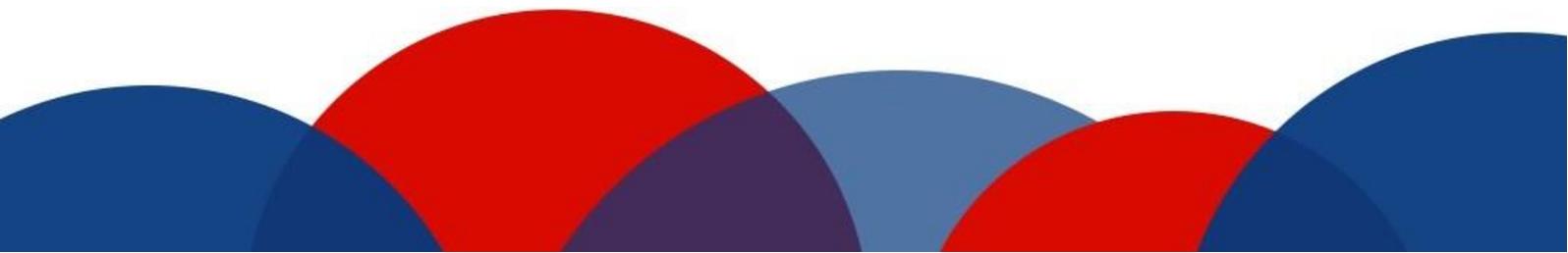


# **Towards an understanding of the contribution of global learning to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs**

**Ben Ballin, Ann McGuire and Laura Murphy**

**2018**

**Global Learning Programme  
Innovation Fund Research Series:  
Paper 4**



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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to explore the possible impact of global learning interventions on students' mental health and wellbeing. The study employed a mixed methods design, which consisted of student (N11) and teacher (N4) interviews, as well as a mental health and wellbeing questionnaire. The participants of this study all attended an autistic specific secondary school that served as a Global Learning Programme Expert Centre. The findings of the study indicated that students who participated in lessons that had a global learning focus, experienced a small but significant improvement in mental health and wellbeing. This small-scale study may lead to more extensive research in the area.

This report may be made available to the general public without the prior consent of the authors.

## Executive summary

This small-scale research project sought to gain a better understanding of the contribution of global learning to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs.

Focusing on four groups of young people aged 11–19 at a Birmingham special school, all with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), project researchers asked four key questions:

1. What global learning approaches can be used to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
2. In what ways can global learning be beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
3. Why is global learning beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
4. How might global learning approaches be better developed to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?

Four different global learning approaches were considered: in the humanities, looking at 'success stories' in development and human rights; in PSHE, discussing issues in the news; in Forest Schools, group work preparing food from different cultures in the outdoors; and in land-based studies, linking horse riding and non-verbal communications to a study of Native American culture.

The research team, comprising two teacher-researchers from the school supported by a global learning consultant, took an action research approach. They collected quantitative data that tracked pupil impacts and looked at qualitative data from pupil and teacher interviews. This was then subjected to data analysis, with findings forming the basis for proposed improvements to future practice.

The headline findings are as follows:

- There was a modest average improvement in mental health and wellbeing for pupils over the school term when the global learning activities took place. This improvement was not apparent in other comparable data from the school.
- This improvement was broadly consistent for all four of the teaching approaches used, which suggests any of these approaches are potentially beneficial.
- There was a slightly higher than average trend towards positive mental health and wellbeing among black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils.
- Young people with ASD typically experience difficulties with communication, relating to others and in how they experience the world. The approaches taken seem to have had benefits for all three aspects.
- People with ASD are at high risk of experiencing mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. The approaches undertaken also appear to have had some benefits in this respect.
  1. Eight cross-cutting themes emerged as potentially beneficial aspects of the global learning work:
  2. It can offer opportunities and contexts for learning outside the classroom, and thus for positive experiential encounters with the wider world.
  3. It can enable participation and a sense of agency, as global citizens, self-directed learners, and through the experience of group work.
  4. Global learning work offers an opportunity to engage with self, identity and culture, for example through validating achievements and supporting a positive self-image.
  5. The work can offer an opportunity for young people to explore their relationships with 'otherness' – a key element for young people who have already been 'othered' as 'special' and in helping them develop crucial competencies in relating to others.

6. It can help build confidence and self-esteem, in part because it encourages open exploration and a space away from those aspects of school life that can promote a fear of failure.
7. It boosts communication of all kinds, especially verbal communication: global learning's strong emphasis on dialogue and questioning thereby supporting another crucial competency.
8. It can help reduce anxiety and address misapprehensions about the world, for example: through its emphasis on critical thinking, examining evidence, promoting debate and offering counter-stereotypical narratives; and through an emphasis on 'success stories' rather than 'doom and gloom'.
9. It engages and motivates through affective learning, which in itself appears to have had beneficial impacts – *'we want to keep that fun thing going on'*.

In taking this work forward, researchers noted that simply asking the question about impacts on mental health and wellbeing made a difference, making teachers mindful of the possible consequences of different global learning approaches for ASD/SEN pupils.

The project raised questions about how the whole-school community can become more proactive in relation to mental health and wellbeing. It noted implications for whole-school planning and timetabling, including time for professional reflection and for joined-up planning across the school. It also noted a potential tension between the demands of formal assessment and the sort of looser and more experiential approaches that appear to have the greatest benefits for wellbeing and positive self-esteem.

Researchers felt that it would be particularly valuable to further explore relational approaches that put the needs and identities of ASD learners at the heart of the learning process, and that celebrate their unique abilities.

The project raised questions about how young people, especially those with ASD, use and interpret media sources, and whether this can result in a narrowly 'Americanised' view of the world.

This was a modest project that highlighted the need for further research in related areas. It raises questions about how far global learning practitioners as a whole are prepared to take on a radically learner-centred and inclusive practice, including valuing autistic perceptions of the world as a challenge to the norms of an allistic (non-autistic) majority.

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# 1 Introduction

This small-scale research project seeks to gain a better understanding of the contribution of global learning to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs.

At the time of writing, young people's wellbeing and mental health is a growing research field, which makes regular headline news (Frith, 2016; Coughlan, 2017; MQ Mental Health, 2017; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2017; Place2Be, 2017; Vaughan, 2017). However, very little has been written on the benefits of global learning for young people's mental health and wellbeing, and, as such, there is little or no research (Ballin, 2015; Hirst, 2011).

There is also limited material that addresses the mental health and wellbeing of young people with special educational needs (SEN), and what does exist is often of a medical rather than an educational nature (Deudney, 2004; Foley & Trollor, 2015; Ghaziuddin, 2005; Mazurek, 2014; Meehan, 2011; Pozo & Sarriá, 2015; Ratcliffe et al, 2015; Shochet et al, 2016).

Additionally, young people with SEN have been relatively neglected in research on global learning, although that is beginning to change. What has been written suggests that assumptions from 'mainstream' education do not always transfer well into SEN contexts (Edwards & Hunt, 2017; GLP-E, n.d.; Hunt, 2015; Rayment, 2017; Sellman, 2011). Indeed, Sotelo and Avila (2017) argue that the needs and rights of learners with disabilities pose a direct challenge to global education practices and values.

While it is unable to address all those questions in depth, this project nonetheless makes a contribution to that threefold gap in current understandings, while proposing some areas for further development.

Focusing on four groups of young people at a Birmingham special school, all with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and all engaged in work on global learning, project researchers asked four key questions:

1. What global learning approaches can be used to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
2. In what ways can global learning be beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
3. Why is global learning beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
4. How might global learning approaches be better developed to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?

The research project builds on the school's longstanding commitment to promoting quality global learning. At the time that the research was being carried out, this included classroom teaching, whole-staff CPD sessions and working as a Global Learning Programme (GLP)<sup>2</sup> Expert Centre<sup>3</sup> to develop its practice alongside other mainstream and special schools. Findings from the project will inform ongoing work at the school and within the cluster.

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<sup>2</sup> The Global Learning Programme (GLP) in England is a national programme that helps teachers in primary, secondary and special schools deliver effective teaching and learning about development and global issues at Key Stages 2 and 3. See: [www.glp-e.org.uk](http://www.glp-e.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Expert Centres in the GLP are schools that have a passion for, and expertise in, global learning and whole-school development. The main role of an Expert Centre is to build a local network of Partner Schools – like-minded schools who wish to make global learning an effective part of their curriculum. Each Expert Centre hosts a series of network CPD sessions to help their Partner Schools drive global learning across the curriculum and share best practice.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 The school

The school is:

*A special day and residential school for students aged 11 to 19 years, with autistic spectrum disorders and complex difficulties. The students cover a wide ability range (school website, 2017).*

Its curriculum is in line with the National Curriculum for England and emphasises breadth, cultural diversity, lifelong learning and the needs of individual students.

### 2.2 Autism

The National Autistic Society defines autism as:

*A lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them (2017).*

The broad term encompasses a wide range of needs, syndromes and degrees of disability, hence the use of the term 'autistic spectrum disorders' (ASD) by the school and in this report.

Education for young people with ASD pays close attention to each individual learner's needs, and therefore tends towards pupil-centred teaching approaches.

In pursuing its commitment to global learning, including this research project, the school had identified global learning as having particular potential benefits for the three key elements of: communications; relating to others; and especially young people's experience of the world around them.

*More than 70% of autistic people experience mental health problems such as anxiety or depression at some point in their lives (National Autistic Society, 2017).*

Mental health and wellbeing was therefore already a key concern at the school, and this placed in the foreground the school's need to understand whether global learning might make a positive contribution in that respect.

### 2.3 Global learning

The Global Learning Programme (GLP) in England defines global learning as follows:

*There are several definitions of the term 'global learning' and 'development education'. In the context of the Global Learning Programme, global learning encourages critical examination of global issues and an awareness of the impact that individuals can have on them (2017).*

As well as these components of real global issues, active citizenship and critical thinking, global learning typically involves a high degree of exploratory talk and group work, both of which the school felt were likely to be particularly beneficial for young people with ASD.

## 3 Methodology

The study investigates how the introduction of global learning approaches in four different subjects impacted on the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs.

The research team comprised two teacher-researchers from the school supported by a global learning consultant. The research combined elements of action learning and external evaluation. The four teachers conducting the interventions planned, implemented and reviewed their work, forming an action learning cycle. Their plans and reflections were shared with the research team via interviews (thus constituting qualitative data on the cycle).

The research team collected quantitative data that tracked pupil impacts and qualitative data from pupil interviews. The teacher and pupil data was then subjected to data analysis, with findings forming the basis for proposed improvements to future practice.

### **3.1 Global learning interventions**

Four global learning approaches were used, addressing a range of curriculum areas where the school felt there would be particular potential for trialling new global learning initiatives. The four approaches were:

#### **Humanities**

Pupils looked at ‘success stories’ of action on the environment and human rights, including interviewing a speaker from Amnesty International and researching how countries in the global South are embracing renewable energy and taking action to protect fragile environments. The emphasis on successes sought to promote a positive sense of agency, enabling pupils’ global citizenship.

#### **PSHE**

Pupils conducted talk sessions as part of their daily routine, looking at the news and discussing current issues in a relatively informal and safe forum. This aimed to reduce anxieties about the wider world, address misconceptions and promote social and communication skills. It also sought to expand pupils’ global awareness while enhancing enquiry and critical thinking skills.

#### **Forest Schools**

Pupils engaged in group activities outside the classroom, cooking food from different countries on an open fire and reflecting together on the skills they developed. There was a strong emphasis on the positive affirmation of individual skills in a group situation and validating pupils’ heritage identities, while expanding global awareness.

#### **Land-Based Studies**

This approach involved slightly older pupils in a staged process, which moved from horse-riding and ‘horse-whispering’ activities to a wider exploration of Native American culture, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and intercultural understanding. This intervention had an explicit focus on ASD and on valuing non-verbal modes of communication. Each stage in the process sought to promote specific benefits: confidence building; the development of empathy; personal validation; and a sense of agency.

More on these approaches can be seen in Appendix 1.

### **3.2 Sample**

Twelve pupils were tracked: three from each intervention group. One of these pupils (Pupil 11) withdrew from the project before completion, leaving a sample of 11 pupils. These pupils were interviewed by a teacher-researcher at the end of the project. Of these, nine were male and two female (this is in line with both the school intake and with national male:female ratios for diagnosis of ASD, where male rates are much higher). Four pupils were of white British ethnicity, and six from a range of black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds (this is broadly in line with the over-all school intake).

Ages ranged across the full school intake, from 11 to 19 years old. Pupils at the school are taught in key stage groups, with six pupils at Key Stage 3 (KS3) (aged 11 to 15 years), two at Key Stage 4 (KS4) (Pupils 10 and 12, aged 15 to 16) and three at Key Stage 5 (KS5) (Pupils 7 to 9, aged 18 to 19). The KS3 pupils (Pupils 1 to 6) did both Forest School and PSHE lessons. (See Table 1.)

All tracked pupils had a reading level of between 1A and 4C, which means that the tracking questionnaire and interview questions could be meaningful for them.

Because the sample size was small, it was not always possible to demonstrate the statistical significance of some findings (See 4.1.)

**Table 1: Summary table of participating pupils**

Pupil	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Intervention / s
Pupil 1	15 (KS3)	M	Asian Oriental	Forest School (focus for research) but also engaged in PSHE sessions
Pupil 2	15 (KS3)	F	British Asian	
Pupil 3	12 (KS3)	M	White British	
Pupil 4	11 (KS3)	M	White Asian	PSHE (focus for research) but also engaged in Forest School sessions
Pupil 5	15 (KS3)	M	White British	
Pupil 6	14 (KS3)	M	White British	
Pupil 7	18 (KS5)	F	British Asian	Land-based Studies
Pupil 8	19 (KS5)	M	Asian Oriental	
Pupil 9	18 (KS5)	M	British Asian	
Pupil 10	16 (KS4)	M	White British	Geography
Pupil 11	Withdrew			
Pupil 12	15 (KS4)	M	White British	

### 3.3 Data collection

Quantitative data on the impact of the work was collected through the use of questionnaire frameworks on wellbeing and mental health that were already routinely used in the school. This included two baselines prior to global learning activities, and one post-activity questionnaire (n = 11 pupils). The questionnaires produce a numerical value for each child's mental health and wellbeing. We provide a copy of the questionnaire as Appendix 2.

This data was supplemented through qualitative pupil interview data. A teacher-researcher conducted interviews with the eleven pupils, following the global learning activities, and took contemporaneous notes. The questions addressed: what the pupils had learnt about; how it differed from other work the pupils had done and why; and how it made them feel. We provide a copy of the interview framework as Appendix 3.

To support interpretation and understanding, we also collected qualitative data from the four subject teachers. This took the form of a focus group activity with the four teachers prior to global learning activities and led by the external researcher. He subsequently held post-activity interviews with the individual teachers and took contemporaneous notes. These were typed up and approved by the teachers before analysis. We provide a copy of the interview questions as Appendix 4.

### **3.4 Ethics**

Because work relating to mental health and wellbeing is potentially sensitive, we built several layers of protection into the project. The four teachers and the parents of participating pupils were supplied with advance information about the project, with the opportunity to raise questions about it. They formally consented to involvement, with the option to withdraw at any time (this happened with Pupil 11).<sup>4</sup>

All pupil interviews were conducted by a teacher-researcher already familiar to the pupils, but not engaged in the global learning curriculum work. Pupils were given the opportunity to raise with this teacher any anxieties or concerns that had surfaced as a result of the project (some of them made use of this opportunity). All pupil data was anonymised before being sent on to the external researcher, who had no direct contact with pupils.

Permission was given by the head of safeguarding and parents for any photographic images used in the report.

All teacher interview transcripts were shared and agreed with interviewees before being seen by the teacher-researchers. The four teachers were also given the right to comment on research report drafts.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Numerical and narrative data was subjected to triangulation and analytical discussion by the research team, identifying key themes in relation to the research questions.

The quantitative data from pupil tracking questionnaires was used as the principal indicator of the impact of the work on the whole sample group's wellbeing and mental health. Researchers also considered differential impacts according to gender, ethnicity and the four teaching interventions. This data was supplemented by insights from pupil and teacher interviews.

Teacher interviews provided the main qualitative data to support the interpretation and theoretical understanding of these impacts, and proposals for how work might be subsequently improved. This was supplemented by insights from pupil interviews and compared with pupil questionnaire data.

In the sections to follow we present the research findings in three different sections.

Section 4 begins with an analysis of the quantitative data, and what this says about the impacts of the global learning approaches on young people's mental health and wellbeing. This relates to research question 1: 'What global learning approaches can be used to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?'

Section 5 goes on to discuss eight ways in which these approaches may have been beneficial and why. This relates to research questions 2 and 3: 'In what ways can global learning be beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?' and 'Why is global learning beneficial to the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?'

Section 6 deals with research question 4: 'How might global learning approaches be better developed to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?'

## **4 Findings**

### **4.1 The impact of the global learning interventions**

The quantitative data from pupil tracking questionnaires forms our principal indicator of the impact of the global learning work on pupils' wellbeing and mental health. This relates to

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<sup>4</sup> With ASD pupils at this school, informed consent to participate in activities usually comes from the parents rather than the pupils themselves.

research question 1: 'What global learning approaches can be used to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?'

Comparing both baselines against final questionnaires, researchers found an average improvement of 7% in mental health and wellbeing for the pupils over the school term when the global learning activities took place. This was broadly consistent for all four of the teaching interventions, so that suggests any of these approaches is potentially beneficial.

Questionnaire data also indicated that:

- There was a higher than average trend towards positive mental health and wellbeing among black and minority ethnic pupils questioned (rising to 10% over the term from baseline 1, though only marginally from baseline 2).
- When baselined at the start of the project, pupils indicated different levels of mental health and wellbeing, but whatever their initial baseline score was, the general trend was towards an improvement.
- The school has a very small intake of girls, so the sample was too small for researchers to see whether they were more at risk of poor mental health and wellbeing than boys (as reported in Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2017).

Life events appear to have had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of some pupils, and it is hard to disentangle this from the impacts of global learning activities. For example, Pupil 8 saw a marked improvement in mental health and wellbeing during the project, but that may be attributable to achieving a long-desired change to his living arrangements. As the final questionnaires were done at the end of the school year, uncertainty about change may have also influenced results. Moreover, questionnaires only recorded pupils' short-term feelings, as researchers were wary of using longer time frames because it is common in autism for the passage of time to be misinterpreted (Houzel & Rhode, 2006).

With that in mind, we compared the questionnaire data from the eleven young people tracked in this project against questionnaire data from a sample of four KS3 pupils who were not engaged in work on global learning. Over the same period of time, the sample not engaged in this project showed an average *decline* in mental health and wellbeing of about 7%.

Previous use of the questionnaire by the school suggested that children often give a positive answer to questions, anticipating that this is what is expected of them. Researchers tried to offset this by working with children who had a higher language level, and by mixing questions up. One of the teacher-researchers verbally checked the scoring with pupils. If the score suggested a high level of anxiety, she discussed their reasons for that. Pupils subsequently identified this teacher-researcher as the staff member to talk to about wellbeing and anxiety: this was especially the case among older and more able groups.

The headline questionnaire findings are encouraging, but need to be treated with caution:

- Sample sizes are small, so that very high or low individual figures might disproportionately affect over-all trends;
- There is considerable variation between individuals, and some variation between the two baselines (i.e. before global learning activities were carried out);
- In some instances, as with Pupil 8 (*'a happier kid compared to last year'*), teacher observations seem to confirm questionnaire data; in others (such as Pupil 2) the questionnaire and interview data is more dissonant;
- Researchers only worked with pupils who have a higher language level, and for whom the questionnaire questions might be meaningful;
- Findings for these ASD pupils in a special school setting are not necessarily relevant to other groups of young people with special educational needs and/or in other settings;
- The questionnaires addressed levels of depression, anxiety and self-esteem, but not other aspects of mental health and wellbeing.

Overall, the researchers' very provisional and highly contextual findings will need larger, longer and perhaps more targeted sample groups if they are to be tested further. We return to this in the recommendations in section 7.

## 5 Benefits of global learning

This section builds on the findings above about what global learning approaches might be beneficial to pupils' health and wellbeing. It draws on qualitative data from pupil and teacher questionnaires to discuss eight ways in which these approaches appear to have been beneficial and why. This relates to research questions 2 and 3.

In the broadest sense, all the young people interviewed spoke about the work in a positive manner, several noting that it was 'different'. Pupil 12 expanded on this further in relation to the humanities intervention:

*Well we don't get to learn about these sorts of issues in other subjects. I found this work very interesting (Pupil 12).*

In interview, teachers – and especially the humanities teacher – talked about the impact of the work on their own professional development. Simply asking the question about whether work on global learning has benefits for mental health and wellbeing seems to have had value in itself, helping teachers develop planning and activities with those outcomes in mind.

The following eight cross-cutting (and often overlapping) themes emerged as beneficial aspects of the global learning work.

### 5.1 Global learning can offer opportunities and contexts for learning outside the classroom.

Learning outside the classroom (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) is a key element in three of the four approaches used, which met with a very positive response from pupil interviews.

Learning in a relatively informal setting (also a feature of PSHE lessons) seems to help set up an emotional atmosphere conducive to pupil wellbeing. Pupil interviews suggest that affective and experiential elements of learning were particularly important to their individual sense of wellbeing. For example:

*I really like being outside in the fresh air, I really like learning like that. It's more fun (Pupil 3).*

There is a wealth of research evidence (Burt & Emmerson, 2016; Louv, 2015; Lovell, 2016; Shafer, 2016; Sobel, 2001) that suggests that contact with the natural environment is conducive to children's and adults' positive mental health and wellbeing, and indeed that it may have specific benefits for people with ASD (Autism and Nature). With this in mind, Forest Schools, the Rural Dimension and learning outside the classroom are already embedded in the school and its practices (Project School, 2015).

While learning outside the classroom is not explicitly 'global', the Forest School teacher suggests the following:

*In my head, Forest Schools is global learning. If we're taking a very UK-centric view, it doesn't make sense. Global learning is about who you are, wherever you are, what's around you and how you socialise, work as part of a group.*

This chimes with other research on global learning practices with SEN pupils, 'provision starts with their lives, linking it to the local and then possibly the global' (Hunt, 2015: 10). Indeed, for SEN pupils 'engagement' itself can have educational value (Edwards & Hunt, 2018). For ASD pupils, the question of how they experience the world is a crucial one.

The humanities teacher felt this experiential element was especially true of less able learners: *'with the lower-ability groups, I think it is important to move from the learner outwards'*. Land-based studies and Forest Schools teachers asserted that this process of *'opening up the world'* for ASD pupils needed to comprise *'small achievable steps'*.

## **5.2 Global learning approaches can enable participation and a sense of agency**

Humanities 'success stories' helped Pupil 10 see himself as an active citizen:

*The woman who came to speak to us from Amnesty International told us that we could write letters to people who are imprisoned. It really made me feel like I could help.*

This included a degree of constructive self-reflection:

*It really makes me think about things I've said in the past and that everyone has the right to say something (Pupil 10).*

His teacher suggested that such empowerment has both an individual and a social element, *'each person can make a small change and the collective can roll it out'*.

This is the clearest example of empowerment in the sense of active global citizenship, but the four global learning approaches all involved more group work than usual, including opportunities for collaboration, competition, learner-directed learning and peer evaluation. This in turn led to increased awareness of others and to raised levels of self-confidence.

All four teachers talked about the importance to young people of being valued as part of a group. Their groups worked closely together, offering mutual support. Land-based studies pupils presenting to peers *'helped each other out... building each other's confidence'*, an idea related conceptually to the theme of 'belonging to a tribe' (land-based studies teacher).

Forest Schools pupils were given precise individual tasks during campfire cooking activities, without which the group activity would not succeed: *'I need to do my bit so that we can all succeed.'* A conscious level of peer- and self-appraisal formed part of that process, one pupil moving from asserting *'I am not a confident person'* to *'I was important to that group'*. This teacher strongly asserted the value of deliberately building in peer appraisal opportunities (all quotes reported by Forest Schools teacher).

The sense of agency extended to the process of learning itself. As the humanities teacher said:

*Before, I used to almost tell them what to think, whereas now it's more about helping them come to their own decision – their voice, their opinion matters.*

As work developed, this included young people identifying their own areas and methods of investigation. Informal peer assessment included the mutual critiquing of ideas and an element of playful competition: *'They enjoyed thinking of questions to 'catch the others out''* (humanities teacher).

As a result, she said that pupils:

*could take ownership of it and present their findings with more confidence... There is a sense of power in being able to offer solutions about their own environment, and we can build on that... These young people do not always have much power in their own lives (humanities teacher).*

With the land-based studies approach, starting with hands-on group activities helped when young people returned to the classroom:

*They were very encouraging to each other, congratulated each other, showed understanding of each other. One of the children usually wears headphones, because he is very sensitive to noise, and he couldn't wear them when he had a riding helmet on. The others reassured him when the horse made a noise... Afterwards, when we were doing more explicitly global work, it seemed more inclusive (land-based studies teacher).*

Pupil 5 summed up the difference for him between global learning approaches and other lessons: *'It's more active for children.'* This greater sense of agency seems to have boosted confidence, resilience and social skills, and in some instances validated a more positive sense of self. It perhaps mitigated the *'reduced sense of agency in ASD'* explored by Zalla & Sperduti (2015: 3).

All this implies teachers taking time to reflect on their practice. The humanities teacher reflected thus:

*As a teacher, this was about stepping back, not giving answers, fine questioning. It was about relationships and pedagogy.*

### **5.3 Global learning approaches offer an opportunity to engage with self, identity and culture**

We noted in 5.2 that Pupil 10 was able to see himself as a potentially active citizen, and that this included an element of constructive self-reflection. We also noted the significance of self- and peer-appraisal as part of the global learning approaches.

Developing a positive sense of self-identity was not always so straightforward. Pupil 2, for example, is a girl from a British Asian family. While she is generally talkative, teachers noted that she *'refuses to talk about Indian culture'* and that *'all she comes across is American culture'*. When interviewed following Forest Schools work, she described cooking Indian food as *'how they cook in other cultures'*.

What was happening here? Maybe there were domestic socio-cultural influences at work: she wears 'western' clothes in her middle-class home, for example, so maybe she identifies more with her British home than her Indian heritage. It was tempting to think that this was not necessarily about cognitive dissonance.<sup>5</sup>

However, teachers related that one of her British Asian female peers comes from a conservative Muslim family, and had dyed her hair yellow. Meanwhile, Pupil 1, an Asian Oriental male from the same Forest Schools group, also *'doesn't like to speak about 'his' culture'* and would *'sometimes pretend not to speak English to avoid questioning'* (teacher-researcher).

The Forest School teacher outlined the impact of the global learning work on Pupil 2:

*It was good to look at the positive aspects of other cultures... One pupil, who had always wanted to be white, celebrated her original (Indian) culture through food. She used to try to be white, a Disney princess, to try to whiten her skin, but this was a step towards recognising that it's OK to be like how you are. So did it have an impact on her? Did she enjoy the food? Yes. Did she have the experience? Yes. But I am less certain as to whether the global aspect of the food was what had the impact (Forest School teacher).*

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<sup>5</sup> Cognitive dissonance is a term originated by Leon Festinger to describe the stress experienced when a person embraces two or more contradictory [beliefs](#) at the same time.

Maybe such experiential 'engagement' is sufficient, an essential part of a 'Disney princess' reflecting on 'who she is' and that this is 'OK'. Edwards and Hunt (2018, op cit) offer this from Carpenter et al (2011):

*Rather than be a prerequisite to making progress, Carpenter argues, having higher levels of engagement is **in itself** progress for individuals with whom there are multiple medical, social, emotional, sensory and cognitive barriers, to being fully present in a learning situation.*

This might be true for some young people with ASD, but one of the teacher-researchers pointed out that:

*this pupil is able to articulate clearly and has good comprehension skills, and can therefore engage in some critical thinking – rather than just have a sensory experience (teacher-researcher).*

An alternative explanation might be that the Forest School teacher had presented the experience as learning about 'other cultures'. This kind of 'othering', while usually framed in a positive manner, was detectable in most pupil interviews: 'how they cook', 'we learn about them', 'other cultures eat all kinds of things'. We say more about this at (5.4), below.

A third explanation might relate to the impact of cultural 'Americanisation' on Pupil 2. We say more about this at (5.7).

#### **5.4 Global learning approaches can offer an opportunity to explore young people's relationships with 'otherness'**

Negotiating 'otherness,' including cultural difference, is seldom easy, and for young people with ASD there are added layers of complexity to consider. Indeed, difficulties in relating to other people is a key characteristic of autism.

As an alternative approach to 'othering' cultural difference, Martin and Scoffham (n.d.) advocate relational learning, asserting its value to both the learner and the other: '*Focusing on relationships reduces the danger of regarding people from different cultures as an object of study.*'

The land-based studies teacher deliberately tried to build in elements of a relational approach: young people learning *from* and *identifying with*, rather than mostly learning *about*, Native Americans. One example is her use of drama and role-play to develop empathic perspective-taking and concern in relation to the 'other'. Research suggests this can be an effective approach (DICE, 2010).

However, even her pupils still frequently engaged in the generalising and distancing use of a third-person 'they' with a continuous past or present tense verb. This use of language can embed 'othering' (albeit positively-framed) when describing activities: '*we learned that Indians had a good bond with their horse and they treated it like friends and family*'; '*Yeah we learned that they tap their horses, they pull the rope and they ride them*'; '*they treat them [horses] with respect*'.

Towards the end of the project, some of the pupils' written work suggested a greater degree of empathy and specificity. Pupil 7 wrote, '*the bond they had it was like they were family and soul mates*'. Her annotation of a photograph of a (British) child with a horse speaks clearly of this empathy with others: she appears to have been able to imagine herself into that situation.



**Fig 1. Pupil 7 – annotated photograph.**

The relationship between autism and ‘otherness’ is itself a complex one. Children with ASD have already been ‘othered’ by the majority culture (take the designation ‘special’, for example). Autism can call into question normative ways of seeing, being and interacting among allistic (non-autistic) people (Hemachandra, 2014) as well as conventional ideas about selfhood and its ‘porousness’ (Wexler, 2016). According to Dziobek et al (2007), some young people with ASD can experience dissociation from others and the world around them, including difficulties with empathising.

The land-based studies teacher told us that pupils therefore not only needed ‘time to reflect on their own learning and how it has progressed’ (as in Forest Schools), but also ‘on what it means for you as an ASD student’. She reminded us that ASD students ‘can live in a very isolated world,’ so this approach involved exploring non-verbal communication through ‘horse-whispering’.

Bearing this research on autism in mind, it is interesting to compare the response of Pupil 10 (see 5.2), who had quite clearly related the learning back to himself (*‘it really makes me think about things I’ve said’, ‘made me feel like I could help’*) with the equally articulate Pupil 12, who also responded positively to the same lesson, but in a far less intrapersonal way: *‘We learned about fragile environments... she told us about an American man... we don’t get to learn about these sorts of issues.’*

Rogers (1983) argues that is only when we act on an understanding that we can be sure that we have really learned. He uses the analogy of a child burning their hand on a hot radiator: it is when they no longer touch the radiator that learning has actually taken place, they have internalised the idea of ‘hot’. Meanwhile, David et al (2008: 2) suggest that in autism there may be ‘an intact sense of agency’ but a limited ability to ‘mentalize’ it.

Pupil 10 had clearly internalised the learning from his humanities lesson, gaining greater self-awareness, making links between himself and other things and people. It was less clear that for Pupil 12 the full learning cycle as Rogers describes it had taken place, and especially

internal 'mentalizing': this appears to correspond more with the features of autism described by David et al.

### **5.5 Global learning approaches can help build confidence and self-esteem**

All four approaches appear to build up young people's confidence and self-esteem. We have already touched on this in relation to their sense of self, sense of agency, their relations with others and the importance of having social spaces in which to reflect on and recognise achievements. Given the brevity of the research project, it was not clear whether these benefits had longer-term impacts on young people's global (that is to say, generalised) self-esteem.

Several young people recognised that they were acquiring new skills or knowledge that could be useful in their lives. Pupil 2 told us that she learned '*what to do if you were lost and you needed to cook something*'; Pupil 8 '*learned how to keep safe and how to do well*' and '*seemed very proud of himself*' and his new-found ability to ride a horse. The Forest Schools teacher spoke of their '*sense of achievement*'. (It is worth noting again that these examples start with their lives and immediate experiences, rather than with the world 'out there'.)

Some young people became more confident in speaking about their anxieties. The PSHE teacher told us, '*They have learned that you can talk about your worries, and it's OK to do so*'. This occurred in a safe space, '*in a relaxed environment, at breakfast time*'. We have noted above (4.1) that some pupils subsequently sought out the teacher-researcher who had interviewed them as a person who might listen to their anxieties.

The Forest Schools teacher asserted that global learning can offer a space away from those aspects of school life that can promote a fear of failure and impair self-esteem:

*It takes them away from that sense of right and wrong... The pressure is off a sense of failure, which is something they will have a lot in the classroom... we need to take away the 'right' and 'wrong' and develop independence and self-help skills.*

The land-based studies teacher emphasised '*they were not being judged*'. This emphasis has institutional and systemic implications, especially in relation to assessment.

### **5.6 Global learning approaches boost communication of all kinds**

Communication difficulties are often characteristic of ASD, and communication was central to many of the activities carried out in all four approaches: discussing and debating the news, human rights and environmental issues; role-playing to engage with Native American culture; writing down ideas; and group appraisal of learning.

For some, an improved confidence and ability to communicate proved to be transferable. Pupil 6 said that, following PSHE news sessions, '*I can talk to my family and friends about what is happening in the world*'. The teacher confirms this:

*You are trying to encourage chat. A couple of them go home and talk about what's in the news... Students are becoming able to involve themselves in table conversations (PSHE teacher).*

Pupils with ASD can have particular difficulties with verbal communication, so the land-based studies approach included:

*a thread around communication within autism, about communicating without speaking... (including how the students had communicated with horses while they were riding them, through body movements and so on). How had people used communications like 'horse-whispering'? (Land-based studies teacher).*

Time constraints and assessment priorities led to this approach being cut short.

On the whole, activities that boosted communication seemed to enhance self-confidence in a crucial skill area for young people with ASD. This is in addition to the value, already described, of group work, and of pupils having safe spaces in which to discuss anxieties.

### **5.7 Some global learning approaches can help reduce anxiety and address misapprehensions about the world**

The PSHE news sessions revealed that some young people had unrealistic views of the world that required challenging. For example, Pupil 6 became highly anxious about a news story about a possible meteor strike on the Earth:

*It also makes me nervous that if a meteor is coming, that I don't know how much time I have to spend with my family (Pupil 6).*

The teacher-researcher reported that:

*much of the interview was focused on the 'doomsday' scenario... It was raining during the interview and the pupil noted that 'God is crying because he knows it's going to end soon' (teacher-researcher).*

The PSHE teacher tried to carefully balance such news stories with less frightening ones, and consciously attempted to contextualise alarming stories. She explained:

*There was one boy who would over-sensationalise the news. We could use the news session to say, 'no, this is what happened', use current terminology from Newsround, help sort out what the facts were. A lot of the boys read up about conspiracies online: the Illuminati are ruling the world, that sort of thing. They pick up on something on the minibus on the way in, in the morning, and it's nice to be able to say, 'actually, this is what happened'. It can be reassuring to help them contextualise what they are hearing and seeing. They have learned that you can talk about your worries, and it's OK to do so, to ask 'why did this happen?' – to have the ability to talk about it, question things (PSHE teacher).*

The teacher was thereby able to increase reassurance, reduce levels of anxiety and help pupils to adjust their ideas to a more 'realistic' view of the world ('like the boy I talked about, it's nice to bring him back down'). Confirming this, Pupil 6 showed a higher-than-average improvement in his mental health and wellbeing in the questionnaire scores. Given that people with autism are particularly at risk of anxiety and depression, this seems an especially encouraging outcome.

The PSHE approach involved: the careful choice of resources; the routinisation of sessions ('we do it habitually, every single morning... It settles the children as well, it's like mindfulness, being in the present'), the creation of safe spaces for talk; and the use of dialogue and evidence to introduce a level of criticality and adjust pupils' ideas about the world.

An emphasis on the careful choice of resources to counter 'doom and gloom' and introduce criticality was also part of humanities lessons, while the need to accentuate positive narratives and to counter stereotypes was expressed by the Forest Schools and land-based studies teachers. Such criticality is usually described as an essential, even definitive, element of global learning.

The presentation of counter-narratives seemed to be particularly important for the pupils at this school. Like many of their peers, YouTube had become a key source of information for these pupils, offering them the freedom to choose what they watched, especially at home. Teacher-researchers felt that this risked 'a narrowing of vision' and asked, 'How do we allow other kinds of reality in?'

These powerful media sources certainly appeared to impact on pupils. Several teachers mentioned the 'Americanisation' in relation to pupils' worldview. This included the self-image

of Pupil 2, the 'Disney princess' (5.3). The teacher-interviewer commented, *'I like... the word 'dissonance' to describe her results because truly that describes her, she has a detachment from 'real life'.*

The teacher-researcher conducting interviews also noted that Pupil 5 *'is very influenced by American culture'*, and (white British) Pupil 6 has *'an American accent and may possibly be very influenced by media'*. Meanwhile, she reported that pupils sometimes ask visitors to the school, *'do you speak American?'*

The need for counter-information such as that utilised in the PSHE news sessions was perhaps particularly acute for those young people with ASD who had generalised difficulties in processing information. As the PSHE teacher related:

*The boys often get things muddled up. They compare one story with previous examples, rationalise from there, often mix them up.*

Techniques acquired from the global learning interventions were sometime adopted by the young people themselves as a means of understanding a potentially chaotic world: *'there is a girl who previously had no idea about the world, and now records Newsround every day' (PSHE teacher).*

## **5.8 Effective global learning involves affective learning**

There was very strong evidence from all pupil and teacher interviews of a strong emotional response to both the content and approaches used at the school. Pupils found the work fun, engaging, exciting and sometimes scary.

Despite the issues we have discussed, for example, Pupil 2 enjoyed the Forest Schools work, showed an improvement in her mental health and wellbeing on the basis of questionnaire scores, and told us *'It was cool and very fun, I found it all very interesting'*.

The ever-thoughtful Pupil 10 said that *'learning about Amnesty International **made me feel proud** that they are trying to help people to get a better life'* (our emphasis). As his humanities teacher said, *'that is a great emotion to have especially in relation to someone else'* (perhaps especially so, given the stereotype that people with ASD can lack empathy). Even anxious Pupil 6 found that thinking about the end of the world *'helps me to focus'*.

In short, affective elements helped engage learners, make learning pleasurable, meaningful and forge a human-centred 'felt understanding'.

Finding enjoyment in their learning probably had a beneficial impact on pupils' mental health and wellbeing: it almost certainly influenced their generally positive questionnaire and interview responses.

There may well be a challenge for people in the dominant (allistic) culture about the value that gets attached to the emotional responses of young people with ASD.

A case in point: Pupil 5 demonstrated a distinctively non-allistic breakdown of his own responses to items in the news:

*Well the bad stuff got me down, like the terrorists made me really sad and scared. When I saw the happy and weird stuff I felt good, the woman marrying a crocodile made me laugh but some of the weird stuff was a bit awkward (Pupil 5).*

Bad and sad, happy and good, weird and awkward: the third set of these pairings is a particularly striking framework to use when interpreting the world.

## 6 Approaches to global learning

This section addresses research question 4: ‘How might global learning approaches be better developed to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?’

### 6.1 Being conscious

In planning global learning interventions, there was a focus on potential impacts on mental health and wellbeing and how those impacts might be maximised. Simply asking the question about impacts on mental health and wellbeing made a difference to the project interventions, making teachers more mindful of the possible consequences of global learning approaches for ASD pupils. We need to keep on asking that question.

The project raised questions about how a whole-school community can become more proactive in relation to mental health and wellbeing, and not just at the level of crisis management. This included the school reflecting on:

- the spaces available for discussing it
- the teaching strategies in use
- the school ethos
- how mental health and wellbeing is monitored (the regular use of the questionnaires was a good start in this respect for the project school, but how might they then best inform practice and support strategies?)
- what support systems are in place.

### 6.2 Whole-school planning and timetabling

Global learning needs to be planned in carefully, embedded coherently, and given sufficient time. All teachers noted that they needed time to plan, reflect and implement the interventions described in the research. It needed to be planned in a sustained way if pupils were really going to internalise learning and apply it to themselves, or strategies such as the news sessions were to become part of the ongoing life of the school. The research team concluded that global learning approaches will work best if they are not permitted to simply become part of a one-off project. This has potential implications:

- for timetabling, time allocation and timing (for example, would the Forest Schools approaches at this school have worked even better if spread out across the year, rather than bunched up into a single term?)
- for joined-up work across year groups and subjects. As the land-based studies teacher said, ‘*good global learning needs a group effort of planning – not a piecemeal or simply individual approach*’.

We became aware that establishing wellbeing-enhancing global learning approaches involved tensions between different school priorities, and especially between the needs of formal assessment processes and the sometimes looser and more experiential learning that enabled both pupil-centred global learning and raised levels of confidence and self-esteem (where there might, for example, be ‘no right or wrong’ answers).

We were conscious of the brevity of this project and the impacts it was able to consider. Longer time spans and more joined-up planning would allow a school to better understand the longer-term impacts of teaching approaches (e.g. on sustained and raised levels of self-esteem rather than short-term confidence-boosting).

### 6.3 Being a young ASD person – a relational approach?

Given the needs of both global learning content and ASD learners, and looking to the future, the research team felt that it would be particularly valuable to further develop and evaluate relational (rather than ‘othering’) global learning approaches that had the particular experiences of ASD learners in mind (see Sotelo and Avila, 2017).

Global learning deals with in/equity, in/exclusion and in/justice. We therefore felt that it would be valuable for a future relational approach to turn the lens more often onto the experience of being a disabled young person and connect this to the stories of others around the world (for example, what are *our* success stories as young ASD people at this school?)

As the land-based studies teacher suggested, this might mean:

*hitting autism head on, celebrating it, finding time to talk about it. I'd like to have boards celebrating what we can do, and nobody else can do – really promote that uniqueness. We need to celebrate and embrace it.*

#### **6.4 Thinking about culture – personal and global**

The evidence we collected demonstrated a need for a professional discussion about how young people at this particular school (and presumably others) are internalising globalised/American culture and apparently creating their worldview from a narrow band of information sources. Some of the questions that emerged from this included:

- How can we balance this with wider narratives that build, for example, on the pilot work carried out in this school's PSHE news sessions?
- What do we do about young people who appear to be internalising an 'Americanised' worldview and rejecting family, culture and ethnic identity?
- What else do we need to know about these young people in that respect, and about what is going on? What information sources are they actually using? How do they use them? How does this impact on how these young people are framing the world?

#### **6.5 Questions to consider about global teaching approaches, mental health and wellbeing**

We think that the following questions, which arise from the project, are worth asking in all settings – both for SEN and 'mainstream' pupils.

- Project evidence demonstrates that effective global learning means *affective* learning, especially if we want to boost pupil wellbeing – *'we want to keep that fun thing going on'*. How can we ensure that this remains a key part of the learning experience?
- How can we keep learning *'kinaesthetic<sup>6</sup> and meaningful'* (humanities teacher), or *'engaging'* (Carpenter et al, 2011)?
- Can we systematically build in more opportunities for peer appraisal?
- How are we promoting approaches that put learners more in charge of their own learning (e.g. talk, group work, drama and learning outside the classroom)?
- How can we source or create resources that offer balanced views of the world and more 'success stories' that promote constructive criticality rather than 'doom and gloom', that counter the sort of stereotypes and images that might confirm a narrow 'Americanised' worldview?
- How can we create safe spaces for young people to talk about the things going on in the world that alarm them or make them anxious?

### **7 Conclusion and recommendations**

This small-scale research project has suggested a great deal to us about the potential of global learning approaches to benefit the mental health and wellbeing of young people with special educational needs, and especially young people with ASD. It certainly suggests that the approaches used at this particular school had modest benefits for almost all the young people involved. It is worth noting that there appear to have been professional benefits for their

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<sup>6</sup> i.e. learning that is carried out through physical, hands-on activities.

teachers as well.

We have been able to draw out eight key ways in which global learning may benefit the wellbeing and mental health of these young people, and have suggested a number of ways in which future such work could be better developed. The benefits relate to communication, relating to others and how young people experience the world: all key elements of autism. They also help mitigate depression and anxiety, which are a particular risk for people with ASD.

However, a small-scale research project inevitably raises as many questions as it answers. Even where it does appear to answer a question, we are keenly aware that the sample size was very small and very specific, and that the work was carried out over an extremely limited period of time.

### **7.1 Further research**

In addition to the school-level proposals in section 6, we therefore note the following as areas where future research would be valuable.

The research tantalisingly suggested that impacts of global learning approaches on mental health and wellbeing were slightly better for young people from BME backgrounds than for white British pupils. However, the sample size was too small for us to be certain about this, or indeed the reasons why this might be so. We have said some things about this in relation to benefits for how young people saw ‘self’ and ‘other’ during this project (5.3 and 5.4, above), but we would need both larger sample sizes and more in-depth work to be able to understand this properly, or to say anything with any certainty.

For complex reasons, including probable under-diagnosis of girls with ASD, almost all the pupils we interviewed were boys. Since gender appears to be a significant factor in relation to mental health and wellbeing in society as a whole (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2017), there would be value in further research that focused on the needs of, and benefits to, girls in particular (for example, a longitudinal study that explores global learning impacts on the self-image of girls with ASD).

Questionnaire data looked at questions about confidence, anxiety and optimism, rather than about how young ASD people see the world or questions about potentially unhelpful constructions of it. There is a lot more research that could be done on how young people with ASD understand the wider world, and what the implications of this would be for global learning approaches. In this, we recognise that such work may well challenge allistic norms.

We only worked with ASD pupils with relatively high (verbal) language levels. Other methodologies would be needed with other ASD pupils. Indeed, there is a vast field still uncovered about other young people with special educational needs, and the benefits or otherwise of particular global learning approaches to their mental health and wellbeing.

### **7.2 Global learning practice**

For our fellow teachers and practitioners, we offer the following three-level challenge:

- We think that the global learning approaches we have used with young people with ASD have a wider potential in relation to all young people’s mental health and wellbeing. With that in mind, the key thing is to ask the question: will what I am planning to do enhance or potentially impair the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils?
- Our work suggests that young people with ASD are able to engage with global learning in complex but often distinctive ways. This calls into question ideas about how these young people see the world: are our tacit assumptions about it simply based on the norms of an allistic majority? What would it mean to embrace a more inclusive world-view, where, for example, things being ‘awkward and weird’ were seen alongside things being ‘good or bad, happy or sad’?

- Following from this, we think that the potential for global learning approaches that start from the learner and open up the world have a potential that goes far beyond young people with special educational needs. Indeed, they invite us to rethink an ‘outside-in’ approach to global learning in favour of a more social-constructivist model (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). In some ways, this might involve a return to ‘global learning basics’. For example, are approaches based on ‘the world out there’ in essence a form of what Paulo Freire once called ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970)? What can we still learn from the pedagogies that initially informed Development Education in the 1970s and 1980s? Can we re-construct them for the realities of the 21st century?

For policymakers, we offer the following challenge:

- The question ‘will what I am doing enhance or potentially impair the mental health and wellbeing of the pupils?’ has systemic and policy implications that we touch on (6.2). In particular, these are that formal assessment models as currently understood tend to undervalue the sort of teaching approaches that best promote mental health and wellbeing. How can we bring assessment models more into line with these priorities?

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## Appendix 1: Teaching interventions

The following are the four teaching interventions as described by the teachers during their interviews, in response to the question *'What global learning approaches did you use?'* As such, they are a snapshot of activities rather than a comprehensive account.

### Humanities

Focus on real-life projects:

- Entry Level Religious Education 'Contentious Issues' unit: Human Rights and the work of Amnesty International. In this students interviewed a visitor from Amnesty International.

Developing students' global awareness:

- Middle-band KS3 on the topic of 'Energy': used materials from the Global Dimension website to show how what are seen as developing countries are embracing renewable energy sources.

Challenging perceptions:

- Geography: focused on 'good news stories' – to investigate positive stories rather than the bad news.
- In 'Fragile Environments' topic, used success stories to give balance to what is happening globally. Looked at what UN agencies are doing through a good news/bad news framework. For example, how many square metres of ocean are agencies working on?
- Students used resources to create an update on what's happening to the world's fragile environments using Photostory or Kahoot to present to peers.

### PSHE

Activities related to the news:

- Looked at the news, through Newsround, discussing news and current affairs daily.
- Weekly quiz on news events.
- Discussion around news items, e.g. issues related to terrorist attacks, politics and stories related to children's rights and safeguarding.

### Forest School

Related to the topic of 'Cooking' and included:

- Methods of cooking, kinds of food, where they were from etc.
- Comparison of their food to food elsewhere (e.g. having access to electricity versus cooking on an open fire)
- Research into different types of foods from different countries, what they liked and the ideas behind how it was cooked: for example, Chinese food retains nutrients, and that has scientific and health implications.
- Cooking popcorn, pizza, curry, developing fire skills and toasting marshmallows on an open fire.

## Land-based studies

Aimed to build different strands together: horse riding; learning from Native American culture and beliefs; and looking at how they have traditionally communicated (with horses, but also communicating without speaking). Incorporated an element of kinaesthetic learning, to build up skills and confidence. Activities included:

- Horse riding – where the students learned to ride or practised riding a horse.
- Looking at Native American culture, for example, Chief Seattle’s song about beliefs, which is simple, visual and easy to grasp; also the Ten Commandments of Native Americans (e.g. respect the earth).
- A role-play activity – where pupils split into two tribes and each nominated a ‘chief’. Each group member took a name and pupils were asked, ‘what do you think personally, as this tribal group member, is important to you?’ Pupils practised saying it, wrote it and performed it with drums and shakers in the background.
- Watched part of *Spirit*, about a horse and the treatment of horses by Native Americans, in comparison with the US cavalry. Discussion of question: were these Native Americans savages? Eco-warriors? More understanding and civilised than the settlers? What can we learn from them?
- Communication and autism: explored communication without talking (including how the students had communicated with horses while they were riding them, through body movements and so on). How had people used communications like ‘horse whispering’? Some students tickled horses’ lips, which is something that calms them and sometimes send them to sleep: one got the horse to close its eyes.

## Appendix 2: Student Wellbeing Questionnaire

<b>NAME:</b>		<b>DATE:</b>		<b>Circle to show your answer</b>		
<b>Read the following statements</b>						
<b>1.</b>	I look forward to things as much as I used to	<b>Yes, most of the time</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No, never</b>		
<b>2.</b>	I sleep very well	<b>Yes, most of the time</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No, never</b>		
<b>3.</b>	I feel like crying	<b>Yes, most of the time</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No, never</b>		
<b>4.</b>	I like to go out to play (I like to go out with my friends)	<b>Yes, most of the time</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No, never</b>		
<b>5.</b>	I feel like leaving home	<b>Yes, most of the time</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No, never</b>		

6.	I can stick up for myself	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
7.	I have lots of energy	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
8.	I enjoy my food	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
9.	If people upset me I can tell them to stop	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
10.	I think life isn't worth living	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
11.	I am good at things I do	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
12.	I enjoy the things I do as much as I used to	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
13.	I like talking to my friends and family	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
14.	I have horrible dreams	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
15.	I feel very lonely	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
16.	I am easily cheered up	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
17.	I feel so sad I cannot stand it	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never
18.	I feel bored	Yes, most of the time	Sometimes	No, never



## **Appendix 3: Pupil interview framework**

**Date:**

**Intervention group:**

**Pupil number:**

**Wellbeing score post interview:**

Question 1: What did you learn about?

Question 2: Was this work different from other work you have done, and if so why?

Question 3: How did this work make you feel?

Interviewer comments

## **Appendix 4: Teacher interview questions**

1. What global learning approaches did you use?
2. What benefits (or otherwise) do you think they had on pupils' wellbeing and mental health? How do you know this?
3. In what ways do you think global learning might be beneficial (or not) to pupils' wellbeing and mental health?
4. Why so?
5. How might global learning approaches be better developed to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people with special educational needs?
6. Do you have any questions for me or the research project team?

### **About the authors**

Ben Ballin taught at a Special School in Kenya. He now works as an educational writer, teacher educator and consultant, specialising in global learning, geography and drama.

Ann McGuire has worked for 18 years at the project school. She is faculty leader of the Rural Dimension and leads global learning work at the school, which serves as an Expert Centre on the GLP for a network of schools that serve the needs of SEN pupils.

Laura Murphy is a combined residential care worker and teaching assistant at the project school, where she has been working for 6 years. She has a BSc. and MRes. in Psychology.

### **About the Global Learning Programme**

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>

### **About the Development Education Research Centre**

The Development Education Research Centre (DERC) is the UK's leading research centre for development education and global learning. DERC conducts research on Development Education and Global Learning, run a masters' degree course, supervises doctoral students and produces a range of reports, academic articles and books. Further information on the centre go to: [www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-derc](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-derc)

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