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Wales & Lesotho school partnerships – a study exploring the impact on learning in 4 schools

Sharon Flint
2022

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Cover photograph: Moshoehsoe II High School by Setempe Phoka 2021

Abbreviations

CCGL	Connecting Classrooms Through Global Learning
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
ESDGC	Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
FCDO	Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office
GLP	Global Learning Programme
IEP	International Education Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

Lesotho and Wales have undergone significant curriculum changes recently, and both advocate the desire for their learners to be 'active citizens' and to acquire core life skills that allow them to be 'creative contributors' to society. The Connecting Classrooms Through Global Learning (CCGL) cluster lead schools in this research have been working in partnership for 13 years. They believe that their collaborative projects are essential elements of their curricula that provide significant global learning for all involved. This study centres upon the experiences and impact of global partnerships on the learners and asks:

- How have pupils in both countries engaged in the partnership?
- What was their experience of it?
- How has the partnership impacted on their learning?

By providing opportunities to investigate and analyse a snapshot of the pupil's perceptions and experiences, their knowledge and assumptions, and what types of skills they display as a result, we can begin to document the effectiveness of such projects and partnerships, and the impact on learning in general. This is an important addition to global learning and international partnerships research in Wales and Lesotho, as at the time of writing no other such paper has ever been written. As Welsh schools begin to deliver the new New Curriculum for Wales (2022), the findings from this study will support schools to prioritise and further embed their partnerships in practice.

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Introduction

This research study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and was centred on 4 schools in a cluster partnership between Carmarthenshire in South Wales, UK and Quthing in Lesotho, Southern Africa. By digging deeper into their experiences of Connecting Classrooms Through Global Learning (CCGL) and their global learning journeys, I aimed to find out how the pupils in both countries have engaged in the partnership, what their experience of the partnership was, and how it has impacted their learning. Past evaluations and reflections from these schools have been focused on teachers' perspectives during and after reciprocal visits. At the time of writing, there has been little research putting the pupil at the centre of research into global learning, international partnerships, and impact on learning in Wales, and particularly considering links with Lesotho, so this study makes a potentially important contribution.

An important part of this partnership is the historical country-to-country twinning between Wales and Lesotho. This was established by the Welsh charity Dolen Cymru Wales Lesotho Link in 1985 and the organisation has been instrumental in setting up the school linking programme in which this cluster is involved. I am an Education Officer for the charity, so even though I pursue this research as an independent researcher, the benefit to Dolen's work and best practice moving forward in a post-colonial and anti-racist world is of extreme importance.

All schools in the partnership have taken part in several thematic projects over the years, the most current of which, 'Planting the Seeds of Thought', is focused on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The previous project in 2019, which included reciprocal visits, explored SDG 4: Quality Education, and was named 'Nothing About Us Without Us'. Over the years, 10 reciprocal visits have taken place, which have formed the strong foundation of the partnerships and kept them alive during periods of no funding. The Secondary schools involved did also ambitiously conduct pupil reciprocal visits in 2013-2014, during which 12 pupils visited Lesotho and 5 pupils visited Wales. This was of course one of the biggest highlights for the teachers and pupils involved.

For this study, my main aim was to spend time with pupils in Wales and for my colleague to do the same in Lesotho. Lockdown in both countries put an initial stop to those plans, so all research activities were re-designed to fit an online and blended format. This unique experience for us all has shaped this study and informed its findings in ways I could not have planned. The common experience of the pandemic made the global connections formed even more important and the move to online tools was of benefit to all. With this new approach I was still able to find out if pupils were gaining significant knowledge, understanding, core skills and values that can help them become active global citizens.

In the next section, I look at the educational context in Wales and Lesotho and the international partnership between the two countries. This is followed by a literature review focused on global learning, school partnerships, pupil experience and impact, post-colonial theory, and global citizenship best practice. Next is a description of the research methodology and findings, culminating in the conclusions drawn and next steps for moving forward.

Context

As this study focused on two very different national contexts, this section explores the educational backdrop for both settings.

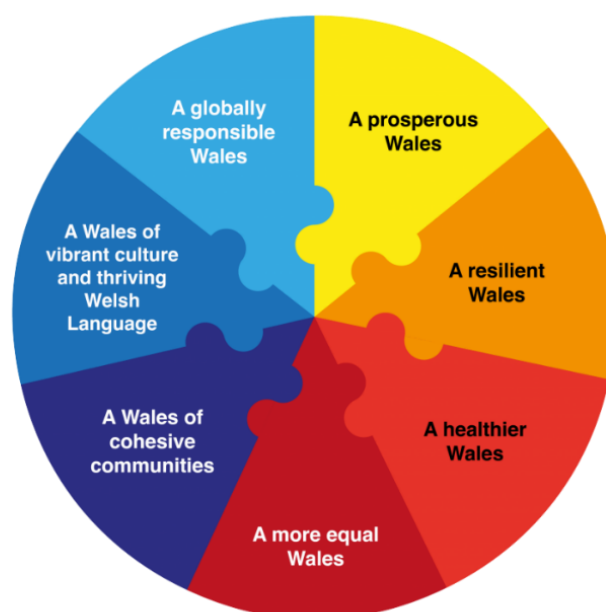
Educational context in Wales

The Wales Alliance for Global Learning defines Global Learning as a fundamental learning approach that:

Improves the way we understand and think about local and global issues. It empowers learners to make meaningful change by developing: knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes and skills. Which enables learners to understand the big global issues, think more critically and creatively, and to value diversity. This allows pupils to develop global citizenship for positive behaviour change whereby they can celebrate difference and similarities, engage in society and take action together (Ventriss-Field, 2019).

This definition is taken from a key document that aligns the Welsh Government’s approach to the New Curriculum for Wales - due to be rolled out in 2022 - and the Well Being for Future Generations Act issued in 2015. Wales is in an exciting position in which global responsibility has been embedded into the curriculum and legislation. Previously known as the ESDGC (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship) framework, it is now placed as one of the 4 main purposes of the curriculum: ‘to develop ethically and informed citizens of Wales and the World’. This makes it a key teaching and learning approach to be embedded in all curriculum areas of learning. It is also in direct relation to the 7 Well-being Goals for Wales:

Figure 1: Well-being for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015



Prior to these key policy changes, many opportunities have been taken by schools across Wales to engage in British Council funded projects through the International Education Programme (IEP). These have included Erasmus Plus, Connecting Classrooms, Global Learning Partnerships, Chinese Language Assistants, Changemakers, Peace Schools, Model United Nations, MOCK Conference of the Parties, Teacher Exchange visits and Professional Learning Community visits overseas. As this funding was in a process of flux at the time of writing due to COVID and DFID/FCDO changes, we as an alliance and members of the Welsh IEP desperately hold onto the important role of these British Council and NGO assisted whole school projects to keep schools on their global learning journeys. The voluntary review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in Wales makes it clear that the new curriculum offers a real opportunity to meet SDG 4: Quality Education (Welsh Government, 2021).

Educational context in Lesotho

The progress towards the Global Goals in Lesotho has equally been documented in their Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 and 2019 United Nations SDG reports (2019: 37). There have been significant curriculum changes over the past 8 years to accommodate the changing needs of learners for the 21st century and demands of the workplace and economy. The Primary curriculum has changed from being content driven to an integrated approach prioritising skill development. It is:

designed to deliver Education for Individual and Social Development, as laid out in the 2009 Curriculum and Assessment Policy, equipping both Basotho citizens and the Nation as a whole to meet the challenges of the increasingly globalised world in which we live, whilst maintaining the core values and identity of Basotho culture and society (National Curriculum Development Centre, 2014: 2).

The curriculum aims to develop Core Competencies which will enable learners to apply the knowledge and acquired skills, values, and attitudes necessary to address both current and new situations. These include: effective and functional communication, problem solving, scientific, technological and creative skills, critical thinking, collaboration and cooperation, functional numeracy and learning to learn (Ministry of Education and Training Lesotho, 2014). The link with Wales is introduced to all learners with or without school partnerships and is indeed part of the curriculum pupil handbook. In general, a school engaged in a school link or a CCGL project is led by one teacher with one class or a core group of learners.

Lesotho introduced free, inclusive basic education for all in 2000 and is working to improve access for early years education. Secondary schools are still fee-paying, but have bursaries for orphans and vulnerable children. The curriculum has been adjusted to offer the Lesotho GCSE to allow students to access tertiary education and the burgeoning digital sector across the world. There are many barriers to learning, access and retention at Secondary level however, and many agencies are working hard to combat issues such as teenage pregnancy, child marriage, violence and child labour (Government of Lesotho, 2019: 56).

Due to the varied curriculum criteria between countries and schools, I decided to refer to Bloom's Taxonomy and its contemporary revision from Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) regarding the impact on learning in this study. Teachers in Lesotho are familiar with this and can see the connections to both the approach of the British Council regarding core skills and the opportunities presented by the partnership project.

COVID has had a devastating effect on education during 2020 where few opportunities were had for online engagement in Lesotho. In a report written by Dr Lifelile Mpho Matsoso, it was highlighted that a new country-wide policy for literacy is needed that includes the multiplicity of skills needed for learners to access the digital sphere. Definitions need to be flexible and adapt to new contexts, such as the UNESCO definition of literacy:

[A]a process of: [applying and] acquiring basic cognitive skills to contribute to socio-economic development and develop the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change. (UNESCO (2017) in Matsoso 2020: 7)

This project has embraced technology due to COVID, and it is clear that the new skills teachers have engaged with are being modelled to learners and exposing new possibilities. With this in mind I will posit that this 'virtual' space can be both 'transformative' and 'emancipatory', but the unequal access to digital technology and the complex hierarchy of relationships exposed in this research also revealed the need to address the colonial context of development education and global citizenship.

Wales – Lesotho school partnership

Many schools in both Wales and Lesotho sign up to the school linking programme to 'connect classrooms' and 'learn about another country'. They cite the aims of being able to teach about globalisation and interdependence to create 'global citizens'. However, what is not written on their information forms is the possible unconscious bias and colonial assumptions that may motivate them to take part, such as Welsh partners who are keen to 'make a difference' and Basotho partners who want to 'visit Wales' and gain access to school resources. It has taken until 2020 for organisations such as Dolen Cymru to start to untangle this complex web, and to understand their role as a twinning 'development' charity and how they can reframe the narrative of their work in a post-colonial and anti-racist world. If they indeed want to stand in global solidarity with their Basotho partners, they need to ensure they are not perpetuating a single story to schools, teachers and learners in Wales and Lesotho. [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's powerful TED talk](#) on this is a core component of one of the CCGL CPD courses that has been shared in both countries, however the process of needing to 'unlearn' takes time and commitment and indeed the critical literacy skills to access the information. One CPD course will not change behaviour. As Bourn and Issler (2010) acknowledge, hierarchies can be hidden in the goals of social justice and so NGOs have a '*significant impact on how the global dimension is interpreted in schools*' (Martin, 2013: 6). In this study I propose that NGOs that are involved in global citizenship education and school linking have a moral responsibility to offer a deep dive into a new long-term relationship with their schools.

Literature Review

In this section I provide a summary of research conducted about global learning and school partnerships and the impact of these on pupil engagement and learning.

Global learning and school partnerships

Global learning has had a strong presence in Welsh schools since the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) framework was introduced in 2004. Even though there is limited research on global learning impact in Wales, many UK writers have investigated the impact of global learning and the role of school partnerships within this. There have also been many initiatives in Wales, one of which was the Global Schools Partnership Programme, a DFID funded project that aimed to train teachers and equip pupils with the skills to make a positive contribution in a globalised world. The impact report produced after this programme documented that there was significant impact on pupils' engagement, knowledge, skills and values (Sizmur et al 2011). A 2014 report by the Welsh Schools Inspectorate Estyn, reported that there were significant improvements since their last thematic report on ESDGC in 2006 (Estyn 2014). Pupils had increased knowledge and awareness of global issues such as climate change, poverty and identity, and culture. The report's recommendations to school leaders echoed related research conducted by Hunt (2013) and Bourn & Cara (2013). In the first study of its kind in England, Hunt documented that the impact on pupils was significant. Evidence was presented that showed pupils developing social awareness and responsibility with an increased interaction with diversity leading to '*mutual respect and responsibility towards others*'. Increased knowledge of global issues led to improved confidence and some social action or change (Hunt, 2013:10). Recommendations from the above papers suggests that, for schools to embed good global learning, they need to prioritise it in their school development plans, allow time for staff co-ordination and training including for Governors, potentially participate in an international school partnership or award scheme, address the more complex aspects of global learning, and increase collaboration with NGOs and/or Development Education Centres.

School partnerships

Although international school partnerships are not an essential component in the good practice of global learning, Bentall et al (2014) state that they can have a positive influence on the development of good quality global learning. Pupils that take part in an international partnership project or experience such as a teacher exchange can develop skills based on equality and reciprocity. The positive effects of an effective school link can increase understanding and raise standards of learning (Bourn 2014: 26). They can '*catalyse global learning for teachers and students and anchor learning to the lives and context of their partners*' (Edge et al 2021: 3). Bourn (2014) and Sizmur et al (2011) evaluated the impact of global learning and school linking in numerous papers and conclude that there is a significant benefit from both endeavours for

students and teachers alike. There are positive impacts in terms of knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values, however the depth of learning in schools is less clear and harder to measure.

Research on effective global learning and school partnerships suggests that schools need to lead effective global learning in their own school before setting up an international partnership. Trying to fast track this process or align with a local twinning organisation can lead to misconceptions, negative experiences, and disillusionment. Bourn and Cara (2012:41) describe how teachers and students alike need to have a deeper understanding of global issues, complexities, and critical literacy in order to benefit from collaborative work with another school. Challenges can occur where the power imbalance is perpetuated, such as when teachers return from visits with stories of poverty or lack that can lead to the reinforcement of a charity mindset. Effective collaboration and mutual learning cannot take place when this experience has not started on a transparent footing. Many partnerships are still driven by Northern agendas, with little room for Southern voices in providing the content, framework or chosen pedagogy. This is apparent even in the recent CCGL programme, where global learning tools to understand the Sustainable Development Goals still tend to be aimed at a Northern cohort of schools with access to technology and resources such as printers and photocopiers.

A clear position held by the African Unit (2010 cited in Downes 2013:4) was that North-South partnerships bring: '*mutual not necessarily symmetrical benefits*'. Shared ownership and transparency are key to generating respect and enriching collaboration that allows power relations to be addressed. Can this be done in the virtual domain, however? Even with this in evidence, can this be transferred into authentic learning experiences for pupils without a paternalist undertone? Do teachers in the North analyse their privilege? Do they still perpetuate the stories of 'lack' rather than challenge the frozen narratives of the 'poverty stricken' (Martin & Wyness 2013:16)?

Vanessa Andreotti mapped a very important scale of global citizenship education which shows how this can look from a teaching and learning perspective. It powerfully exposes the 'soft' compassion, charity mindset of global learning as opposed to the post-colonial, critical framework of understanding. The critical mindset allows space for critical engagement, reflection, and reflexivity – to understand that knowledge is constructed, partial, incomplete and contextualised. A Masters paper written by Jacinta Jolly (2014) provided a post-colonial critique of the previous ESDGC guidance for schools in Wales using this matrix. She concluded that whole school approaches to active citizenship tended to be 'soft' and do not identify the causes and complicity in injustice. She concluded that the Welsh framework should promote a more '*ethical and critical approach to Global Citizenship*'. This is perhaps an apt foreshadowing of one of the new Curriculum for Wales' core purposes and a key area of interest for this study.

School partnerships, pupil engagement and impact

Sizmur et al (2011) wrote the impact report for the Global Learning Programme and looked at measuring the awareness, attitudes, and responses amongst pupils in participating UK schools over three years. Schools in the UK with the most success had embedded global learning and it

was part of their school ethos; their international links were well established, and clear impact was made on pupils. This impact included improved critical literacy, pupils had a clear sense of identity and friendships were developed that were conscious of stereotypes. The researchers observed '*vibrant, enjoyable and relevant learning*' taking place. This study also concluded that wider involvement was apparent in Primary schools, although less so in Secondary. However, the depth of study and engagement in global learning was deeper in this phase. They witnessed a '*flow of ideas and a high degree of global awareness and acuity*' (Sizmur 2011: 71).

A study by Bourn et al (2017) on behalf of DFID, concluded that schools who had a partnership showed enriched quality of teaching and learning, which made the curriculum 'real' and demonstrated that the pupils and the school as a whole were part of a global community. All the teachers interviewed referred to the impact the experience of having a link had on them personally, in terms of questioning their own assumptions, broadening their perspectives and, as a consequence, developing their understanding of global learning and the more complex risks of paternalism and perpetuating a colonial mentality.

In preparation for this research, it was more difficult to find previous research on the impact of global learning and partnerships on learners in the Global South. One research paper by Leonard (2012) concluded that pupils in Madunduchi, Tanzania gained from the experience of partnership by developing skills that influence academic achievement such as English language, Information Communication Technology, Mathematics, critical thinking, creativity and social skills. The teachers involved saw impact on their teaching practice, school facilities and leadership. Learners improved their knowledge of their partner country, the lives of their partners, their own country, and global issues. They also improved their understanding of the role of global citizens, similarities and differences, diversity and pre-conceptions, rights and responsibilities and career aspirations.

Post-colonial theory

As part of this research, it is important to understand the basics of post-colonial theory to consider the implications of projects and partnerships between Wales and Lesotho. Post-colonialism cannot be separated from critically understanding colonial power, international development and partnerships between the Global North and Global South. It deconstructs Western hegemonic discourse and is used by many authors to critically review the approach to global learning. Two key elements are 'unlearning privilege' from Spivak (1990) and the creation of the 'third space' from Bhabha (1994). Spivak posits that we need to unpack and unlearn our power positions. We need to '*recognise own world views and foundations*' where we can then '*learn to unlearn*'. Bhabha proposes that alternatives are needed to position ourselves away from donor-recipient discourse where '*mutuality, reciprocity and equality*' are needed (Bhabha 1994 cited in Martin and Wyness 2013: 33). This takes place in a new space of dialogue without unconscious positioning, where new understanding can evolve and not perpetuate global inequalities. In Martin's (2013) paper on partnerships and post-colonial theory, she elaborates on the need for a '*critical ethics of care*'. Many international development charities have been seen to perpetuate the power of the Global North through their approach to 'care'. However,

Martin states that this is need of a more critical and ethical approach. She suggests that teacher CPD needs to go beyond understanding 'need' to explore how it has been created throughout historical exclusion and marginalisation, unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Beliefs, attitudes and dispositions need to be re-adjusted through a '*decolonisation of the mind*' (Merryfield 2000 cited in Martin and Wyness 2013: 37) where transformational learning can then take place. A post-colonial space for learning needs to be contextual where there is an ethical relationship with each other, and relational - a space that is always open to flux and change. Bhabha's third space is a post-colonial space, a space between culture. This can only be entered through a 'displacement' space (Broch cited in Martin 2013) where we can unpack and unlearn the concept of care, the single story, binary identities, colonialism and complicity.

Methodology

This section will highlight the research methods that were used, as well as how the data was collected and from whom. I will also highlight the ethical considerations that have been considered and the process used to analyse the data.

Methods

A range of data collection approaches were used with pupils to allow as much accessibility to their independent voices as possible. Research into child-centred research methods acknowledges that approaching the child as ‘expert’ in their own lives and lived experience can allow us to capture their perceptions in a way that is not influenced by an adult or suggest the ‘correct’ way to respond. Johnson et al (2014) refer to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, whereby children should be encouraged to express opinions in matters affecting their lives so that they can be active and resourceful partners in research.

Drawing activity: The first way to capture an impression of the partnerships was a free drawing activity. Dell Clark (2011) commented that visual methods can be effective in accessing the voice of the child at any development/ linguistic stage. This was particularly needed for younger pupils and those for whom English is a second language. Although this was initially planned as a warmup exercise to set the scene of their past/ current project engagement, it was later used as a source of data as many themes and perceptions were evident in the drawings.

Writing activity: Secondly, two written tasks were set for learners to complete independently. One was to reflect on their knowledge about the partnership using the Know, Want to know, Learn (KWL) tool. This is an analytical method for learners to think back on prior learning, think ahead to future learning and then finally, after the series of activities, to reflect on what new learning has occurred. This activity aimed to capture students’ current perception of the partnership and the key elements that they remember. Robson and McCarton (2011) wrote about the construction of knowledge being dependent on the interaction with others. With this in mind, the second written task was designed to allow individual responses to explore perceptions and experiences, but also with a chance to re-construct knowledge through dialogue. The task was to write a diary entry based upon their current COVID experiences, but from the perspective of their school partner. The intention for this creative task was to explore their experiences and gather personal responses about the global pandemic, but also allow them to share their ideas their assumptions about life in another country. It also gave me a chance to observe evidence of their cognitive processes and any of the ‘core skills’ key to the British Council’s programme.

Digital media activity: Learners were also requested to reflect and respond to their partners’ digital diary entries. Initially this was to be part of discussion in a pupil focus group, but due to lockdown, learners were instead free to share their thoughts via Zoom or videos. The intention was to observe critical thinking and reflection as pupils read about any surprising responses and connections between their experiences.

Online survey: Lastly, a summary survey was made to capture learner reflections in relation to their Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning project, British Council Impact Statements (CCGL-Wales Framework version 13, 2019), and the SDG goals and skills which were implicit in their chosen project. Again, this was originally intended to be part of a focus group activity to capture the bigger picture in relation to the more complex global learning undertaken, but it had to be adapted to an online format. Unfortunately, many project activities had not yet re-started at the time due the pandemic, so this had an impact on the outcomes.

Data collection process

The methods employed in this study were designed to prioritise the learner voice so that I could gather data in a non-biased way. This was a challenge due to COVID, but the majority of learner-centred tasks were completed individually with little adult facilitation. All learners were set the same tasks with the same written, audio and video instructions sent to all via a Padlet and WhatsApp. An initial Zoom and survey were issued to all school partnerships to explain the project aims, gather more context and set out the learner tasks.

All activities took place between April and July 2021 as schools opened up in both countries. I was able to lead the activities in the Welsh Primary School, my colleague led the initial activities in both Basotho schools, and the CCGL cluster leader led tasks in the Welsh High School. Not being able to control the impartiality of all contexts was a challenge, but from analysing the responses I can see all pupils were free to respond individually without coaxing or help. The strain of lockdown, home learning and adaptation to the 'new normal' provided a unique slant on the research, but also highlighted the lack of current partnership activities. This undoubtedly impacted the responses to some tasks as some school based CCGL activities had taken place in 2020 and were in the distant memory of some learners.

There were a few adjustments along the way as there were challenges in Lesotho regarding exam timetables and teacher attendance in order to complete the tasks in time. Also, audio recording/ reflections on the discussions were not done initially, so Partner to Partner Zoom meetings were later created so that I could observe the children with each other. All tasks, instructions and outcomes were stored on a Partnership Padlet that the pupils could access and use to upload materials. This was a successful method as it was accessible via the internet and smartphones. Partners in Lesotho were already aware of the platform from other work with Dolen Cymru and were happy to use it as a safe way to share digital files.

About the schools

The lead cluster school involved is a Welsh Secondary school and has been linked with their partner in Lesotho for 13 years. Both schools have taken part in British Council projects together throughout this time with great success. They both invited their feeder Primary schools to join the cluster 8 years ago when a new round of funding was available. The Primary schools involved both had introductions made by Dolen Cymru, who has helped facilitate their projects and visits since 2015.

Participants

A request was sent to lead CCGL teachers in all of the schools to select a small group of learners to take part. An introductory Zoom meeting was then conducted with each partnership to gain background context and opinion on the impact on the teachers and pupils involved. The pupils volunteered to take part after the research project was explained to them. They had all previously been involved in CCGL activity in addition to any curriculum content on Lesotho and Wales.

School 1 Wales	2 boys Year 6; 1 girl Year 5 and 1 boy Year 5	School 1 Lesotho	2 girls, 2 boys Grade 7
School 2 Wales	3 girls, Year 9	School 2 Lesotho	2 girls, 2 boys Form D

In total, 7 pupils in Wales and 8 in Lesotho took part in all tasks including the online survey, although the Primary schools completed them as a group directly after their Zoom meeting with their partners. The Secondary pupils accessed the tasks independently and as a group in both school and their free time.

Ethical considerations

In line with the guidance set by the British Council, all schools were asked for permission for the research to be conducted and consent letters were sent to all pupils involved. They were made aware that they could withdraw at any time and their personal data would not be shared or used without their consent. The project sharing platform and live meetings were used in line with all safeguarding guidelines and only accessible via private links. All data used in this report has also been anonymised to protect confidentiality.

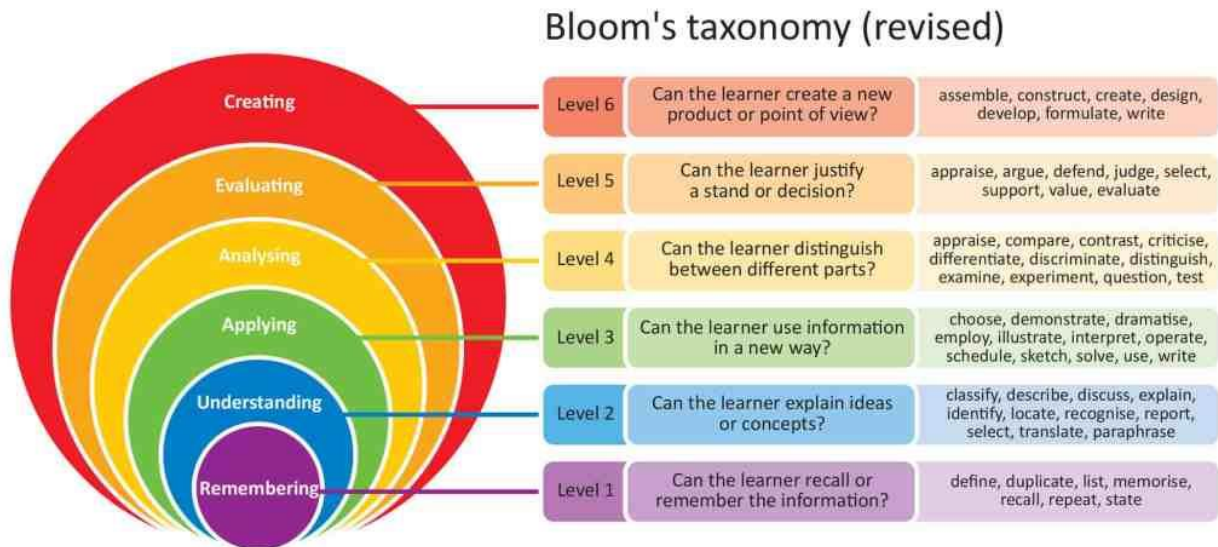
Data analysis process

After transcribing responses to the KWL grids, drawings, written extracts, Zoom/ video conversations and final surveys, I was able to compile a list of thematic codes that could be used to group the responses from the young people. I conducted 5 phases of analysis. The first was the initial identification of themes and codes and the second was justifying and making selections to keep specific codes for the analysis. Examples of these are provided in Appendix 1, along with examples from the learners' drawings and writing.

During the third phase a final table of results was compiled in which each code was tallied according to how many times it was referred to within all the collected data. The findings were then grouped into 8 themes, with between 3-8 sub themes. Appendix 2 provides examples from each theme and the number of times they were referred to within the data.

Appendix 3 shows how during the fourth phase of analysis the learning evidence was matched to the revised 2001 Bloom’s Taxonomy (Figure 2), through which I scored the data against the 6 levels of the cognitive process. After working with Basotho teachers and the British Council South Africa, this framework seemed the most inclusive with regard to the impact on learning in both countries.

Figure 2: Bloom’s taxonomy (revised) (Anderson Karathwohl 2001)



The final phase of analysis looked at the final learner surveys in which the students reflected on their experiences and learning in relation to the British Council pupil impact statements (see Appendix 4).

Findings

In this section you will find the main observations from the analysis of the data which was collected. Results are categorized according to the main research questions, which focused on how pupils have engaged with and experienced the partnership and what the impact has been on their learning.

Pupils' engagement in the partnership



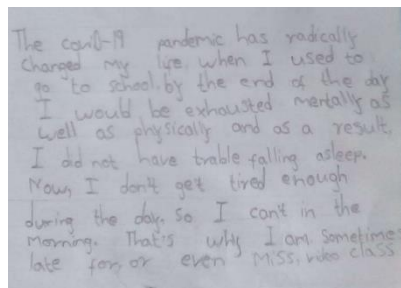
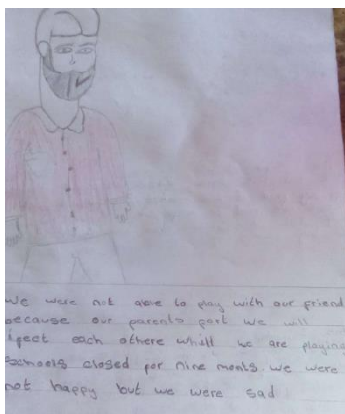
Amongst all of the data analysed it was evident that the pupils' understanding and engagement with their partnership centred around the themes of **country**, **school** and **partnership**. Each drawing and initial reflection on the partnership by all participants showed a strong understanding of each other's country, location, national symbols and climate. There was a common sense of comparison such as similar landscapes and some reference to the 'interlinking' of the countries and schools, but no real sense of understanding the history of the link. Many drawings and expressions of what is 'known' linked to their experience in school, as many drew symbols of school identity such as logos, mottos and their geographical location. These are important reference points to typical 'getting to know you' activities that would have been led in their respective schools and shared during reciprocal visits.

An unexpected outcome to many of these responses was the common experience of sport. Drawings from Lesotho in particular showed sports being played in both countries and it being a huge part of their missed learning due to COVID-19. When the Primary school pupils were able to connect via Zoom, they talked about sports day and their likes and dislikes, how they use their free time and what opportunities they have outside of school. There was a clear sense of missed social interaction from all participants due to lockdown experiences and the common connection of this was noticed by all. One standout moment was the discussion about online gaming, where Basotho pupils assumed all Welsh pupils stayed up all night playing games. The realisation by all that this was a common misconception made the groups laugh. Older pupils in Lesotho were posed the question – 'what musical instruments do you play?'. Instead of exposing the 'lack of opportunity' in the Lesotho Education system, one learner talked about how she would love to play piano one day. This more reflective thinking from the High Schools also showed that the value placed on education was clearly considered by older pupils and how important the partnership is on their school identity and learning. All groups expressed how

positive it is to learn from others and making friends in other countries helps them to be a good global citizen.

The moments of engagement witnessed in this study spotlight the golden threads that suggest how important the 'live' or 'asynchronous' exchange is. With the exception of the High School student exchange many years ago, the pupils in both countries have only learnt about the partnership through the teacher as filter and facilitator. They may have seen videos and other documentation from pupils as part of shared learning, but these learner-centred and learner-driven experiences show how possible it is to expand their critical thinking and understanding.

Pupils' experience with the partnership



Dear Diary,
today I woke up and helped my mother with the morning chores. I helped prepare the fire for cooking and warming bath water. Whilst I was waiting for the water to heat up, I swept the yard and made sure that all the drums were filled with water. After that, I began to prepare myself for school.

The data analysed from the written tasks and interactions began to paint an interesting picture of how these young people have navigated **COVID-19** and **lockdown** and how these experiences relate to their own **cultural context**. These themes seemed most relevant in analysing their experience – both past and current. All pupils had engaged with the partnership at least 6-12 months prior to this study. Schools in Lesotho had been affected by strikes prior to lockdown, so the experience of the partnership was a patchwork of memories and active engagement during the research project. This active engagement and lived experience really dictated the interactions and reflection of the students. A majority of references were made to the rules and safety measures we all have to live by in each country. For young people to go through such a unique and all-consuming experience such as a global pandemic, it is pertinent to see how it was top of their responses. Through the Zoom and video exchange, the definitive similarity of new safety rules, mask wearing, and social distancing was a powerful connection. Being able to express their opinions about these life changing events and match the similarities in each country exemplified their global connection. It was impossible for them to reflect on the partnership without the current context being explored, even with the youngest students. The diary task gave them an opportunity for this in particular and some powerful writing was shared about how lockdown was encountered in each country, including the loss of life, sadness encountered and the impact on basic needs. Many were able to connect through such similarities and imagine how the other lived and coped during lockdown. Two of the Basotho pupils wrote about mental health and fear, which was then highlighted in the video exchanges

as well-being was discussed, and new initiatives in school such as Well-being Wednesday were initiated. In addition to this, some of the diary extracts showed very good empathy and the ability to apply understanding in a new context.

The theme that was referred to the most in all the data was **people**. Most experiences here were about differences in home life, school routines and responsibilities. Welsh pupils had a clear set of knowledgeable facts about language, clan structure and traditions, whereas Basotho pupils queried learner behaviour and attitudes more than their Welsh counterparts. Both were inquisitive about the 'why' behind each countries' celebration days in March – in Wales for St. David's Day and in Lesotho for Moshoshoe's Day. Both national days are to celebrate the history and identity of each country, and are a big part of partnership calendars, although interestingly all learners were not clear on the background context for them. Many mentions were also made to togetherness and the importance of partnership, learning and understanding. This reflects a clear foundation to the school partnerships which centre on common human experience, common age-related learning context and lastly, the noticeable differences in culture and daily life.

Impact of school partnerships on pupils

From the data analysis above you can begin to see how the partnership has added value to the global learning of the pupils. To measure the impact of the partnership on their learning I analysed the evidence of cognitive processes in relation to the 6 levels in the 2001 revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The results are presented in Appendix 3 as a tally chart and bar graph. The highest evidence of impact is on the lower levels in 'Knowledge and Understanding'. Nearly half of the data shows evidence of 'Application' of this knowledge and only as we reach the higher levels of analysis, evaluation and creative skills do we see evidence in the older pupils' submissions. They were able to embrace the creative aspects of the tasks where they showed more ability to evaluate and create new content on their own. From my literature review this echoes with the evidence gathered by Bourn et al (2017) whereby the depth of learning in Secondary phase is often more evident. As many researchers have posited, more longitudinal studies are needed to measure impact over time in both Northern and Southern school partnership contexts.

Nevertheless, this does show a level of impact on learning. Throughout the partnership project work, the sample pupils are clearly showing evidence of strong knowledge about one another and good understanding of context and culture. Through their independent activities, some displayed the application ability, such as imagining they were living in their partner country and communicating with empathy and applied knowledge. Others were able to apply this knowledge to critique and question assumptions, or make evaluative judgements to create new content such as creative writing or a video diary. It is my understanding that these creative outcomes and digital exchanges are showing a new authentic dimension to the partnerships in which virtual exchanges have the potential to bring about deep learning encounters.

All pupils who participated in the research took part in an online survey after their online exchanges to reflect on their enjoyment and learning in relation to the bigger global learning

impact statements set by the British Council. When asked if they have knowledge and understanding about the Sustainable Development Goals, global responsibility and similarities and differences, all participants answered in the positive. Fewer pupils ticked the answers for understanding interconnectedness and '*learning about global issues such as inequality*'. This was indicative of the Primary phase pupils who have not been part of in-depth learning this year due to the recent gaps in project activity due to COVID lockdowns.

'We have learnt there are many similarities and differences between (our) schools-lockdown, school life and home life. It was great to connect via Zoom and we would like this to happen again soon.' Primary pupil, Wales.

The second set of impact statements refer to 'Attitudes and Values'. All students equally felt that they were developing attitudes and values that reflected: *Learning about other people and cultures, social justice, responsibility for one another, value other points of view*. One respondent from the Primary phase did not value the diversity of people in the community, country and world. This was surprising and may have been an error.

'After taking part in this project I feel extremely lucky to have my education because not everyone in the world has the chance to be educated. I think in Britain we waste and take our education for granted, when we should appreciate and be grateful for what we have. Though, I find their way of learning in X High School incredible. They want to be there because they have to pay for it, so their work ethic and disruption in class is very different to ours.' High School pupil, Wales.

Lastly, students were asked what 'core skills' they believe they have developed through their partnership work. All (100%) felt that *collaboration and communication* was the main area of skill development. The Welsh Primary pupils felt they had developed *critical thinking* and have gained the ability *to take action for the SDGs*. 80% of High school pupils felt they had gained *critical thinking and problem-solving* skills, with no pupils feeling their had gained new *digital skills*. This was acknowledged as an area of impact however from the Primary schools in Lesotho as they highly valued the new use of Zoom and Padlet.

'Listening, speaking, responding to questions, asking questions has improved, we experienced meeting through Zoom and use of Google classroom. We are feeling happy to meet with our partners through Zoom.' Primary pupil, Lesotho.

An extremely important area of impact on the pupils involved at the High School level was the development of their group friendship. With school and parental permissions, the students involved in this research created a WhatsApp group to initially discuss the tasks on the Padlet. This has impacted them on a personal level whereby they have been able to share information and questions in a more informal and personal way. This is a unique situation as the High School partnership has evolved and grown over such a period of time that the teachers involved are comfortable making this decision. As pupil ambassadors for the partnership, this deeper level of engagement does take their learning to a new level with possible lifelong impact.

Conclusions

In this final section I will draw together my conclusions based on findings from the three research questions, the implications for global citizenship education, and some final thoughts on my professional practice learning from this research.

How have pupils engaged?

The pupils involved in the study have all engaged in the partnership in a variety of ways including face-to-face teacher visits, project-based learning, class-based activities, and learner led actions. The strength of the school and country link identity was a strong factor in all pupils understanding of the partnership. The length of the partnership has had a significant impact on the depth of their knowledge and understanding as over time their partnerships have become embedded into the school ethos and development plans. Through their engagement in this research project, I have witnessed their global learning in action: pupils came together to share the unique personal experiences of lockdown and the impact on their lives. There was evident inquisitiveness and openness to new experiences, connections and knowledge that has been clearly heightened through these 'live' and 'asynchronous' experiences. From the engagement of the High School pupils beyond this project it is significant to mention the depth of their learning, particularly through their new friendships, makes this partnership engagement unique and possibly creates space for authentic mutual global learning, driven by the young people themselves.

How have pupils experienced the partnership?

For learners to 'experience', to undergo a meaningful encounter, it is undeniable that 'live' is better. The visiting teacher from another country and culture brings the world to the child. However, the creative use of online platforms during COVID has re-created this somewhat. The live Zoom session for the Primary pupils was as exciting for the teachers as it was for the pupils. The asynchronous sharing between the High Schools then opened a friendship via WhatsApp that is truly exciting. All the teachers involved commented on how powerful the friendship element is for them on a personal and professional level. The wider network of link schools between the two countries adds value to this friendship and forges a strong committed partnership. The learners display this strength in their reflections on partnership and the shared global experiences of COVID in their writing and drawing. The predominant theme in all their responses centred on 'people' and this common human experience. The questions posed to one another in the 'live' sessions and in some diary entries interrogated misconceptions, imagined new realities and explored the feelings associated with the changes in life for everyone, including the inevitable impact on mental health and well-being.

What have been the impacts on learning?

The independent learning tasks in the study allowed all learners to display their development of personal knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and core skills in relation to their experiences of the partnership this year. From the analysis using Bloom's Taxonomy you can see clear evidence of 'deep' learning for a number of the older students. The nature of the long term and sustainable partnership would suggest that as the younger pupils progress through they will also display the higher-level areas of cognitive process. The connection between the partnership work in the past, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the research project were not so evident in my research due to the current COVID context. If the pupils were project active, they would have perhaps scored higher in their reflective surveys. However, they all scored high in their development of new knowledge, understanding, developing attitudes and values of sustainability, social justice and global responsibility. All pupils and teachers agree the highest core skill development is collaboration and communication which is central to any working partnership, so a true skill for life for all involved. There was evidence of critical thinking and empathy in many of the reflections which was demonstrated in their imaginative writing – Basotho pupils imagined how it would be to be in school next to the sea and ride a bike, and Welsh pupils reflected on the additional roles for children in Lesotho to help with day-to-day chores such as food preparation and cleaning.

Soft or critical global citizenship?

My query underlying all my investigations was whether or not the pupils were experiencing soft or critical global citizenship. Did they display overt 'sympathy' rather than 'empathy'? Did they adopt a 'donor' and 'recipient' attitude to the partnership? There were elements of this displayed by a minority. Comments such as *'we need to send them display materials as they have none'* and commentary on *'Welsh teachers have helped us read better'* by younger pupils showed that we have way to go in re-aligning the dynamic and position of equity. However, regarding Andreotti's matrix I can conclude that there was no evidence of 'helplessness', 'lack', or 'moral imperative' to make a difference displayed in any of the research encounters.

However, there was also no evidence to judge whether teachers or pupils understand 'root cause' and 'addressing injustice' with 'individual accountability'. As many researchers argue, CPD is the answer for teachers to not repeat the same single story that positions people within the power hierarchy. It has not been within the scope of this study to explore this, but it is clear that a new 'collaborative' CPD space is needed for partners to collaborate, reflect, share and act on their learning. When I have discussed power and privilege with colleagues in Lesotho, this new language and positioning will take unlearning from their side too. Evidence is still present of the donor approach within international development and the tendency to see any funding from these projects as being 'gifted' from Wales. Recent experiences of the CCGL programme saw many schools gain valuable training and school resources to support their teaching and learning about the SDGs, but only because Dolen Cymru were able to facilitate it. With the money still being held by the UK partner, how can true equity and a balance of power exist?

In conclusion therefore, NGOs like Dolen Cymru have a key role to play within such partnerships. Our 'critical ethics of care' approach needs to shape the way school partnerships get started, so that partners understand why the country twinning exists and how it can be a collaborative process through which communities work together. If an NGO can support the unlearning of privilege and help the creation of post-colonial 'transformational' spaces for all participants, then the journey towards 'critical global citizenship' will be enabled for more people. More people will be able to reflect critically on its legacy, take responsibility for change, and act ethically to ensure that these complex power relations are addressed and built into teaching and learning.

Reflections

In addition to studies conducted in the UK looking at the impact of global learning on pupils, this paper provides further evidence that pupils in Wales and Lesotho involved in global learning and international partnerships are showing mutual respect and responsibility towards others with an increased knowledge of global issues (particularly in terms of the pandemic and its impacts). This study has also captured an improved confidence to communicate and collaborate, with some pupils able to engage in some social action or change (Hunt, 2013: 10). There is evidence of critical literacy being developed, particularly in the High schools, where current knowledge is being re-constructed through interactions from pupil to pupil in both countries. As pupils move from their Primary to Secondary phase in the sample schools there is a pathway for them to further understand the complexities of global issues and their position in the world, where their international partnership provides a solid foundation to other global learning across their curriculums and may indeed be a part of their active global citizenship journeys. Bourn and Cara (2012) identified this as a need for school partnerships to be successful and these examples are good evidence of such.

Final Thoughts

Taking part in this research project has made me critically reflect on my own power and privilege and understanding of my role within the charity. This has been a painful process as I have to acknowledge my mistakes and complicity in reinforcing stories of lack and White power over the years. I am passionate about the potential of young people and the importance of active global citizenship, which has again made me take stock about my own active citizenship – I have to practice what I preach. Next steps for Dolen Cymru's role in global citizenship are to improve our school linking programme, provide better guidance and support, and ensure an equitable approach to teachers in both countries. We have begun to write a CPD course to be led virtually for teachers in both countries and we have made a set of teaching resources that provide valuable perspectives from Lesotho to inform the work in Wales as part of the New Curriculum. The next step is to make resources for the Basotho schools that can support their approach to global learning. To do this, I will work with the teachers in Lesotho who are currently engaged in successful partnerships and have an important voice to share.

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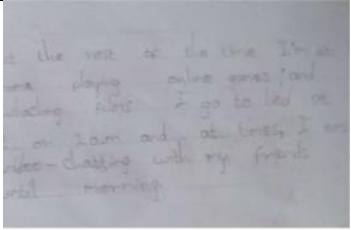

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Thematic Analysis Process

Table 1 – Initial identification of themes

Theme	Meaning	Possible Codes	Examples from students
COVID	Reference to COVID in terms of life before and after lockdown.	Rules Safety Impact	
LOCKDOWN	References to experiences during lockdown, home learning & new normal	Learning Personal life Routines Challenges	
COUNTRY	Reference to learning about each other's country geography, climate, places etc	Weather/climate Landscape/places Flag	





<p>CULTURE</p>	<p>Learning shown about each other's language, traditions, ways of life etc</p>	<p>Religion Language Dress Food Traditions Symbols</p>	
<p>SCHOOL</p>	<p>Sharing information about school routines, subjects, events etc</p>	<p>After school Sport Subjects/Learning Technology Logos Mottos School day School buildings</p>	
<p>PARTNERSHIP</p>	<p>Reference to the long link/country visits/positive outcomes of partnership</p>	<p>Positive/aspirations Global Citizenship Country Link/friendship Learning</p>	
<p>PEOPLE</p>	<p>Learners have referred to personal values, connectedness, differences that form the partnership bond</p>	<p>Differences Similarities Poverty Values Appearance Togetherness</p>	

Table 2 – Refining of codes based on each theme

Code	Working definition	Relevant theme/s	Outcome
Rules Safety Impact	Any reference to COVID including restrictions on daily life and ways to stay safe – drawings, discussions and writing about how to stay safe, new rules etc.	COVID	Codes remain
Learning Personal life Routines Challenges	Particular reference to learning during home schooling – learning activities, restrictions, emotional impact/challenges	LOCKDOWN LEARNING	Code include routines as this comparison was made between all learners when comparing experiences at home, e.g., cleaning/farming. Separate to reflections on personal activities, friendships etc.
Weather Government Landscape/places Flag	Any reference to the physical country features. Also, the symbol of the nations as a key part of national identity.	COUNTRY	Government was omitted as only 1 pupil mentioned this as part of their learning. Places of manmade interest were added to natural landscape code.
Religion Language Dress Food Traditions Symbols	Lots of learning was shared about a variety of aspects, mainly traditions and symbols of cultural identity.	CULTURE	Dress was combined into traditions, food kept separate as it was a key reference in cultural understanding displayed by learners.
After school Sport Subjects/Learning Technology Logos Mottos School day	Every exchange referred to school as a main partnership connection – strong part of the work shared	SCHOOL	This was a popular category, so some have been combined: Sport/recreation Subjects/Learning Logos/Mottos School day

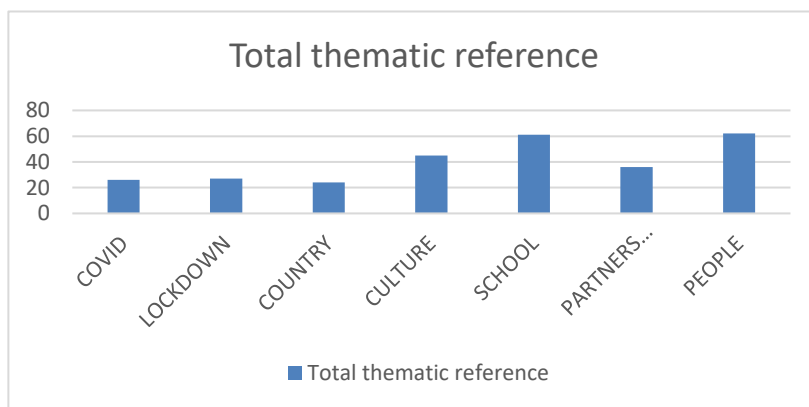
School buildings			Learning environment to include technology
Differences Similarities Poverty Values Appearance Togetherness	Many differences were talked about/ shared in creative writing but overwhelming connection through analysis and Zoom showed sims/ togetherness	PEOPLE	This again was highly referred too. The references to similarities were put into a category called togetherness as this was a clear theme in the creative and digital experiences.

Appendix 2: Final codes with thematic reference count

Table 3 – Number of times each code was present in the data

Theme	FINAL CODES	Number of times referred to	Thematic reference
COVID	Rules	7	26
	Safety	9	
	Impact	10	
LOCKDOWN	Learning	9	27
	Personal life	9	
	Routines	4	
	Challenges	5	
COUNTRY	Weather	4	24
	Landscape/places	11	
	Flag	9	
CULTURE	Religion	7	45
	Language	7	
	Food	6	
	Traditions	13	
	Symbols	12	
SCHOOL	Sport/recreation	14	61
	Subjects/Learning	13	
	Logos/Mottos	15	
	School day	10	
	Learning environment	9	
PARTNERSHIP	Positive/aspirations	12	36
	Global Citizenship	9	
	Country Link/ friendship	8	
	Learning	7	

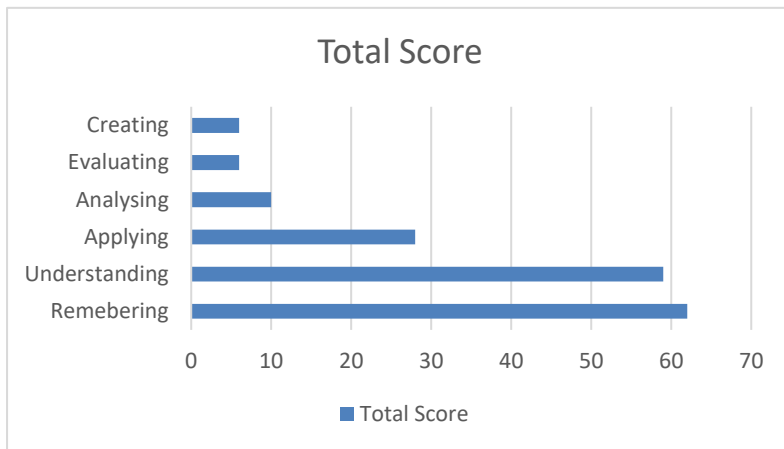
PEOPLE	Differences	28	62
	Poverty	5	
	Values	7	
	Appearance	10	
	Togetherness	12	



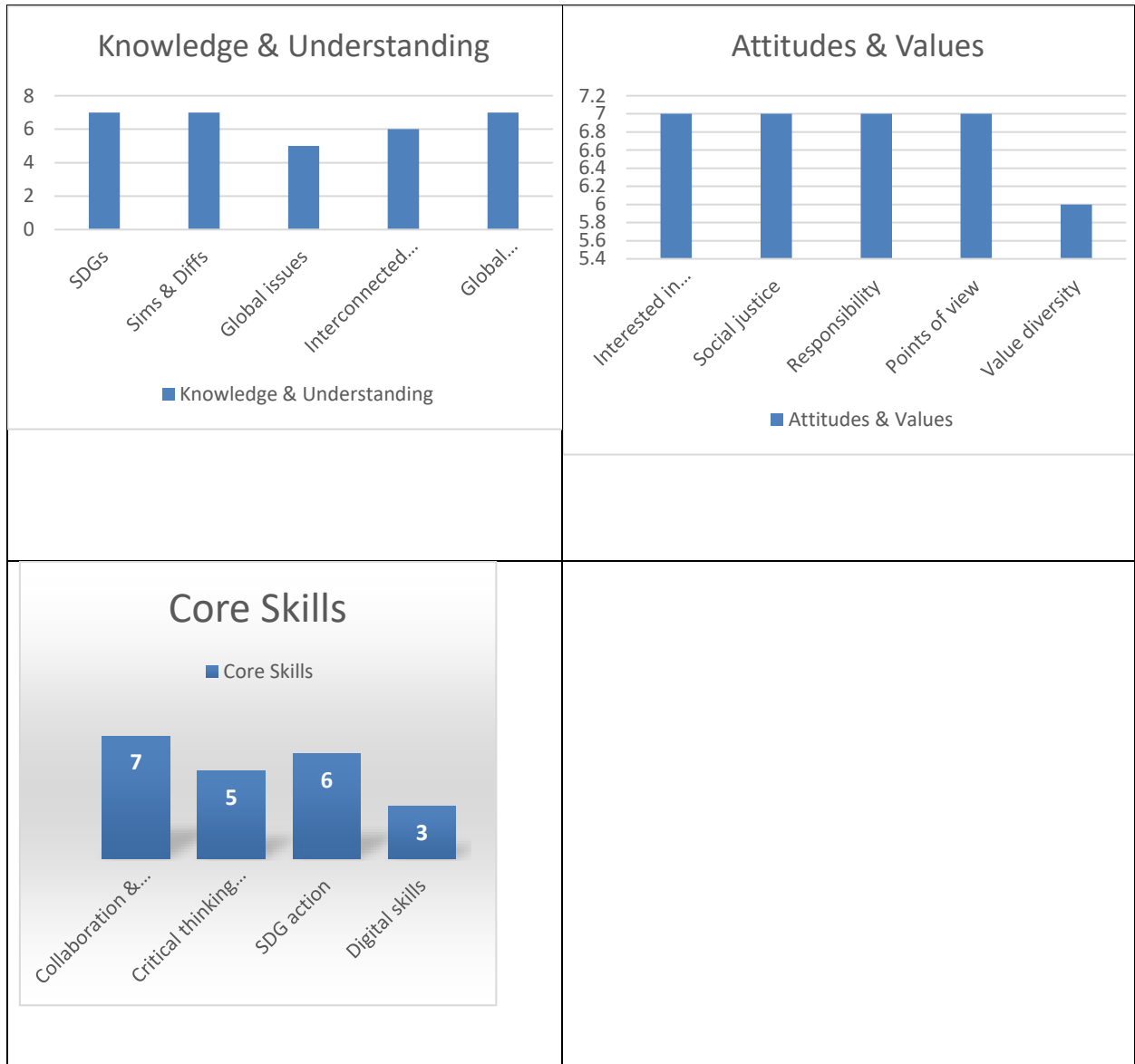
Appendix 3: Bloom’s Taxonomy analysis

Table 5 – Analysis of data in relation to Bloom’s revised taxonomy

Tally chart that shows how each school’s submissions were matched to the levels in Blooms revised taxonomy		Levels	Drawings	KWL	Diaries	Zooms/ videos	Total
		Remembering					62
		Understanding					59
		Applying					28
		Analyzing					
		Evaluating					10
		Creating					
							6
							6



Appendix 4: Learner survey results



Appendix 5: Letter to Parents

January 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Sharon Flint, and I am a teacher and Education Officer for Dolen Cymru – Wales Lesotho Link, a small charity that partners with communities in Wales and Lesotho in Southern Africa for health and education projects. I am undertaking an action research project on the schools programme 'Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning' funded by the British Council. I'm sure you're aware that your son/daughter's school has a link with Quthing in Lesotho where projects have been completed and teachers take part in exchange visits. For more information see our website www.dolencymru.org

I would like to invite your son/daughter to participate in my research project by joining a series of small group sessions with myself and their teacher from March to May 2021. These activities will investigate the experiences and impact of global partnerships on the pupils in 4 schools in Carmarthenshire and Quthing. There will be a written report and with your permission a podcast produced as part of the activities.

All research activities will be kept strictly confidential to the researchers involved and at NO time will any individual responses be released to the general public. This gives your son/daughter a chance to express your views on this programme in a confidential and anonymous way and still be able to make a difference. Their participation in this study is completely voluntary so they can withdraw from the research project at any stage. After careful and precise analysis of the data obtained from this research, I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the findings at your request. The results of this research project will hopefully enhance my understanding of global partnerships and pupil impact and will be fed back to the British Council and the University of London in October 2021.

We thank you in advance for your time and participation. If any questions do arise, feel free to contact me at your convenience at sharon@dolencymru.org. Please complete the attached consent form with your son/daughter and submit it to your son/daughter's school by 1st March 2021.

Yours sincerely,



Sharon Flint - Education Officer

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Project title:

Wales & Lesotho school partnerships – a study exploring the impact on learning in 4 schools

Name of Researcher: Sharon Flint

Name of CCGL Project teacher:

Teacher email:

Name of school:

Project Plan:

March 2021 – Learner focus group 1 – activity to understand the partnership with Wales and learner perspectives

April 2021 – Learner focus group 2 – activity to observe learner responses to information sent from Wales

May 2021 – Learner focus group 3 - activity to observe learner responses to information sent from Wales

Please tick & initial in the boxes:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information dated January 2021 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	•
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	•
I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the research team.	•
I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.	•
I agree to take part in the above study.	•
Signature Parent/Guardian: Signature Learner: Signature Teacher:	•

Signature Researcher:	
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You may decline to participate in this study. You may end your participation in this study at any time. If you decide to remain anonymous, maintaining your anonymity will be a priority and every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. If you prefer anonymity, there will not be any identifying information on audiotapes or transcripts of this or any interview. No-one will hear any audiotapes or see any transcripts without your prior consent. All materials generated from this, or any interview will remain confidential.



About the Author

Sharon Flint is an experienced Secondary School teacher and Education Officer for the Wales based charity Dolen Cymru Lesotho. She has worked in the Development Sector since 2013 when she first visited Lesotho as a volunteer teacher. Since then, she has trained over 300 teachers in Lesotho and worked with over 50 school partnerships between both countries. She was also a Local Advisor for the most recent British Council's Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Programme.

You can follow Sharon on Twitter [@flintythenomad](#) and [@DolenCymru](#)

About Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is a free and flexible programme for schools around the world based on learning, knowledge sharing and international collaboration. Connecting Classrooms supports teachers to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to act more thoughtfully, ethically and responsibly as citizens and contributors to society.

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is funded by the British Council and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and runs from 2018 through to 2022. For more information go to: www.britishcouncil.org/connectingclassrooms

The CCGL Practitioner Research Fund

The CCGL Practitioner Research Fund runs from 2019-2022 with the aim to support educators to conduct research related to global learning and overseas school partnerships within schools. DERC was contracted by British Council to support educators in the research and writing process.

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. The DERC team conducts research on development education, global learning, and global citizenship education, runs a Masters' degree course, supervises doctoral students and produces a range of reports, academic articles and books. DERC also runs a highly successful free online course Global Education for Teachers which is hosted via Futurelearn. DERC is located in the UCL Institute of Education, the world-leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science.

For further information on the Centre visit: www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-derc