

Reflections on a Human-Centred Education Pre-Pilot with Young People with SEND

November 2018

Alice McCarthy Sommerville

Scherto Gill

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Outline of the project	4
Learning opportunities facilitated by the programme	7
Three Students' Stories	7
Harir	7
Rachel	9
Jacob	11
Key Kinds of Learning Opportunities	13
Developing Critical Thinking	13
Building Confidence and Communication	13
Enriching Emotional Awareness	14
Encouraging Care and Respect	14
Nurturing Meaningful Relationships	15
Discussion: Whole Person Learning	16
Looking Forward	18
Final thoughts	19

Executive Summary

Human-Centred Education aims at the holistic development and growth of young people as human beings. It focuses on the nurturing the relationships between students, teachers and other stakeholders within the school as a learning community. This report reflects on the learning opportunities offered by a 3-year pilot programme of the three core curriculum areas of Human-Centred Education (HCE): Cognitive Development, Social/Emotional Exploration and Keywork/Mentoring.

The programme involved 8 students with additional learning needs, and a core team of staff at a specialist centre (The Seaside Centre) based within a mainstream secondary school, working closely with the research team at the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace (GHFP). Students were offered one session a week, alternating between cognitive development time and group emotional time. All students also were given access to 30 minutes per week of individual mentoring time with a designated keyworker. Before the start of the programme, all members of the Seaside Centre team took part in a professional development and dialogue INSET day, hosted at the GHFP, which provided an introduction to and opportunities to explore HCE aims and values.

The programme has had an enthusiastic reception from students and the researchers have observed a significant shift in the ways students tend to relate to one another and to adults in the school. Students began the programme with resistant attitudes, they were rude to and expressed frustration with the adults leading the sessions and were routinely unkind to one another. By the end of the programme, the once fragile social connections between students had become strong bonds of friendship and support and students were taking full advantage of the safe space to share their experiences. Every member of the group appeared more capable of (and open to) articulating their perspectives on a wide range of issues, and the group began to take shared ownership of sessions, directing discussions in mature and thoughtful ways, allowing the teaching team to take a step back. The researchers have also observed the professional development of the core teaching team, who are now more confident in planning, developing and facilitating flexible, responsive and safe learning environments.

We have identified five core areas where students have shown significant growth:

- **Confidence**
- **Critical thinking and communication**
- **Emotional awareness**
- **Embodying care and respect**
- **Building meaningful relationships**

As the discussion will make apparent, these should not be understood as discrete areas of development, but rather as indicators of the whole-person learning facilitated by the programme.

Part of the role of the pilot programme was to provide a space where the research team could work alongside practitioners to build on the theoretical work of the GHFP to further develop HCE. This report therefore also explores ways in which the programme could be enriched, in particular in the areas of **professional development** and an **holistic approach to programme development**. This would include more focussed and extensive staff development and mentoring, thereby further empowering participating staff and deepening understanding of HCE across the whole teaching team. It might also include more opportunities for collaborative planning and professional dialogue.

Outline of the project

Since September 2015, the Seaside Centre have been working in collaboration with the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace, to pilot a 3-year Human-Centred Education programme. Human-Centred Education aims at the holistic development and growth of young people as human beings. It focuses on the nurturing the relationships between students, teachers and other stakeholders within the school as a learning community. A human-centred education empowers young people to pursue a rich, meaningful, flourishing life during adolescence and throughout their adulthood and nurtures those core personal qualities and dispositions that make us more fully human, including inner integrity, relationships with others, and care for the world at large.

The Pilot is centred around three of the core HCE pillars: (1) cognitive development, (2) group-based emotional exploration, and (3) one-to-one mentoring. These three interrelated pillars are concerned to promote students' cognitive and social/emotional development and relationship building, whilst at the same time supporting them to learn to understand themselves and to have a sense of autonomy and direction with regard to their learning and personal development, to appreciate and collaborate with others, and to become motivated to take responsibility for their own learning and support others' learning.

In total, eight students took part in the Pilot programme. They all have identifiable additional learning needs and Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. Five of the students are enrolled in the Seaside Centre, and three are enrolled within the main school. Cognitive development sessions ('Cognitive time') and social/emotional exploration sessions ('Group time') were designed and facilitated by 2 members of the Seaside Centre team, Clara and Doris, with support from the research team of the GHFP. The one-to-one mentoring resembled the Seaside Centre's own keywork sessions and is facilitated by Clara, Doris and three other keyworkers.

During term time, the students came together once a week as a group for an average of 1 hour/week, rotating between cognitive development sessions and group emotional exploration sessions. The majority of these sessions were observed by and participated in by a member of the research team from the GHFP, and the facilitators have worked closely with the research team to reflect upon their practice and their development of human-centred sessions and human-centred pedagogies. In addition, each of the students was offered a 30 minute one-to-one mentoring session each week.

Cognitive Development Sessions are a time for young people to develop reading, listening, speaking, thinking, reasoning, and writing capabilities, which are necessary for them to both access curriculum contents in school, and to enable them to make meaningful decisions in their lives (present and future). They provide students with opportunities to become more comfortable with language and expand the complexity of their linguistic abilities, to develop their thinking processes, to understand and engage critically with diverse texts, and to articulate and communicate their ideas. Cognitive Development sessions are distinctively different from the students' everyday class work, thereby enabling them to engage with and develop relevant qualities and capabilities without experiencing frustration, apathy, alienation and other negative emotions or reactions often associated with their struggle to cope with the challenges in the mainstream classroom.

Group Emotional Exploration supports students in their emotional and social development by offering a safe space with opportunities for direct experiences of emotions and feelings, group reflection on these experiences, for open sharing, listening and caring, and for encountering and exploring differences. These group sessions encourage students to engage with emotions and emotive perceptions in creative ways and non-threatening ways, such as through roleplay, music, body sculpture, drawings, and storytelling. It is a space where students can build meaningful relationships with each other and with the adults facilitating the

sessions. Through relationships and friendships, the students learn to develop self-understanding as well as understanding and appreciation of others in the group.

Keyword/Mentoring is protected weekly one-to-one time when a trained Mentor or Keyworker and the student can build a trusting relationship. In mentoring sessions, students can be supported and nurtured with care and the mentor serves as a point of contact for vulnerable students, providing advice and support for their everyday needs. The mentor and student reflect together on the student's overall experiences in education, the development of their personal qualities, strengths and values, and how these might impact their decisions and actions in learning and in life. The mentor supports the student to identify immediate, medium-term and long-term goals and challenges them to examine how they might best achieve these goals. In doing so, mentoring sessions help students develop a sense of direction and purpose in their lives and to understand that their education here and now as a part of this.

All three Human-Centred Education Pilot sessions share some core common features:

- 1) Sessions offer students a safe space, where there are clear boundaries and consistent values. This serves as a framework of ethos and enables students, who are vulnerable in many ways, to experience a sense of safety and security.
- 2) Sessions encourage an openness and flexibility within the above boundaries and values. This is reflected in the facilitators' willingness to let students follow an interesting thought or to take a gentle pace, and less rigidity in pursuing predetermined learning outcomes.
- 3) Sessions distinguish themselves from the mainstream classroom setting, giving students an impression of 'not counting'. This allows students to engage in a more emotionally connected way, by reducing anxieties and stresses associated with their usual classroom environment.
- 4) Sessions are led by adults who take time to develop rapport and relationship with students and who exhibit a genuine care for them and respect for their individual processes. In doing so, students come to know and trust these adults. Core to this approach is the development of a culture of listening.
- 5) Sessions take place within a contained physical environment, the Seaside Centre, and are facilitated by a small team of professionals whose consistent presence in the students' sometimes chaotic and hectic lives provides some rare stability and reliable contact. This empowers students to be more daring in taking risks in learning and exploring.

Here is how the core facilitating team described their approach:

"I think what I have tried to foster within the classroom is a general kindness and respect for one another and focussing on us as a group. ... It is a lesson still but I have tried to be more flexible ... we don't necessarily have to get through everything that I have planned. I think just making sure that everyone is involved and in a way that is comfortable for them and that they are respectful to each other."

-- Clara, Cognitive Development Facilitator

"We try to allow the time to go where it goes, and not to be obsessed with covering a curriculum and targets and levels. There's time here, there's a space, people are listening to them, they're listening to each other, and it's a way of relating that doesn't happen during the rest of their time at school."

-- Doris, Group Time Facilitator

Throughout the third year of the pilot, the research team systematically documented classroom observations, facilitators' and keyworkers' reflections and students' comments and evaluation in order to explore the potentials of the programme on the development of students. This has included one-to-one interviews with the majority of participating students and all participating staff and keyworkers. Feedback from students and staff has been very positive. Teachers have described students as less disruptive, less prone to crying in lessons and less rude to adults and peers. Students have expressed enthusiasm about and appreciation for the sessions, described their experiences as calm and enjoyable, and are openly enthusiastic about the powerful friendships developed within the group, despite their very different backgrounds. In the following sections we shall look in more detail at the pedagogical potentials of the programme in relation to whole person development and learning, and also at the aspects which may benefit from further development and reflection.

Learning opportunities facilitated by the programme

The intervention at the Seaside Centre was designed with the intention of providing a space to explore and develop the types of activities and pedagogies which would support the aims of HCE, with a view to using these insights in the development of a more focussed pilot programme. Due to the small scale of the pilot and the exploratory aims of the research, the data collection has not involved any structured 'before-and-after' measures, nor have we formally measured students' academic or social/emotional progress. Rather we have worked with students and staff, and in particular the core researcher-practitioner team, to draw out the learning opportunities facilitated by the programme.

In what follows, we will draw on anecdotes and individuals' experiences to paint a picture of the kinds of learning opportunities offered by the programme. These are drawn from: researcher field notes; 20-40 minute semi-structured interviews with students; 60-90 minute open-ended, exploratory interviews with Doris and Clara; 10-30 minute semi-structured interviews with participating keyworkers; a 60-minute facilitated focus group with all keyworkers; and informal researcher-facilitator team meetings and conversations with the team.

In general, the data suggests that the learning spaces offered by the programme, which complement the rich portfolio of activities already offered at the Seaside Centre, have played a role in supporting students whole person growth, specifically to grow in confidence, to build meaningful relationships and to think in more relevant and coherent ways. The three elements of the HCE programme have overlapped to provide a network of support which has allowed students to explore their own perspectives on a wide range of issues and to experiment with ways of expressing these views. Students seem more self-aware, including around their emotions, and more able to reflect on their relations to significant issues and ideas in their lives. In the process they have learned a great deal about one another and been given the opportunity to build meaningful, respectful and caring relationships with one another and the adults involved.

Three Students' Stories

In this section we will present three short stories capturing some of the changes we have seen in students over the three years of the programme. These will help the reader to understand the kinds of whole-person learning exhibited by students, as well as giving a flavour of the sessions they have taken part in. We will draw on themes arising from these stories, alongside insights from participants, in the discussion that follows.

Harir

Let us begin by describing Harir on the first day of the programme.

He came into the session as though he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. His body language was closed; he sat with shoulders hunched and a deep frown furrowed his forehead. When he did contribute in the session it was in short, clipped sentences, bordering on (and often crossing over the border into) rudeness. When other students spoke to him his response tended to be anger and his tone was frequently aggressive or resentful. As Christmas neared, Harir's mood deepened. He spent whole sessions scowling, barely saying a word.

We learned from Doris and the team that as a Muslim, Harir found it especially difficult at school to handle the feelings of alienation raised by others' celebration of Christmas. We were also made aware of reports that Harir was experiencing racist bullying in school by several students, who were calling him a 'black Muslim', threatening him with violence, and encouraging his friends to ignore him. In the first year of the pilot, Harir often exhibited frustration and anger with his peers, as well as with staff. In the first term of the programme we witnessed one staff member in tears after one particularly unpleasant encounter with him.

Let us now fast-forward to a session in the third year of the programme. The session begins, the group sit in a circle and Doris asks them to reflect on how they are feeling and to take turns to share. Harir raises his hand and tells the group: "Year 11 feels particularly difficult... partly because there is a lot of work to do, and partly because there is the pressure of GCSEs". He tells us that he has found that friendship is the most important factor in helping him keep a balance: "The reason that I could cope with the amount of work is due to spending time to have fun time with friends, especially Jacob and Simon," he says, turning to them, inviting their input. "Friendship is really important for all students who go through challenges in school." Both Jacob and Simon agreed.

In a session shortly afterwards, Harir and Jacob shared their experiences of a fellow student making racist comments to Harir in a public space, describing how she had made Harir feel threatened and victimised. The boys expressed their frustration but also their support for each other through difficult times. As Jacob described in his interview: "I was like, Harir mate, we need to get out of here now, because I didn't feel comfortable."

A little later in the session Harir raised some concerns and confusions he was experiencing about global attitudes to Islam, and his own experience of being a young Muslim, subject to the casual racism of peers and even his friends' parents. Jacob and Harir shared a story of how they had overheard Jacob's father making Islamophobic comments, and the concerns that this raised in each of them that it would hurt their friendship. Jacob described his endeavours to put things right: "I kept telling my dad that he cannot talk like that because he needs to know about Muslims. Not all Muslims are violent."

As the programme progressed, these kinds of discussions, which were often emotionally charged, were increasingly common. It was striking how Harir began to take initiative, asking the group to consider questions and issues which are part of his day-to-day struggle. He no longer rejects the group in anger and fear, but rather trusts them and asks for their support. As he described to me in his interview:

"We were talking about poppies and the second world war, and I was talking about racism and how it connects with wars, and obviously everyone in the group who listened to my ideas, well, I know Jacob felt emotional after the session, and ...it was kind of emotional for me myself because of the racism and stuff like that all the time."

By the final year of the programme, Harir would often mention his family and their way of life, and speaks proudly of how he tries to be helpful, respectful and supportive to others, as his faith expects of him. He has formed a close friendship with Jacob ("We are like brothers, but closer than real brothers almost,"); they are often heard laughing and joking, even drawing on themes relating to racism to inform their humour (e.g. concocting an elaborate fantasy together, in which Harir was arrested at Jacob's wedding because the guests thought he was a terrorist), as well as offering each other advice and support (e.g. Harir encouraging Jacob to reconsider his disrespectful behaviour towards his mum, suggesting to him that perhaps she was feeling hurt by his manner to her). The empathy, connection and care that these small anecdotes reflect seemed impossible from the Harir who walked into the classroom on day 1.

In his interview, Harir spoke with enthusiasm about his experiences of the HCE sessions and the Seaside Centre more generally, emphasising the relational and participatory nature of the sessions, as well as their accessibility:

"Other lessons are just basically working. You just do whatever the teacher tells us. We just work. The Seaside Centre sessions are different - it's got to do with getting together and participating and chatting."

“The actual PSHE class was a bit hard - the way it kept using words I just didn’t understand. But here they make it really simple - they give us a definition. It is more better - there is more care - so I enjoy it.”

When Harir comes into HCE sessions, he will often approach the adults in the room, asking how we are and engaging in an open, interested and highly personable manner. Throughout his interview, although a little apprehensive in advance, he was cheerful and thoughtful, making good eye contact and asking questions of his own. He reported that he has noticed a shift in the group over time towards being more ‘sensible’:

“Yeah there has been a lot of change... Last year with Jacob and Rachel they had problems with each other getting C1s C2s and all that and distracted me, Tim and the others. But now this year has been a bit more quieter ... This is our last year, year 11, and I think we need to try to make ourselves work harder and not mess around too much.”

Starting out as an angry, disengaged and frustrated member of the group, Harir has become an enthusiastic, reflective and engaged participant, who regularly takes initiative in the group and directs the conversation. He has used the space to process his own personal challenges around race and religious identity, and to build strong, trusting relationships that he can take with him into the future.

Rachel

Our second story is Rachel’s.

In our first session, Rachel spent almost the entire hour with her head on the desk. She didn’t speak a single word and didn’t exhibit any interest at all. She seemed shy and disengaged. As the sessions progressed, the only times she communicated with anyone in the room was to exchange a look or a giggle with Anna (the only other girl in the class), with the intention of making fun of another student or the session itself. When Doris played classical music for the students to sit in a circle and listen to, Rachel sat tapping Anna’s foot every time Doris looked away, muffling her giggles in her sleeve.

In the second term of the pilot the research team observed the participating students in several of their mainstream lessons and were amazed to discover that Rachel tended to be loudly disrespectful, disruptive and aggressive. In one lesson, she spent a large part of the lesson sitting at the very back with a small group of girls, hysterically giggling behind her book (the class were supposed to be reading quietly), occasionally banging the book loudly on the desk and muttering complaints, and making loud unrelated comments to her friends. Once the teacher began to introduce content on the board she became more and more disruptive, and when asked to be quiet, she made a rude comment to the teacher. At this point she was asked to leave, which she did with great drama, first slamming her bag on the desk and swearing loudly, then storming to the door and slamming it behind her. When we reviewed the records of her behaviour management sanctions, we found Rachel’s record was littered with comments from staff reporting her ‘ranting’, ‘swearing’, ‘abuse’, ‘walking out’, ‘refusing’, ‘truanting’, ‘wandering’, ‘haranguing’, ‘arguing’ and ‘sneaking’.

After this, we began to reassess Rachel’s manner in the sessions. What we had understood to be rudeness and shyness, became construable as a valiant attempt to engage. She was neither rude nor resentful in the sessions, simply evasive. Shortly after this, in an informal conversation, one member of staff reported that Rachel had described the Seaside Centre sessions as the only lessons she understands.

As the sessions went on, Rachel’s silence in sessions was so striking that we decided to count the number of words she said in any session, and to capture what they were. Over the first year, it was usual for the count to be somewhere between 0 and 5 words. This would be a brief comment, usually under her breath, a ‘no’,

or 'dunno', to a teacher, or a 'what?' or 'shut up' to her peers. At best it would be "can I go toilet?". She would leave the class multiple times every session, often without asking, ostensibly to fill her water bottle.

By the end of the third year, Rachel would regularly participate in conversations. Whilst by no means chatty in sessions, it was rare that there wasn't something that she engaged with, and her contributions would be more of the form "please can I do some?" or "d'you want to come help with this Simon?". Although she was still often disruptive, distracting others by comments under her breath, written notes, or quiet teasing, she always got started on a task almost immediately, often producing beautiful, careful and thoughtful work, well beyond what she would usually attempt in her mainstream classroom.

By the third year of the programme, she would rarely disrupt the class, and when she did and was reminded of the expectations of the group by an adult or one of her peers, she would often ask to leave the room briefly and return in a moment, calmer and more engaged. She would regularly look to the facilitator for a discrete smile, often for reassurance, or to share the humour of a situation. When she teased other students they tended to be in on the joke and laugh along.

As a student who rarely contributed in a mainstream class, except to swear or shout at the teacher, Rachel was remarkably engaged in the HCE sessions. She listened to others, and whilst still not often confident to speak her views aloud, she responded especially positively to activities which include creative, open elements, such as drawing in the 'pink books' (blank notebooks for free-writing/drawing) whilst listening to music, or choosing colour and word cards based on reactions to audio clips. These kinds of activities which did not require her to provide the 'right' answer, but rather allowed her to engage without fear of not understanding, seemed to enable Rachel to participate with enthusiasm and interest.

Rachel is enrolled in the mainstream school, rather than the Seaside Centre. In the final year of the pilot, however, she began to make use of the Seaside Centre as a safe space in her free time. Most breaktimes she was to be found sitting chatting with other Seaside Centre students, or sitting quietly in a classroom or in the 'soft room'. When she felt unable to stay in her mainstream lessons, she would often come to find her keyworker in the Seaside Centre, rather than wandering (or storming) about the corridors as she would have used to.

Here is the perspective of Rachel's keyworker, which echoes the narrative above:

"With Rachel originally, I did all the talk, she wouldn't talk at all, mostly she would just shrug to questions and if she answered it would be one word. In the first year she often didn't come - she would tell me she forgot. And now she comes! I think she might have only missed one or two of the second year and this year she actually came to see me to find out when we would be having our time ... so that was quite major. We still have times where she is less communicative but not completely silent and mostly she will engage more in a conversation and she does come and seek me out now during the day. So when she does have a problem - like if she has walked out on somebody's lesson - she will often come to look for me and then we will address the issue - you know 'was that a good choice to walk out of the lesson?' No. 'Ok well what do you think you need to put you back into that lesson rather than just wander around the building?' There are still days when she does just wander around the building and some days when I come across her wandering she won't engage with me, and I say 'why don't you come and have some time in the soft room and we can work out how we are going to deal with this' and it's like 'no no no'. Overall that's very rare now. ... I don't think she is necessarily finding lessons easier, I think some of them she is, but I think she is managing difficult situations more effectively. Situations where she isn't understanding and therefore getting frustrated or not doing anything and then having a conflict with the teacher. I think she is more equipped now to be able to manage those moments - to communicate with somebody in the room...that she needs some help. Or to be able to leave the classroom. She has a card now to enable her to leave the

classroom if she's feeling quite volatile - before screaming at somebody or hitting the wall... When she started to talk to me more we were able to start to put things like that in place for her".

By offering Rachel a 'home' within the school, where she feels that the adults are there to support her, Rachel seems to have been able to engage more positively with her school day in general. Rachel declined to take part in an interview, however she wrote several farewell notes to members of the team expressing her appreciation of the programme:

"It was amazing - thank you for everything you have done in this group with us all."

"I don't want to leave because from the moment you have been my keyworker you have helped me with everything...All that hard work I have been trying to do and you and others helped me, so thank you so much. I will miss you... not having you at college by my side."

Jacob

Let us finish our stories with Jacob's.

In the first HCE session, Jacob barely stopped talking. He spoke over the facilitator, seemingly unable to withhold or be distracted from his interior monologue. Whilst Doris talked about identifying their strengths and personal qualities, Jacob talked incessantly about the video game he had been playing the night before. He spoke over Doris repeatedly, making comments such as "Last night I made a thousand dollars," and "I've actually driven at 90mph you know." He seemed unaware of which comments were about his 'real' experiences, and which were game experiences. He was keen to be heard, and also raised his hand to engage with the material of the session, however this would often include his talking over other students. He rarely seemed to have any interest in what other students were saying, or any awareness of the impact of this on others' experience of the session. In the first term he tended to try to sit alone at a desk, rather than with others.

Let us take a look at Jacob in a session halfway through the final year of the pilot. The group are sitting in small groups, sharing their aspirations for the future. Jacob is sitting with one of the research team and Tom, who has severe speech and language difficulties. Jacob begins by sharing his dream of being a songwriter and rapper. In the first year, talking about this career would have involved many inappropriate imaginary details (about women, cars etc.), however now Jacob instead describes his recent songwriting and recording experiences, including how his friends have responded to his writing, and how Harir is helping him to record a music video. Next it is Tom's turn to share his dream of the future, but the researcher finds herself entirely unable to understand Tom's words. Jacob, seeing this, diplomatically asks Tom, "Tom, would you mind if I told her what you said?" Tom agrees, and Jacob reports Tom's words, allowing the discussion to continue. Note the social awareness, responsibility and care reflected in Jacob's actions here; he cared about the process of sharing, was aware of the barrier to shared communication, and took initiative to support the relational process.

The anecdote above reflects a striking shift in Jacob over the programme. He has built genuine friendships with other members of the group, and identifies as part of the Seaside Centre. In his interview he described his initial struggle with being seen by peers in the main school as 'in the Seaside', describing their negative judgements of him as 'special' and his own perception that 'it was only for people who had problems'. He then explained his realisation that he was 'one of them', and that if 'that means I'm like Harir' then that's 'pretty cool'. His description of his friendship with Harir reflects his feeling of being accepted:

“We are like brothers - back in year 9 we said we were best friends and I wasn’t sure what he would think if I called him a brother. But we were that close that it felt like brothers to each other. I started that off. And he was cool with that.”

In his interview, Jacob exhibited a remarkable level of self-reflection and awareness, including on behaviours for which he had received sanctions: “I nearly got a C3 on my first day back because of Miss’ accent -- when she said my name I thought *hopefully she doesn’t get my name wrong* - but she did and I laughed and I got a C1 and C2 - she understood that I was laughing at her accent, which isn’t really a good thing. I apologised.” Over the three years of the programme, Jacob’s contributions and energy became key in bringing the group together and introducing new ideas; he became increasingly able to take turns and listen to others, sharing ideas and anecdotes with relevance and enthusiasm. In our final session we sat in a circle, quietly reflecting on a happy memory. When the group were brought back together, Jacob immediately asked “can we share them now?” The facilitator agreed, expecting him to share his own memory, but Jacob turned to Tim and said “Tim, d’you want to share yours?” The contrast between the apparently self-absorption of the Jacob in early sessions, and his interest in and awareness of another member of the class’s needs or interests here was remarkable.

As it happened, Jacob opened up a space for Tim to share an especially personal memory, something he had never before shared with his peers and the sharing of which brought him to tears. The group listened with care and respect as Tim told a deeply moving anecdote, and then took some quiet time to calm himself down. “I normally don’t talk about it because I think that it’s private”, he told a researcher after the session. “But I thought I would just try it out. I’m not sure where to go from here, but I thought I’d try it out...” Throughout the programme, Tim has tended to be a diligent but quiet member of the group who always focuses on the task at hand but has rarely shared personal anecdotes with us. That he took advantage of the final session to ‘dare’ to open himself to the judgement of his peers seems to reflect his improved confidence and appreciation of the sessions, and that Jacob was responsible for providing an opening for this sharing felt symbolic of his growth over the programme.

Key Kinds of Learning Opportunities

The three stories above may help us to begin to tease out and understand the kinds of learning opportunities facilitated by the HCE programme. It has been the general feeling of the adults and students we spoke with that, over the 3 years of the pilot programme, students began to relate to their school day in more positive ways; they became better at making and sustaining friendships, found it easier to cope in their mainstream classrooms and tended to engage more 'appropriately' (i.e. politely, respectfully, compliantly) with adults in the school. All students involved in the pilot now appear to see the Seaside Centre as a safe environment or 'home' space where they are amongst friends and adults whom they trust and feel supported by. Within sessions students are more confident, more able to think critically and articulate their thinking, more aware of their own and one another's emotions and able to act with sensitivity upon this awareness, and more able to build meaningful, respectful and caring relationships with each other and adults in school. We shall unpack these ideas below, before exploring how these different kinds of learning may be understood as interconnected aspects of students' whole-person growth.

Developing Critical Thinking

By the end of the pilot, the research team observed students in sessions exhibiting more complex and critical thinking competencies. This is reflected in the kinds of discussions which began to be possible and the level on which students could engage with them. The richness of discussions around themes such as race, homelessness, anger, the challenges of adult life and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular the dialogic nature of whole-group discussions, where ideas were explored together and the group worked together to construct a common understanding, reflects students' development in this area.

It is also reflected in the more focussed development of cognitive/thinking skills throughout Cognitive Time, where students have exhibited their improved understandings in areas such as drawing inferences, problem solving, ordering/sequencing, planning, predicting, classifying, decision making and comparing and contrasting.

The combination of the flexible and open spaces created by the facilitators, the more targeted introduction of pertinent discussion themes in group time and the explicit integration of critical thinking skills support in cognitive time, may all have contributed to empowering students to engage critically and thoughtfully with ideas which are directly relevant to their lives.

Building Confidence and Communication

In her interview, Clara described the transformation she saw in the confidence of students by the end of the programme:

"She was confident with this and it was amazing to see, because I had not really seen her in like that before - just her whole body language when she knew the answer to something - just sitting up with her hand up, looking like 'I know this, I want to contribute this'. It was really nice to see."

"I've seen the benefit of the programme in them with just their willingness to talk."

-- Clara, Cognitive Time Facilitator

Clara described the initial challenge of "just being able to get some of them to a point where they could even share an idea or relate to each other in a way that wasn't too defensive..." Distracted or threatened by "bickering or arguments...", they weren't feeling confident enough to share." Now, to her delight, "when they walk into the room, they are ready for and open to what we are doing."

As reflected in the student stories, over the programme we saw students gradually becoming more comfortable to speak in sessions. By the end of the programme, students were using the space to explore and experiment with their ideas.

In their interviews, several students reported that they find the sessions calm and accessible, contrasting this with their experiences of the mainstream school. This difference of atmosphere and ethos may have played a role in the HCE programme's empowerment of students to contribute their ideas in sessions. Removing the fear of judgement, the distraction of a loud and fast-paced classroom, and the anxiety associated with 'getting it wrong', may all have contributed to students' ability and willingness to engage in intelligent conversation about important issues which affect their day-to-day lives.

Enriching Emotional Awareness

Alongside their improved ability to think and articulate their ideas with confidence and clarity, students have also begun to engage with emotional self-awareness and care.

Throughout the programme, facilitators tended to begin their sessions with a brief opportunity for students to express how they were feeling. At the beginning of the programme, this would often take the form of each student saying a number from 1-10. The students often announced their 'feeling' simply as a number ('I'm a 5') with no commentary and they would most often choose either 1 or 10 (extremely bad or extremely good). Meanwhile the others would often be distracted, whispering in small groups or looking out the window, barely aware of their peers' contributions. It was rare, even when asked, that any student would be prepared to give more than a couple of words of explanation. By the end of the programme, students would articulate, sometimes at length, how they were feeling and why, and many of them exhibited an interest in exploring each other's emotional experiences (consider Jacob's story). When it came to sharing at the beginning of sessions, it was even common for them to venture to suggest how others were feeling ("let me guess, you're feeling a bit nervous?").

One of the core teaching team described her experience of this shift towards increased emotional awareness and articulation:

"They didn't have the emotional vocabulary to even talk about this kind of stuff in the beginning. They weren't self aware enough to understand themselves let alone to understand other people or to offer help and support to one another. Which they now are. And to look at some pretty massive issues around things like racism, cultural identity, ethnicity and religious background... and being able to look at the adults in their lives and kind of critically reflect on those adults."

-- Doris, Emotional Time Facilitator

By providing a safe space, where exploring our emotional landscapes is encouraged and facilitated, the students have been supported to develop their emotional awareness and vocabulary. This has been made possible through processes such as providing open sharing spaces and modelling respectful sharing, integrating creative/non-verbal exploration of emotions and the introduction of more nuanced emotion-related vocabulary.

Encouraging Care and Respect

As we saw reflected in the student stories, students now take turns to speak in group discussions, take initiative in supporting one another to contribute, including leaving spaces for quieter members of the group to engage, and listen to and engage meaningfully with one another's contributions, building on each other's ideas. As we saw in Rachel's story, she and Anna began the programme with a tendency to whisper and giggle together, often at the expense of others in the group. In the final HCE session, during our open sharing, Anna called Tim a nickname. "Please stop calling me that Anna," Tim implored. "Just stop - I've asked you before and it's not funny". Previously this would likely have provoked further teasing. Instead Anna said quickly, "Sorry Tim", and within seconds the whole group moved on. This one small example illustrates how the group have learned to moderate each others' behaviour, holding each other to account to uphold the values of respect and care for one another.

The ethos of respect and care was introduced as an explicit feature of all the HCE sessions from the outset. The adult team modelled this care in all their work with the students, ensuring that all voices could be heard, allowing the space and time and designing open-ended activities which enabled students to feel valued. For example, many of the activities introduced in Group Time were explicitly underpinned by these values of respect and care for the other. Likewise, the relationship-building required to provide meaningful keywork/mentoring inherently embodies these values. Over the programme, students were responsive to this consistent care offered by the programme and the adults within it; they began to understand and appreciate the significance of relationship in the sessions, taking the initiative to explore each other's ideas and trajectories, not only with those whom they would consider close friends. In some cases, as we have seen, this care evolved into richer and more meaningful friendships/relationships, which the students have taken with them into their futures.

Nurturing Meaningful Relationships

Over the programme, the whole group grew in cohesiveness and mutual appreciation. Many of the students had known each other since childhood, however it seemed it was only in the HCE sessions that they began to celebrate this as genuine (intentional) friendship, as opposed to circumstance. In breaktimes, students from the group tended to be found together. When one student was absent, this would always be noticed before the start of the session and the rest of the group would immediately share any knowledge (or guesses) as to where the missing student was (ill, interview, pretending to be ill...). By the end of the programme, even Tom, who has struggled throughout his school career to build a friendship group due to his additional needs, was appreciated as a member of the group. At the start of the programme, students would relate to him as an outsider, teasing each other at his expense ("Jacob, don't you want to work with Tom...?") and avoiding sitting beside him. By the end of the programme, Tom would never sit alone and would be supported to contribute in discussions by other members of the group ("What do you think, Tom?"). The ways in which the group began to relate as a friendship group was reflected in their anecdotes of spending time together in their free time (e.g. at birthday parties) and in their written reflections and drawings during Group Time sessions.

Supporting students to relate to each other appreciatively was an explicit intention for Clara in planning her sessions:

"I really wanted them, alongside all the academic stuff, to be thinking about positive things... things that they can see in one another. Within that group there was a lot of negativity and there were tensions building - I wanted them to not always be looking for what was annoying them about their peers but also things that they are doing that are kind and helpful and generous."

--- Clara, Cognitive Time Facilitator

As the programme progressed, some students within the group built particularly close friendships, or formed romantic relationships, with others in the group. As we saw with Jacob and Harir, these friendships were forged in full knowledge and appreciation of the significant differences in their backgrounds.

Students have also become more open to sharing their interests and challenges with, and to take advice and encouragement from, their adult keyworkers. Students expressed appreciation for their keyworkers, describing that they feel they know their keyworker well, that they like them and that they feel that they have been helped by them:

*"**We have a lot in common** and he is probably one of the best people I have ever had. When I met him for the first time we had some time to talk and all that and he is actually really nice. We talk about football a lot which is what my favourite hobby is. We talk about stuff that I usually get stressed about and he really helps me a lot and he supports me there. Whenever he is a bit down I usually give him support. Yeah, **me and him we have a connection - we are always there for each other.** We have one-to-one sessions and he always thinks I'm working hard - I am working hard and*

giving everyone the support they need. I really like him... Usually, every morning, he comes and handshakes me which is very nice now and tells me how's your morning and I usually say I'm tired, but everyone knows that, we're all tired!"

-- Harir, student

Note that Harir doesn't only feel supported by his keyworker, he also feels that he can provide support in return. This reciprocity reflects the values of genuine care and mutual respect which underpin meaningful relationships. In interviews, keyworkers exhibited their deep care for students and knowledge of their unique challenges and strengths and whole person-growth:

"He didn't respond well to me to begin with... He would just sit there and not say anything... When he met any adversity at all in year 9 it seemed it was a brick wall... It took a while to figure out an approach that worked with him because he was running so hot... I would try to appeal to the logic in him...and working with him like that seemed to have a good response... When he was in year 9 he wasn't ready to hear other opinions, now he is... If he hadn't had the support, I think he would still be tearing up his papers every time something went wrong. This time last year I was worried about putting him in for any GCSEs... I was really concerned about his mental health. That's not a concern for me now. Hopefully it's not a concern for him either... He is prepared to say things to me now which he isn't prepared to say to his parents or other staff."

-- Toby, Keyworker

"I think they know me pretty well actually, they know quite a lot about me, my family, my children, my pets. So it is very much sharing by example. I don't mind, obviously there are professional boundaries, but they know stuff about me too. I talk about how I'm feeling and I also talk about my weekends sometimes because I want them to share about theirs. I think it is a two-way thing. We have quite a close relationship with our students within reason."

-- Arianne, Keyworker

These kinds of genuinely caring reciprocal relationships described by both students and keyworkers are testament to the opportunities the programme has provided for students to experience meaningful relationships both with their peers and with members of staff. As we heard in Harir's interview, as well as in Rachel and Jacob's stories, students draw confidence and a feeling of security from these relationships, which allow them to relate in more positive and engaged ways with their overall experience at school.

Discussion: Whole Person Learning

Human-Centred Education respects the whole person and focuses on students' holistic growth, cultivating human qualities such as interest, curiosity, care, compassion, relationship and responsibility. It nurtures the development of relationships between students and adults in the learning community and aims to empower young people to pursue rich, meaningful and flourishing lives, now and into the future. This involves nurturing a sense of care in students, care for themselves, for others and for the world around them. The kinds of opportunities for learning identified above may be understood in terms of these broad human-centred aims.

For a young person to flourish, they must have a level of self-understanding and self-appreciation. The programme provided enabling opportunities for students to reflect on their values, interests and qualities, and to develop a sense of direction with reference to these, as well as a more global sense of self. As they gained the confidence to engage with ideas and begin to develop and articulate their own perspectives within the classroom environment, they began to make connections between their own values, interests, and possibilities, becoming motivated to pursue relevant further study and experiences, and understanding the personal significance of these. Thus students began to act as agents in their own lives, with a clear sense of and commitment to their own futures. Their confidence in articulating their views in class may also

support them to engage meaningfully with these next stages of their education and in other professional settings in the future, enabling them to follow the trajectories they have chosen. This is affirmed by the fact that all students have secured places on educational placements, mostly in mainstream FE settings, and several students, including Harir, received feedback commending them on their excellent performances at interview. The opportunities to understand and care about oneself facilitated by the programme go far beyond simply supporting students to make good choices about their next steps in education and employment however. The sessions provided support for students to become more self-aware, in particular more aware of their own emotional landscapes, as well as to appreciate themselves for who they are. The feelings of self-worth arising from these affirming processes were visible in how students began to speak about themselves in sessions and in their raised confidence in their abilities to achieve or make change in their futures. The cultivation of this self-awareness and appreciation may go a long way towards facilitating the students to continue to grow and flourish.

For a young person to flourish through adolescence and beyond, self-love is not enough; they must be capable of forming meaningful connections and relationships with their peers and with adults. These relationships would be underpinned by care for the other. Throughout the programme, students have been given opportunities to build these relationships with each other and with the adults leading the Group Time, Cognitive Time and keywork sessions. The qualities of sensitivity, openness, respect and care which underpin these relationships and have been nurtured through the programme, will support young people in all areas of their lives, and contribute to their abilities to build futures in which they feel supported, with a secure network of meaningful relationships around them, as well as being able to relate to others in professional and day-to-day environments.

In addition to nurturing young people's care for themselves and for others, the programme also provided opportunities for them to identify the value in things beyond themselves, such as causes, ____, nurturing their social responsibility. Students were given opportunities to enquire into political and ethical questions, exploring and articulating their own and others' perspectives and exhibiting their proactive motivation to make change in areas they felt strongly about, such as racial inequality and homelessness. The cultivation of these qualities of compassion and care for the world beyond themselves may provide direction and focus in these students' lives, contributing to their ongoing flourishing.

It is beyond the scope of this report to capture the full picture of holistic learning experienced by students at the Seaside Centre. However, as these young people move on to new educational settings and beyond, it is clear that they go strengthened by human centred qualities and capabilities that the programme has helped to nurture.

Looking Forward

Having reviewed the three years of the programme, we have identified several areas below which could be fruitfully developed and expanded in future instantiations.

Professional development

In addition to the learning opportunities provided to students, the pilot programme has also provided the core teaching team with broad opportunities for professional development. Through the process of becoming human-centred practitioners, they have become more reflective on their practice, more capable of listening to the needs of the students, and more able to hold flexible, responsive learning spaces characterised by a culture of listening.

Although the team acknowledged that it was initially challenging to make shifts in their practice towards being more human-centred, through ongoing mentoring and support, and as their engagement with and responsibility for the programme progressed, they became more confident to embrace the uncertainty involved in providing flexible sessions which responded to the needs of the group. As Doris described:

“It does feel possible to incorporate these type of ideals. Rather than thinking ‘oh this would be great if we didn’t have all these other constraints on us’ - actually thinking more about how to manoeuvre around the constraints, and the fact that it is not just for this period of time for these kids in a bubble - to be trying to have it running through other things we are doing, other lessons that I am teaching.”

-- Doris, Group Time Facilitator

All staff we interviewed told us that they would appreciate more training or support to better understand the values and processes of HCE from the outset, and ongoing involvement to support them to integrate these into their practice. To ensure that staff are able to develop a deep understanding of the values and aims of HCE, which can then become embedded in their practice, they might take part in a half-day training session with the team from the GHFP once every half term. These sessions would include practical and experiential aspects, as well as reflective aspects, encouraging the team to explore ways in which they can transform their everyday activities in the school toward a more human-centred approach, as well as providing practical support with planning and delivering sessions. Ideally every member of the team participating in the programme would also engage in their own personal processes of critical reflection, with the support of the GHFP. This might involve their keeping a reflective journal and being offered a one-to-one mentoring meeting each term, reflecting on their own strengths and professional journey in the context of the HCE programme.

Feedback from practitioners working in all three areas of the programme suggests that it would also be helpful to begin to build a bank of sample resources to support the team with the planning and delivery of the programme. This might include sample activities suggestions and basic frameworks to support professional reflection.

Holistic Approach to Programme Development

Whilst the team have engaged with one another, and the wider Seaside Centre team, throughout the programme, in rich dialogic processes to recognise and understand the diverse learning needs of participating students, when the core team were developing the specific elements of the programme, the three curriculum areas (group time, cognitive time and mentoring) were planned and offered to students with only occasional opportunities for explicit shared planning.

The team might find it helpful to create protected time for collective planning and review, ensuring that the different curriculum elements work symbiotically to support each student’s whole-person learning needs. This might also provide opportunities to find ways of integrating and embedding the learning from the

mentoring/keywork more meaningfully into the other sessions, for example through the creation of learning agreements/contracts, which provide a reference point from which students can share their orientations to learning.

Final thoughts

The HCE pilot programme has provided rich learning experiences for both participating students and the team, supporting the young people's whole person growth and empowering staff to make meaningful connections between their practice and core human-centred values.

However, as the head of the Seaside Centre reflects, it is not always easy to find the space, amongst other institutional priorities and pressures, for these kinds of programmes, especially for the students who are enrolled in the main school, but are nonetheless in need of further support. It is her belief that:

"The whole HCE thing is quite an extreme shift from current secondary school, primary school, or any kind of maintained school in the state sector really, and there was a potential disconnect between what we could do in our setting here and the principles underlying HCE that want a more global change. ...

I think that the thing that's always missing is the ability to give it time. ...

You need the right team; you need the right people leading it, championing it, defending it. It's finding the space, making that gap... You have to find that gap and open it a little bit at a time... It's determination!"

Having this determination has made it possible to embed a programme which has built staff competencies and confidence to provide meaningful learning experiences, whilst supporting students' whole-person growth, allowing them to develop in ways which will empower them to face challenges and to live more meaningful lives now and into the future.