When I signed up for this paper, I was not aware that we would be participating in GEE. After completing this, all I can say is wow. I have never had to put so much thought into general communications to ensure that there wasn’t any miscommunication or worry about sending something to my partner for one area from Hong Kong with the time difference and not wanting to be that annoying person that wakes you up from contacting you in the middle of the night. Once I got the hang of everything it calmed down and meant that most of my work happened in the late evening.

Taking a step back, I never realised how small my ideas were compared to others. My ideas consisted of helping high school students decide what to study and teaching kids or teenagers how to cook as that is an issue with many of my peers at University. Both ideas I thought were valid and helpful, but on a much smaller scale then the other ideas that my team presented. Some examples were collapsible drink bottles, fish farms in Africa and fertiliser. With each idea that people presented, it helped me get a better idea of who each person was and what they value.

When we decided to do with fish farms in Rwanda I was extremely nervous. All I could think was “how am I meant to help with this? I know nothing about fish, farms or Africa!” Trying to calm my nerves I started talking to my group leader and found a few areas that interested me and that I could actually help with. I was so relieved! As the 2nd youngest in a big family I hate to feel like a burden and that has affected a lot of my work and relationships since moving out of home. I started to feel more confident in this project and like I could contribute and not just be the dead weight that everyone hates.

While completing the GEE proposal, I also had to do multiple group assignments for other courses, and work 20 hours a week. This meant that my time was restricted, my stress was high, sleep suffered and my anxiety constantly came back. I was very restricted in when I could work on this project so a good proportion of my time was researching my areas and then writing them up while talking with my group leader to get an idea on if I was actually doing the right thing as I was still anxious of screwing up. Thankfully, my group leader was good at responding and giving advice and we bounced ideas off each other when sorting the initial set up. The simple act of having someone that I could talk about my issues to that actually cared and understood what I was talking about was a game changer. It greatly helped reduce my stress and helped me understand what the heck I was meant to be doing. Funny how just having someone there made everything so much easier.

We had some difficulty with getting some of the other members involved which I tried to help the group leader as much as possible to get everyone as involved as possible. I had never realised how frustrating different time zones could be until I started this project. Having mainly worked with University students at the same university for group assignments I am very used to quick responses and time restrictions on work. However, with GEE we had people from all over the world which meant that all of our timings were off and sometimes you had to wait almost a day for a response to a simple question. As someone who likes to reduce as much time wasted as possible I found this so frustrating! Time zones and not being able to actually meet my group in person seriously threw me off course and it took some time to get used to. Also, it wasn’t like the delays were due to someone being lazy, they were due to the time zones so there wasn’t even anyone that I could get annoyed at!

Due to everyone having different schedules and time restraints, the team leader and I talked and decided that the tasks should be divvied up giving everyone a few days to complete them. This meant that any work not up to standard group members had time to re do and any areas not completed would then be dealt with. This worked fairly well with the group leader contacting everyone to see how they were getting along and me offering her advice and opinions where possible. Unfortunately, some areas really weren’t done well and that specific member was less than responsive so the team leader and I worked through them to get them up to standard.

With everyone being from different countries, cultures and presenting different ideas there would always be some clashes. One in particular occurred when everyone but 1 agreed to do our fish farmers project in Rwanda whereas that one wanted to follow their own suggested idea. It was clear that everyone cared about trying to present a report which benefited and helped contribute to a better world, there were still different ideas of how we should so that. This conflict was resolved within the first 2 days however it felt like the work contributed by the opposing member lacked passion and effort.

I know how stressful being the team leader can be and I can't imagine how much more stress it is for an international project so I decided that I should support the team leader where possible. I’m not saying that I did anything that drastically changed an outcome but I would like to imagine that I helped. Mainly I was a sounding board, helped encourage team participation and helped with questions and issues where possible. I know our team leader went out of her way to support myself and my team so it felt like the least I could do.

In the last few days, stress ran high as over half of the work was completed whereas some wasn’t at a good enough quality or just wasn’t done. Through communicating with my team leader, she edited it while I would go over it and try see any gaps. Thankfully, some of the other team members helped out with this last area much less stressful. Overall I can say it was a challenge, but I loved how I got to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds. This project has definitely helped alter my thinking especially around group assignments. Thank you GEE!