HUMAN WELLBEING

Children and Wellbeing: one approach to teaching

Source: Shutterstock

Stephanie Boden, Social Sciences Teacher, Hornsby Girls High School

Human Wellbeing is an exciting and dynamic topic and can be approached in a variety of ways. It has links to the Stage 4 'Place and Liveability' topic as well as 'Global Challenges' in Stage 6. There are also cross curricular links to HSC Economics (The Global Economy) and HSC Legal Studies (Human Rights and Young Offenders). At Hornsby Girls High School several teachers have worked together to build an engaging unit that involves both explicit teaching as well as student led investigations.
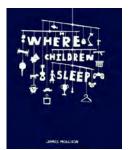
For context, Hornsby Girls High School is a selective school in the north of Sydney. Students are drawn from a wide range of Sydney suburbs and some also travel from the Central Coast of NSW. Many of our students have global connections with family and friends in many different countries. Students study Geography for one Semester each year, and study History for the other Semester. We teach the Human Wellbeing topic as the first topic in Year 10. Students have already studied 'Sustainable Biomes' and 'Changing Places' in Year 9. We accelerate our Stage 6 Geography course, so that some students in our core Year 10 classes are also studying the Preliminary Course at the same time.

Given how broad the Human Wellbeing topic can be, and the variety of understanding and knowledge our students bring to lessons, one way to focus the teaching approach is by using case studies about child wellbeing. By considering the global variations of children's wellbeing, students address three syllabus outcomes:

• analyses differences in human wellbeing and ways to improve human wellbeing GE5-6

• acquires and processes geographical information by selecting and using appropriate and relevant geographical tools for inquiry GE5-7

• communicates geographical information to a range of audiences using a variety of strategies GE5- 8

At Hornsby Girls High School, we introduce the topic over two 75 minute lessons by asking students to describe their own bedroom. They need to identify the features of their bedroom, including building materials, connection to electricity, furniture, electronic items, trinkets, heating and cooling options, and whether they share their room. They then share their descriptions with the class and we build a common features list.

The class then view pictures by photographer James Mollison that show 'Where children sleep' in various countries. As we look at each photo, we identify the location on a wall map and have a brief discussion about some features of the city or country each child is

Double page spread from 'Where children sleep' by John Mollison

from. If a student has first-hand knowledge of a place and is willing to share it, it can be a great way for them to be the expert in class. As we think about each child and their location, we build up a list of reasons that account for the differences between children. These reasons can broadly be categorised into economic, social, political, environmental and technological factors.

In pairs or groups of three they then choose one child's country to investigate to find out further information that can explain the level of wellbeing in a place. Great sources of information include the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's 'Countries, Economies and Regions' website and the BBC's 'Country Profiles'. Students put together a photo only slideshow and verbally share their findings. Limiting research time to 30 minutes and presentations to one minute keep the learning pace fast and focused. Students write a paragraph on what they think 'Human Wellbeing' means and why there are global spatial variations. By this stage they have usually started using some key human geographic terminology including life expectancy, GDP per capita and inequality.

Once these introductory lessons have been completed, students work in groups to determine what countries they think have good wellbeing and which ones have lower levels. We think about what data they might be able to use to show these differences. Explicit teaching is needed to explain qualitative and quantitative types of data and we look at Gross Domestic Product (GDP), GDP per capita and the Human Development Index (HDI). The United Nations and the World Bank websites have lots of current information about these. For High Potential and Gifted Education (HPGE) students, discussing the advantages and limitations of each type of data builds their analytical skills which is useful for Stage 6 study.

We then move back to thinking about children and wellbeing. We investigate the UN Development Programme's Multidimensional Poverty Index

(UNDP MPI) and identify what it means to be 'multidimensionally poor'. Students are usually surprised to learn that half of the world's multidimensionally poor are children. We discuss reasons for this and implications for the children throughout their lifetime. By this stage students have usually started thinking about intergenerational disadvantage, spatial inequality and social mobility/ immobility. Different classes also tend to be interested in different aspects of children's wellbeing, so we adapt the program as we teach to cater for the interests of the current classes. UNICEF is a great starting point for information on different child wellbeing issues.

There are lots of ideas to consider about children and wellbeing. We usually do a case study on child marriage. A great way to introduce this topic is by watching the Netflix short film 'Sitara' (ensure you have tissues handy). We think about the different perspectives of each character and whether the overall message is hopeful or not. World Vision, The UN's Population Fund and 'Girls Not Brides' both have relevant information and short videos to build up a case study on child marriage. For extension work or for HPGE students, consider finding out about child marriage in more developed countries. Is it an issue in Australia? The USA? What laws exist to protect children from forced marriage in different countries? What barriers exist to stopping child marriage? Students can show some of this information on a choropleth map. 'Population Education' has a straightforward guide on how to create a choropleth map using Google Sheets. Groups of students can focus on aspects of child marriage and can compare their spatial outcomes as shown on the choropleth map they compare. This leads to discussions that help pinpoint the effectiveness of organisations that aim to reduce child marriage.

Other issues relating to children include:

- Orphanages: Foreign Correspondent on ABC iView has an excellent episode on 'Paper Orphans' in Nepal. This case study can be further developed into looking at the issue of child/ people trafficking.

- HIV prevalence for children in various regions also shows students the importance of quality education and healthcare systems. Start with UNICEF's information on this area.

- Child soldiers (look at the Human Rights Watch website)

- Stunting (The World Health Organisation has excellent information and videos)

- Child labour (start with UNICEF and look at the International Labour Organisation's comprehensive website)

- Gender inequality (again, UNICEF has great information)

- Refugees (start with UNHCR)

- Indigenous children wellbeing outcomes on either a national or international scale (The Lancet- will need teacher interpretation and there are links to other research articles)

- Child incarceration in Australia and globally (start with Human Rights Watch)

- COVID-19 and the impact on children (start with UNICEF's Data Lab website).

Due to time constraints, these topics can't all be explicitly taught, and it can take a lot of time to develop all these case studies. There are several ways to determine what is best for your class. Students can vote for one or two of these early in the term to allow time for the teacher to develop the case studies. Alternatively, students can work in groups and investigate the child wellbeing issue of their choice. This could also be incorporated into an Assessment Task. Ensuring that students can find ways to improve the outcome for children means that this topic doesn't become too overwhelming for them. There are lots of amazing charities and NGO's that focus on improving children's wellbeing. A class might decide that they want to run a fundraiser for one of them. This can also be incorporated into the school's Social Justice Group and shows students the real-life impact that understanding and acting on human wellbeing inequalities can have.

As mentioned earlier, at Hornsby Girls High School several teachers have developed this unit. Thanks to Vanessa Gilmore, Head Teacher HSIE and Louise Goodwin, Geography Teacher for their excellent contributions to this course. Thanks also to our students who provide lots of honest feedback each year so that we can continue to improve Stage 5 Geography.

Child in a refugee camp. Image source: Shutterstock

Sources of Information

'Where Children Sleep' by James Mollison https://www.lensculture.com/articles/james-mollison-where-children-sleep

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's 'Countries, Economies and Regions' website https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/countries-economies-and-regions

BBC country profiles http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

UN HDI https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi

World Bank HDI https://databank.worldbank.org/Human-development-index/id/363d401b

UNDP MPI https://hdr.undp.org/en/2021-MPI

UNDP MPI 2021 update https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021_mpi_report_en.pdf

UN Population Fund https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage

Girls Not Brides https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/

World Vision https://www.worldvision.com.au/global-issues/work-we-do/forced-child-marriage

Foreign Correspondent https://www.abc.net.au/foreign/paper-orphans/12021342

UNICEF Data Lap Covid and Children https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/

How to make a choropleth map using Google Sheets https://populationeducation.org/a-step-by-step-guide-to-making-a-choropleth-map-in-google-spreadsheets/

Child soldiers https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-soldiers

Child stunting https://www.who.int/news/item/19-11-2015-stunting-in-a-nutshell#:~:text=Stunting%20is%20the%20impaired%20 growth,WHO%20Child%20Growth%20Standards%20median

Child labour UNICEF https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour

Child labour – International Labour Organisation https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm

Child gender inequality – UNICEF https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality

Children and HIV https://data.unicef.org/topic/hivaids/global-regional-trends/

Child refugees UNHCR https://www.unhcr.org/children.html

Indigenous children – The Lancet https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02719-7/fulltext

Child incarceration – Human Rights Watch https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/africa-americas-asia-europe/central-asia-middle-east/north#