bollywood (probably a reference to Hollywood)	18%
<b>Energy, transport and communications</b>	Sandy roads, cars, ferry port, boats	3%	Electricity, solar panels, mobile phones, satellites, bumpy roads, good technology, finger scan technology, super-fast broadband	11%
<b>Economic activity</b>	Diamonds, gems, markets, safaris	4%	Oil, tourism, diamonds and minerals, gold, poor countries in the middle due to less trade that means less wealth, money on phones, more movies made than in US and UK, get resources from other countries, banks, bank machines, restaurants, shops	10%
<b>Countries or features</b>	South Africa, Zambia, Sahara Desert, Cape Town, equator, Niagara Falls (probably meant Victoria Falls), Ghana, Malawi, Madagascar, Egypt	16%	Egypt, Cameroon, Congo, Kenya, Sahara, South Africa, Zambia, Nigeria, Lake Victoria, Malawi, Kalahari desert, Mt. Kilimanjaro, Somalia, Africa is a big continent, Zimbabwe, (link) school, Madagascar, Cape Town, Ivory Coast	18%

## Appendix 2: Responses to ‘What would you see at our partner school?’

Type of response	Initial responses	% of total responses	Repeat responses	% of total responses
<b>Natural environment</b>	Forests, very hot even in winter, dry and wet season, rivers have crocodiles, snakes, cows, goats, lions	13%	Lots of sun, rainy season, lake, river, elephant, giraffe, animals, trees, very hot	21%
<b>Built environment</b>	Open-air buildings, schools and homes made of bricks and mud, lots of villages, live in bad homes, outside toilets, they don't have tall buildings, homes not the same as ours	14%	Corrugated iron roofs, mud bricks, stick houses, hut homes, mud houses	10%
<b>People and society</b>	No iPads, water pumps, lots of people, cook on stoves, dark skin, grow lots of crops, poor country, happiness, not very clean water, no taps, no shoes, not good hospitals, can't afford to buy food	30% (14% negative)	Water pumps, not fresh water, don't have proper clothes, happy, different colour skin, eat beans, not as much money	26% (2% negative)
<b>School lessons, resources, sport</b>	Education, assemblies under trees, good teachers, more pupils than our sister school, 100 pupils in each class, desks, chalk boards, black boards, click instead of putting hands up, red and blue uniform, we all have lessons, they learn different things, play sports, football, they start school earlier than us, they are the best netballers	32%	More children in school, day starts at seven o'clock, blackboards, sit on floor, click fingers when they put their hand up, assemblies sometimes outside, share our learning, not the same facilities, lots of teachers, bigger class sizes, they change class based on knowledge not age, football	33%
<b>Culture and history</b>	Different language	0.5%	Used to be a colony	0.5%
<b>Energy, transport and communications</b>	Walk a long way, lots of walking, no cars, they have solar panels, electricity, no phones	10%	Fire to cook, solar panels to provide energy, mobile phones, walk to school	4%
<b>Economic activity</b>	Markets	0.5%	Farms, grow crops	6%

## Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Here are some questions for you to answer



Please answer honestly

Please tick the correct box.

1. I am a boy  a girl

2. What year are you in? Year \_\_\_\_\_

For the next questions, please tick just 1 box for each question. Think carefully about your answers.

3. It is important we learn about how people live in other countries

strongly agree      agree      not sure      disagree      strongly disagree

Please say why you think this:

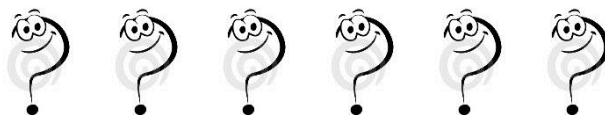
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4. Do you believe that people who live in poorer countries are happy?

strongly agree      agree      not sure      disagree      strongly disagree





5. How rich are people in Malawi?

most people  
are rich

most people  
are poor

even mix of rich  
and poor

don't know

6. How many people in Malawi have mobile phones?

most do

most don't

some do

not sure

7. How important is our link with our partner school?

very important

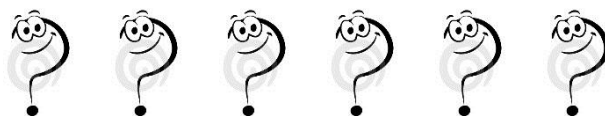
important in  
some areas

unimportant

don't know

8. What is the purpose of our partnership?

Write your comments in this box







9. How clean is the water at our link school?

all is pure	some is pure/some dirty	all the water is dirty	don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Our partner school uses renewable sources of energy.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If yes can you name them?

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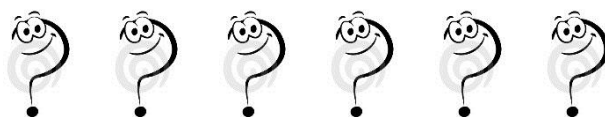
11. Pupils at our partner school learn many of the same things as pupils at (our school).

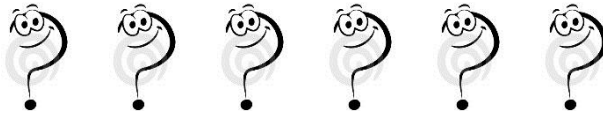
strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. How do you feel when you look at pictures, or hear about life at our partner school?

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13. Do you feel more or less fortunate than those at our partner school?

more

less

the same

don't know

Give your reasons

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14. Our joint curriculum project this year is inequality. List the ways you feel equal and unequal with our partner school:

Equal

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Unequal

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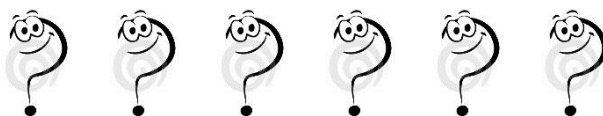
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Thank you for completing this questionnaire



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## About the author

Margaret Lewis was a primary school teacher in north-west Kent for over twelve years. She introduced and led global learning in her school and the school subsequently became a Global Learning Expert Centre providing CPD for twenty local schools as part of the GLP. She has completed a MA module in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, is an accredited 'Global Learning Lead Practitioner', and has taken part in research into school linking with the UCL Institute of Education. In October 2016, Margaret begins working for a UK charity; she will be based in Malawi where she will facilitate global learning in the schools there along with aiding communication between the UK schools and their partner schools in Malawi. Contact Margaret via email: [mlewis32@gmail.com](mailto:mlewis32@gmail.com)

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The Global Learning Programme (GLP) in England is a government-funded programme of support that is helping teachers in primary, secondary and special schools to deliver effective teaching and learning about development and global issues at Key Stages 2 and 3. It is being delivered by a team of organisations with complementary experience in supporting development education, the wider development sector and peer-led CPD for schools. For further information on the Global Learning Programme in England go to: [www.glp-e.org.uk](http://www.glp-e.org.uk) Information about the GLP in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found at: <https://globaldimension.org.uk/chooseglp>

**The Innovation Fund** is a GLP initiative to support research by school-based educators on a global learning theme. Its purpose is to encourage small-scale research to promote innovation in global learning, inform best practice and build capacity at school level. All Innovation Fund studies are practitioner-led, with research support provided as necessary by the Development Education Research Centre, UCL Institute of Education (IOE). For further information go to [www.glp-e.org.uk](http://www.glp-e.org.uk) and search under Research.

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