

## Development Education Research Centre

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning  
Practitioner Research Fund Paper 10



# Looking through both lenses: exploring long term school partnerships from the perspectives of both Cumbrian and Tanzanian teachers

Jen Ager  
2022

Supported by



## Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Practitioner Research Fund

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2022**

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# Abbreviations

<b>GLA</b>	Global Learning Association
<b>ISA</b>	International School Award
<b>CCGL</b>	Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning
<b>CC</b>	Connecting Classrooms
<b>CDEC</b>	Cumbria Development Education Centre
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

## Abstract

This research project aims to illustrate the journey of school partnerships between primary schools in Cumbria, UK and Moshi, Tanzania. Using a qualitative approach, the study shares the processes involved from making first contact with an overseas link school to expanding a successful model of partnership working to a cluster of schools in both countries. The shift of moving from a charitable giving approach to one of social justice, and how this has been achieved, is a suggested method for other schools who currently have school partnerships or are due to embark on the journey. This research focuses on three main themes: sustainability; reciprocity, and equity. By using an insider researcher to construct the narrative of the research and explore the themes, an honest, subjective insight highlighting the successes, obstacles and scope for longevity is shared.

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# Introduction

## Background and context

Joining a rural Cumbrian primary school in 2006 as a class teacher, I was first made aware of the school link with a primary school in Tanzania when it came to the annual Christmas production. After the production donation boxes were provided for a collection for a school in Tanzania and it was explained that over the year, after any whole school production, donations were collected from parents. Utilising the services of a local charity, the funds were then taken as cash by a charity worker and delivered to the school. The funds were predominately spent on teaching resources in Tanzania and subsequent thankyou letters were delivered back to the school in Cumbria from the Tanzanian children and staff. This practice had been adopted over several years and a predecessor colleague had visited the Tanzanian school in 2001 and engaged in collaborative teaching ventures. From 2006 – 2015 a pattern emerged of annual letters, cash donations and limited interactions with the school.

In 2014 I attended a course funded by the Global Learning Association (GLA) which focussed on school improvement and the International School Award (ISA). This course was aimed at educational practitioners who wanted to develop internationalism in their school. After working hard to achieve Fairtrade school status in 2008 I had thought, perhaps naively, that the provision for global learning within my setting was of good quality. However, the audit and reflective activities offered on the course facilitated an in-depth consideration of the relationship with our partner school and the value and educational opportunities it was affording to all involved.

Coinciding with this audit we received a letter from the headteacher in Tanzania, thanking us for our most recent donation. The letter clearly displayed that the fundamental relationship was based upon us gifting money donations. Our two schools did not really know each other, and we had unknowingly played to a stereotypical narrative of rich, white school giving aid to a poorer, African counterpart. By referring to the orphans and lack of supplies at the school, there was a clear need for support. However, I was curious as to how this relationship could grow to be of mutually educational value.

This was a turning point, and I decided that I wanted to make the interactions increasingly meaningful for the children at both schools and endeavoured to research how I could work with the head teacher in Tanzania to make this a reality. Appendix One shows two letters received that mention cash donations which were the stimulus for me contacting the school to try to build a relationship upon more than charitable giving.

Feeling that the relationship needed to be developed in order to succeed in meaningful exchanges, in 2015 I participated in the British Council's Connecting Classrooms programme (later Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL)). This allowed for the opportunity to visit Tanzania and meet the staff; teaching in the school I had been corresponding with for many years.

I planned to contact the school by telephone to ascertain their interest and motivations, however I was also mindful that I am an English-speaking teaching professional from the 'Global North'. I was aware my role instigating the interaction could be perceived as me further exacerbating a 'North-South' power asymmetry. Thus began a profound shift in my own pedagogy and knowledge which increased the impetus to develop the learning opportunities.

Conversations throughout my first ten-day visit with my Tanzanian colleagues changed over the duration of my stay to perceived professional conversation. Reflections from the diary I kept during that inaugural visit, and photographs taken, have been integral to my reflections, realisations and motivations to make the partnership a success.

Subsequently, employed in the same school today as an assistant head teacher, I am also the cluster lead for ten schools involved in the CCGL Programme. I have visited our Tanzanian partnership school on three occasions; twice funded by CCGL. I have organised and led a trip for schools in the cluster to visit their counterpart schools, and hosted a reciprocal visit. Being the curriculum lead at school, I have been instrumental in designing a curriculum that has global learning as a key curriculum driver and planned numerous collaborative teaching projects. I am uniquely placed as a cluster lead, classroom practitioner and member of the senior leadership team to offer a multi-layered, holistic overview of the journey, process and benefits that long term partnerships can afford.

I feel that providing some context is important as it demonstrates how professional curiosity, commitment, and experiences have contributed to a partnership that has flourished, despite challenges, and has been the stimulus for other schools to explore the benefits that a school partnership can bring. I tell this story from my point of view, and that of colleagues in Tanzania who committed to the journey with me in 2014. Hearing the voices from both countries provides a unique insight from different perspectives.

## Purpose of the study

This study provides a narrative account of a long-term project, in excess of ten years, beginning with one primary school in Tanzania and one primary school in Cumbria, England. The aim of this study is to explore how the relationship was initiated and how it continues to develop, considering the perspectives of those involved. Using a long-term partnership as a basis for this study has provided an opportunity to document an ongoing narrative that continues to develop. Utilising a narrative approach, or telling a story, aims to provide congruence for the reader in placing this study into a wider social, cultural and political world view and offering an opportunity for other professionals to make links with their settings, values and curriculum. It is recognised that:

*'Stories can: give meaning to life, express values, teach the young, and convey culture; connect elements in one's own self, experience, and life; connect one to one's (individual and group) past, and to other cultures; give one a sense of wholeness, that the pieces of one's life fit together and add up to something.'*  
(Miller, 2010).

The aspiration is that by reading this story, other practitioners can reflect, engage and adapt or develop their own narrative. Establishing equitability of the partnership between the schools has taken time and, in this study, the long-term approach built on relationships has developed trust and this has further expanded to a cluster of schools. This study will highlight the need for thinking long-term about partnerships; having engagement from all parties and for collaborative practice - and how this then can lead to sustainable impact of partnerships. Admittedly this research had also cannily enabled a documented story and memento to be cherished by the schools involved and strengthened their relationships further.

## Research questions

The research questions in this study have been framed to allow for reflection for readers who are either embarking on a school partnership or find themselves where I did in 2014 – evaluating the effectiveness and value of a current partnership.

Drawing on the notion that schools and decision makers develop practice and policy based upon evidence of what works in similar settings, this study can be used to discover an exemplar of embedding and sustaining a school partnership. The competing priorities in school organisations and time pressured timetable and curriculum expectations can mean that new initiatives or pedagogical approaches can be introduced without a clear success criteria or steps for success (EEF, 2019). There appears to be a research-evidence gap in school settings regarding sustainable school partnerships which this study seeks to help to close up. By demonstrating the value of the partnership explored in this study, it is hoped that schools who find their partnership waning, tokenistic, or in need of further development can learn from the experience and adopt practices that will help to embed a successful, meaningful and fruitful relationship with their partnership school which has high educational value. Therefore, the following research questions have informed and steered the methodology.

1. How has a long-standing school partnership developed over time?
2. How have the school partners worked around issues of equality, trust and reciprocity over the course of the partnership?
3. What have been the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the school partnership (and has this changed over the course of the partnership)?
4. What are the perceived impacts of the school partnership on pupils and staff?

Deliberately open ended, the aim is to facilitate some meaningful discussion, exploration and understanding of how all schools within the partnership have committed to and provide insight of their thoughts, feelings and perspective. In the following section a review of relevant literature is considered; endeavouring to explore the strengths and limitations of school partnerships.

Trust, equality and reciprocity are highlighted issues that have informed the research questions, and thus literature pertaining to these identified issues is presented to

acknowledge the problematic nature of these themes within the educational, societal and social context of this study.

I then go onto provide a research methodology for the study and outline my findings. I finish with concluding remarks and some recommendations for educators starting out on partnership journeys.

# Literature Review

## What is a school partnership and why have one?

A school partnership can be described for this study as being two schools, from two different countries, that have established a link. The aim being to work collaboratively to provide experiences and context for the pupils in both settings to enable them to explore a different culture, perspective, and to form a connection. This is not an uncommon notion with global learning and international school partnerships being an element of the educational landscape for more than 20 years in the UK (The British Council, 2020).

The longevity of this practice could be interpreted as testament to the success and positive impact that partnerships can provide. The CCGL programme is a partnership between the British Council and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (previously Department for International Development); its aim is for pupils to understand the big issues that shape our world and equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make a positive contribution. CCGL supports school partnerships by providing resources, professional development, advice, and funding to assist with the practicalities of maintaining a partnership. Publications and initiatives from central government highlight how a global element can be incorporated into a school curriculum and support the importance of understanding global issues for both children and teachers (DfES, 2005; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2018). This seemingly endorses the importance of the role a school partnership can have in integrating global learning into the school curriculum.

Martin (2012) discusses how study trips to the global south, aimed at supporting teachers' professional development, enabled diverse methods to be directly experienced e.g., by meeting 'differences', thus enhancing a teacher's ability to then teach high quality global learning. This would further add to the notion of partnering between schools and teachers internationally being a positive and worthwhile exercise. Historically, global learning in schools has been constructed around 'banking' methodologies that raise awareness and provide information, aiming to transform the learner's views and promote engagement and action (Bourn, 2014). The key to integrating this knowledge into transformative learning is how the learner develops and uses the knowledge. This crucial integration is synonymous with the experience of my school partnership moving from a focus on charitable giving and donations to transformative learning experiences.

School partnerships can provide a platform for real life, experiential encounters between learners (teachers and students) in different cultures. Partnerships can provide opportunity for pupils to transfer their learning by relating it to a real-life global context and providing an interactive experience (Edge and Khamsi, 2012; Mackenzie et al, 2016). The benefits of global learning within schools are well-documented by advocates of engagement between culturally different schools (Edge and Khamsi, 2012; Hunt and Cara, 2015; Martin, 2012). This view has been supported by national initiatives over the years with the aim of attracting more schools to develop school partnerships. The British Council's CCGL Project and

International Schools Award are testament to the number of schools engaging with partnerships with schools and arranging reciprocal visits. Studies that explore how these fit with the curriculum, and the benefits to pupils' learning, have also been made available (Bourn, 2014; Hunt and Cara, 2015).

However, there is less documentation that brings in the voices of teachers from both countries, or that explores how the relationships and personal connections have developed over a long period of time. Critiques of partnerships need also to be mentioned. These critiques often focus on the motivations of schools, post-colonial and imperialistic legacies, and possible power imbalances influencing decision making (Gallwey and Wilgus, 2014; Mackenzie et al, 2016; Martin, 2012).

## **Role of equality, trust and reciprocity within a school partnership**

It is important to state that the nature of partnerships between schools in different countries is inevitably complex; the geographical, cultural, and economic opportunities between the schools involved in a partnership could be wide, varied, and potentially problematic. It is prudent to consider the themes of equality, trust and reciprocity in the role of the partnership to consider how these potentially problematic issues have been approached.

### **Equality**

Equality can be understood here as a situation whereby equal value in decision making and mutual participation is encouraged and aspired to. In general, the notion of equality encompassing a position of all participants having the same rights and opportunities is problematic due to the variety of differing circumstances of the settings of the partnership schools (Schliecher and Zoido, 2016). Multiple studies highlight that the inequalities between countries give rise to unbalanced partnership work; with the initial aims of equity and mutual involvement ultimately lapsing as the 'Northern' partner becomes the main decision maker and instigator (Dodson, 2017). Three of the Tanzanian schools involved in this study are very rural with incredibly limited educational and structural resources. In terms of equality of opportunities available, it is recognised that, in Africa, rural, remote communities have lower educational levels and life opportunities, with access and attainment clearly connected to the societal circumstances of the pupils (Ebersohn, 2016; Schwartzman et al, 2018). Some would question if there can ever be true equality between schools in the global north and global south (Ebersohn, 2016; Gallwey and Wilgus, 2014). Both of these studies suggest that there are many issues outside of individual control. To assume that school partnerships can stop all educational inequalities contradicts a large body of evidence.

However, there are other important ways to think about, and to strive for, a form of equality within the partnership: achieving parity in decision-making; uniformed input into the strategic

aims and processes involved in the projects; and aspiration for a neutral pedagogical approach in the execution of the projects.

## Trust

Trust is an essential part to the building and maintaining of relationships - it can be viewed as a social exchange and interaction. Trust is also recognised as needing time to accumulate within partnerships; those that have the time to do this being the most successful (Dodson, 2017). Borrowing from a study looking at health and medical partnerships, it has been found that the higher the relationship quality between partners, the greater the success and quality of the work within the partnership (Patnaik et al, 2020). This study also showed that low levels of trust often resulted in the termination of a partnership, or power imbalances being magnified and opportunistic behaviours and strategic decisions being unpredictable by some parties.

This partnership study will propose that the trust generated between the schools within the partnership that has developed over time, through shared experience and common learning goals, has transcended the inequalities that could define a tokenistic partnership made to include global learning within a curriculum. It will show how trust has developed meaningful relationships, how reciprocity has empowered the teachers to sustainably engage, and how issues of equality have been recognised, but not acted as a barrier to interaction.

## Reciprocity

The word reciprocity can embody many things, but is defined for this purpose as the action of making mutually beneficial exchanges; in this instance the exchanges relating to the agreed actions, ventures and learning opportunities for the children and staff at each school. We have recognised the need for equality in the decision-making process. Reciprocity can be recognised as the expectation that all parties contribute to, and benefit from, the exchanges. A study by Mackenzie et al (2016) looked at school-linking between schools in Scotland and Malawi. Whilst the findings demonstrated that Scottish pupils were aware of the privilege they had compared to their Malawi counterparts, the notion of reciprocity was recognised as being the responsibility of all in the partnership. Particular reference was made in the Mackenzie study to ensuring that partnership decisions and actions were collaborative, in order for appropriate actions to have impact and not be solely benevolent. Silbert (2019) also advocates that, by approaching partnership work collectively, reciprocity can be extended to building community relationships - whilst recognising that there will always be structural inequality and historical difference. True equality in essence cannot be achieved when there are structural, historical and power imbalances, but they can be identified, acknowledged and collectively worked with to help develop successful partnerships.

## Perceived benefits and challenges of overseas partnerships

*'There's no more authentic way for pupils to learn about global issues than by working with their peers in another country.'* (British Council, 2020)

Using the word *authentic* could imply a precise, real, trustworthy way for children to learn about global issues. If we consider effective teaching and how children learn, then moving from abstract to concrete and meaningful is a recognised strategy. Overseas partnerships offer the ability for peers and colleagues to work alongside each other in an authentic, collaborative and real way. There are geographical challenges which can contribute to working with another setting over a large distance. Time, money and creative ways of communicating can all pose a challenge, and it can take effort, determination and enthusiasm to combat these.

However, once the benefits have been experienced, lived and observed, using a partnership to enhance a learning experience can be a memorable way to obtain knowledge. Actively engaging children in their learning by interacting with peers can be a beneficial approach to teaching and learning. This can be a stimulus for children to become personally involved and question global issues (Bourn, 2014; Edge and Khamsi, 2012). This perceived benefit can have lifelong implications in terms of developing critical thinking and questioning skills; skills and a language that will be needed for the future. Oxfam (2007) recognised the potential that this could have for children - to have a desire to take action for positive change in the world.

The challenge when teaching is being aware of the values, bias, and lens that children have and may experience the work or activity through; the same can be said for the teachers. Teacher development training on ethical considerations and world view can be helpful to challenge the motivations, knowledge and stereotypes that may be inherently prevalent (Martin, 2012).

## Perceived impacts of partnerships

Bourn (2014) found that the experience and process of developing school partnerships can positively impact on a teacher's pedagogy. Working with peers in another setting can provide opportunity for educators to consider their own world view and values. In turn, this translates into changes to their teaching and classroom work whereby they encourage children to reflect and consider their world view too. Interaction with a partnership can be viewed as effective professional development and good reflective practice for teaching staff. The focus of professional development can be a whole staff work force dedicated to embracing global learning opportunities within the school curriculum (Oxfam, 2007). Through global learning initiatives children can believe they can make a difference (Oxfam 2007; British Council 2020). The effect of a child knowing that their voice is heard and that their opinion is important can be life changing. Recognition of peers facing the same or similar problems on a global scale could be the stimulus for collaborative action, challenging stereotypes and promoting agents of change.

# Research Methodology

## Research design

The research was approached using predominately qualitative methods to present historical and recent data. To relate to the theme of a narrative, this data will provide insight and a direct explanation of what was done and how it was done – exploring the problems encountered on the way, and the resolutions that triumphed which relate to the research questions.

## My role

It is important to recognise my role in this study. I have a vested professional and personal interest in achieving success due to the relationships that have developed over time and the engagement with the CCGL programme. By publicly endorsing and sharing opinion, research-based evidence and championing overseas school partnerships – my voice is apparent throughout the approach to this study.

My role in this study is somewhat unique in its complexity and has evolved over the duration of the partnership to date. Within this study I will be recognised as: chief storyteller; teacher; senior leader; subjective observer; researcher; participant and cluster co-ordinator.

Recognising the convolutions of the numerous roles I hold at one of the partnership schools has directed some methodological choices. The reflections that contribute to the story of this partnership is at times a journey into 'self' and the community of the partnership. It presents opportunity for recognition of my own self efficacy, agency, and the shifting epistemological positions and pedagogical approaches within the partnership. My role has included being an observer and recorder of the journey. I have worked alongside everyone else within the partnership – maintaining a professional role. My personal reflections have allowed me to write autobiographically, and my reflections and observations of others have also given me an ethnographic insight.

## Data collection

### Historical records

When approaching the data collection for this research I had over ten years of records. I had started in the school in 2006 and inherited a lever-arch file of photographs and some correspondence. Attached to the inside cover was a Post Office Box number in Moshi and a telephone number for a charity worker. Between then and the time of embarking on this research in 2021 I had amassed quite a collection of evidence. Photographs, films, letters,

lesson plans, text messages, emails, action plans, and evaluations can all document this story. The parameters of this study do not require the full collection, but I have included some historical data to provide context and by way of comparison. Once this study had been agreed and ethical consent received from all involved, I adopted an approach to data collection based on convenience for the time scale and geographical constraints that existed.

## Online questionnaire

Throughout the duration of the partnership the use of the internet to communicate has become increasingly useful and accessible for all. Being reliant on postal communication earlier in the process had meant long delays and infrequent communication which on occasion had not reached its destination. The Tanzanian schools' post is delivered to a postal box in the town and the head teachers did not check this daily. With this in mind it was decided that a questionnaire that could be delivered and completed online was the most efficient way to collect responses. An online Google Forms survey was created as an easily generated link could be sent to the participants using social media and it was the online platform used by the lead UK school where the researcher was based. The teachers in Tanzania had previously commented that when answering direct questions, it was often easier to see these written down when out of context and to have the time to take to process and consider an answer. This was the main source of data collection to add to the historical data and story to date.

Before sending the questionnaire, the head teacher from the Tanzanian lead cluster school was asked to proofread and test the questions for understanding alongside myself representing the UK teachers. This was done using a conference call to share a computer screen and discuss each question individually. Once it was deemed that the style and vocabulary used was readily understood, the survey was distributed to all. Eight surveys were delivered using a link via WhatsApp with a 100% return rate. The survey was distributed to the global coordinator in each school involved in the partnership; four surveys from each country.

The survey included a mixture of open ended and closed questions. The focus was on finding out about teachers' perceptions of the partnership and how significant being involved in the partnership is from their perspective.

## Interview

Six teachers (3 from Tanzania, 3 from UK) participated in a semi-structured interview conducted online via Zoom after the survey responses had been collected. The most convenient way to conduct the interview was using an online conference call with the researcher with an interpreter present. The Tanzanian teachers were identified as the target group and met in an agreed location in their local town, and the UK teachers joined

separately. I prepared a set of semi-structured questions to lead a discussion to explore responses at a deeper level whereby time was given to add further comment to questions asked in the survey. Funding was supplied to assist with travel to the venue and consent by attendance was given to use evidence from the responses. Recollections of historical conversations, outside of the organised discussion, were also included as data and classed as semi structured responses. The language barrier between the researcher and the interviewees meant that the interview was conducted with a more conversational tone to allow for confidence building and freedom of response. The Tanzanian interviewees admitted that this was the first interview they had participated in with an English-speaking interviewer. I was cautious that a potential perception of power imbalance - of what could be a display of a formal, contrived interview - would be in contrast to the role previously held of equal stakeholder within the partnership. The teachers were all well known to me, with a well-established professional relationship. This helped the conversational tone, and all participants gave the appearance of being at ease when expressing themselves in English, and their native tongue.

The timescale for this data collection was set at six months with the acknowledgement that a multitude of historical data would also be considered,

When reading the story, it will become apparent that language and cultural difficulties had been initial challenges early in the partnership. A crucial part of the data collection was the assistance of an interpreter. From visits and correspondence in the past an interpreter had been useful to ensure that both Tanzanian and UK teachers were understood in terms of their aims and objectives. The interpreter had an understanding of the partnership and had provided assistance throughout the partnership. They were briefed beforehand to provide assistance only when asked, and to provide as direct a translation as possible. This became a necessity when longer conversations evolved into free flow and speech invariably quickened. The Tanzanian teachers had expressed they found this useful to ensure they had fully extracted the meaning of a question. The interpreter had been part of the school system in Tanzania and lived locally to the Tanzanian schools so could offer some further cultural, geographical and social context if needed. The interpreter only spoke when asked directly. It was discussed how indirect translation could call into question the validity of a response and the best efforts to directly translate an opinion or theme was aspired to. While we should recognize that this could add another dimension to the accuracy of interpretation and meaning, due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews and everyone being present, and the familiarity in how we now operate as a partnership, the sentiment and understanding of what was found in the data collection is in keeping with the actions and commitment to the partnership work.

## **Research sample**

There are two lead schools in the cluster: one in the UK and one in Tanzania. Six other schools were involved in contributing to the research from the cluster group from both countries. Tables 1 and 2 outline the demographics of each school and how many teachers

were involved in contributing to the data collection.

**Table 1: Overview of schools involved in the project**

	<b>Years involved in partnership</b>	<b>Role in CCGL cluster</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>School info</b>
School A	16	Lead school	UK	Rural primary School Bordering a National Park and close to a small city NOR approx. 200
School B	16	Lead school	Tanzania	Rural Primary School Within a National Park and close to a large town NOR approx. 440
School C	5	Partnership School	UK	Village School Outskirts of a National Park NOR approx. 250
School D	5	Partnership School	Tanzania	Village School Outskirts of a National Park NOR approx. 250
School E	3	Partnership School	UK	Town School within a National Park NOR approx. 400
School F	3	Partnership School	Tanzania	Town School within a National Park NOR – approx..600
School G	3	Partnership School	UK	Village School Outskirts of a National Park NOR approx. 45

School H	3	Partnership School	Tanzania	Village School Outskirts of a National Park NOR approx. 170
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**Table 2: Overview of data collection by school**

	Online questionnaire responses	Online Interview participants	Additional Information
School A	1	0	Researcher based school
School B	1	1	
School C	1	1	
School D	1	1	
School E	1	1	
School F	1	0	Not able to attend
School G	1	1	
School H	1	1	

## Data analysis

With the aim of interpreting the social phenomena at play within the main partnership and subsequent cluster partnerships, I analysed the themes emerging from the collated data. Although predominately a qualitative study, responses from the questionnaires will give some quantitative data. The wealth of data to be collected will contribute to capturing a cultural picture, alongside a shift in attitude. Themes and narratives highlighted from dialogic interactions and anecdotal evidence relevant to the research questions will be explored and described providing a rich insight and narrative.

## Limitations

The sample size of this study is small when considering a global scale of overseas partnerships. It is limited to primary school settings so cannot account for the demands and requirements of a secondary school curriculum. It is also recognised that global learning is a key curriculum driver at the lead UK school and priorities and drivers in other settings may not reflect this. However, the small-scale nature of the sample size could be seen to add authenticity and scalability in terms of a model by which schools in similar settings can adopt similar measures.

Language plays a feature within this study. Proficiency in each other's native tongue for participants in the UK and Tanzania is limited. However, these barriers have been overcome by developing relationships, using an interpreter, and by continued commitment to the partnership. Indeed, there may be nuances not captured or some direct meanings not explicitly represented, but it is my view that a true account and reflection of the processes involved have been accurately demonstrated.

## Ethical considerations

All data collected in this research has been anonymised for reporting. Interview attendance acted as consent to include responses and was shared verbally via the interpreter.

Participants in the survey study signed the following statement:

*The survey will inform a wider research project which focuses on four key questions. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The survey includes 20 questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes. The information you provide is confidential, however anonymised quotes may be used, or the researcher could seek further clarification. If you request confidentiality, beyond anonymised quotes, the information you provide will be treated only as a source of background information, alongside literature-based research and interviews with others. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study. You can withdraw from this study at any time, and without having to give a reason for*

*withdrawal. If you require any further information, you can contact the researcher by email.*

Consent to use historical letters, photographs and conversation recollections was also given with headteachers giving consent for anonymised pupil letters to be used. Participants were asked to provide the geographical location of their school and their position, in order provide context for the reader for each partnership. As the researcher it was important that I clearly identified my role in this study to mitigate any challenging ethical considerations that my personal relationship with the participants may have presented. This was made explicit and separated from my role as cluster lead.

## Research Participants

Photo 1 shows twelve of the participating teachers from schools outlined in the research sample after a training event in Tanzania.

**Photo 1: Participating teachers**



### **The story (2014 – 2020)**

It is prudent to provide a timeline of the significant dates and events within the story to provide further context due to the number of years this partnership has spanned. This can be found in Appendix Four and is helpful in demonstrating how the initial years of the partnership (pre-2014) had a predominately charitable focus.

After being supplied a mobile phone number from a charity who had links with a neighbouring school, an initial, admittedly awkward telephone exchange took place in 2014 between me in the UK, and the headteacher of the partnership school in Tanzania. Reliant upon postal communication at this point; this was the first contact made to develop the partnership and professionally personalise the relationship. I intrepidly instigated the phone call aware that there were a host of reasons why a seemingly ‘normal’ act of telephoning a

colleague felt suddenly intimidating. My internal thoughts questioned how well the phone call would be received, whether this was a personal or professional contact number and if the school wanted to develop the partnership further. However, stoically I dialled the telephone number from the main office and took a deep breath.

**Box 1: A transcript of part of a telephone conversation (2014) produced from notes taken during the call and retrospective recollection.**

“Hello, my name is Jen, and I am calling from your partnership school in England. I would really like to make more of the school partnership and am calling to introduce myself. Is it okay to talk to you? “

SILENCE

“Yes, we would like you to come and to meet. My name is xxxxxx”

“Can you tell me a little more about the school? There is some funding available that would support some collaborative work and enable us to visit each other’s schools. Hello?”

SILENCE

“Yes, my name is xxxxx and it would be good to meet the children”

“Do you have an email address xxxx?”

“No email. There is no electricity at school. My friend at xxxx has an email”

“Are you happy if I contact you by text?”

“Yes, yes. My name is Imelda. We are happy to know your school.”

Following the phone call my original curiosity transformed into an introspective reflection. It was apparent that the English language was a barrier to communication that I had not anticipated. Historically, letters had been exchanged which demonstrated a level of English language that was proficient and well-communicated as demonstrated in Appendix One.

Letters from the children had varied in levels of fluency, as they had in our school dependent upon age and ability (see Appendix Two), but again had shown a level of written communication that was not comparable with the level of spoken English language indicated in the telephone exchange. Seemingly however, the head teacher had received the phone call and was keen to pursue further communication. Two more letters were exchanged by post with a six week turn around. These letters confirmed that the telephone call had been understood and that the school was keen to be involved with the CC programme – see Appendix Three.

Four years later, on a subsequent visit to Tanzania in 2018, the head teacher and I recollected that first phone call when we were reflecting on the process. I asked her what she had thought and with the help of an interpreter received a more detailed response:

*'The phone call came as such a surprise. It was lovely that you called but I did not know if it was real and I did not know who The British Council were, and I did not have words prepared. When I told the staff that there was to a visit to England, many did not want to come. I came to show the children what life was like in England and find out how you teach at your school. If I had not answered the telephone that day this would not have happened. It is brilliant for our children in our village school.'* (Ager, 2018).

The phone call was the catalyst for an application for funding from The British Council's Connecting Classrooms fund. After a successful submission, and with paperwork agreed and signed through a third-party email address in Tanzania courtesy of a local secondary school, a visit to Tanzania was arranged for me and my head teacher, and a reciprocal visit for two teachers from the partnership school in Tanzania. All further communication with the head teacher in Tanzania was by text message. Using solely text messages I was able to arrange a date and a time that we would meet. At this stage I could get no definitive description of where the school was located other than that it was within an hour of a town where I had booked a hotel. We were told that the head teacher would come to the hotel to meet us at 5am on a Monday morning in October 2015. This would be the first of many cultural obstacles navigated and the real beginning of the partnership.

Waiting nervously at the hotel at 11am GMT, after a discussion the evening before with an employee at the hotel introduced us to Swahili time (Swahili time is benchmarked at 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.), we were introduced to a host of smiling faces who arrived to pick us up and transport us to the school. This caused much laughter when I wrote the two times down on paper and explained that we had been prepared to get ready at 5am; dreading it but prepared to commit to show willing. An hour later we arrived at the school after driving through the main town and then slowly up the foot slopes of Kilimanjaro on unsurfaced roads. Conversation in the car had been pleasant and a village elder had accompanied the staff by way of interpreter. Although we had seen photographs and letter correspondence for nearly a decade at this point, experiencing something first-hand can have the most profound effect. Surrounded by banana plantations and coffee farms, the school is at the heart of a small village and there were over four hundred children awaiting our arrival. On disembarking from the car, we were moved to tears at the sound of a welcome song and then waving a farewell to our interpreter were shown to the head teachers office.

We spent five days in the school teaching lessons; both ones that we had planned and ones provided by the Tanzanian teaching staff. Wary of us at first, the children gained confidence over the duration of our stay, and we were shown real kindness and warmth and were followed everywhere we went by curious eyes and giggling faces. Using pictures, notes and charade-like gestures we communicated with the staff. The use of English language to communicate with us increased over the week and they admitted feeling nervous about their ability to make themselves understood. There were many humorous moments in the staff room; in particular, at our marking attempts and depth of marking of the children's English books as shown in Photo 2. Although we had planned lessons to deliver in Tanzania using teaching approaches we were familiar with in the UK, some lessons we were encouraged to teach using the same pedagogy and style as we were being demonstrated by our Tanzanian

colleagues. For example, we were asked to teach a lesson from a textbook to a class of 55 children. The norm, we were told, was to introduce the lesson using the blackboard to model how to answer a question, followed by rote call and repeat verbal practice. Once the introduction was completed the teacher then left the lesson for the children to complete the work and returned to either the staff room to prepare lessons and mark or proceeded to introduce a lesson to the class in the next room. Older children called 'monitors' then supervised the remainder of the lessons and delivered the finished work in a pile of books to the staff room to be marked. We were met with raucous laughter when we stayed for the full eighty minutes in one lesson and wandered the room giving formative feedback and questions. When marking books and annotating work with comments, we were faced with perplexion. It was the sharing of these moments, the help and support from the staff ensuring we were embraced into the normal workings of the school and our efforts to try to embrace this, that made strong foundations for the commitment to continue to make the partnership meaningful.

**Photo 2: Staffroom in Tanzania with obligatory red pen for marking and a helpful phrase book!**



Reflecting on the week with the head teacher before we returned home, these moments were mentioned as a recollected quote from memory outlines below.

*'It was good that you saw the teaching in our school and tried our lessons. We want you to show us in your school how you do this with so many teachers and so little children. Do you write in every book? What do the lessons look like?'*

Being asked questions about our teaching approaches and what a lesson looked like with a genuine desire to engage in professional conversation based around professional curiosity has been the motivation to stay committed. Both schools agreed then to develop the

partnership to ensure that the impact of having a partnership was useful, integrated and embedded into the ethos of the school and having a positive impact on the children's learning in both settings. This was articulated on our last days as we were given farewell gifts and welcomed to the head teacher's personal home for a meal. Throughout the visit we were shown the dilapidated state that parts of the school were in, the lack of resources, and even taken to visit the education minister within the town to show support for the school as the head teacher respectfully questioned a reduction in state funding. Although being asked for financial help with resources had been an expected aspect of the trip, it was accepted by all of the staff that this was not the sole focus of our being there.

In December the same year, a reciprocal visit to the UK was conducted. Two teachers from Tanzania were able to be funded as the staff were hosted in the homes of the teachers who had met them previously which lowered the cost and enabled them to travel together.

Relationships, both professional personal, were developing - based upon the experiences of overcoming challenges to organise the visit due to visas and immigration, humour in cultural differences, increased confidence in asking questions and a genuine desire to experience the culture of a different school environment. The visit took a similar format with the teachers from Tanzania planning their own style of lesson for the children in the UK school and then peer teaching with the staff. When teaching in their comfort zone and replicating their own classrooms, the English language difficulties were not apparent. The didactic nature of the pedagogical approach meant there were no spontaneous questions, and the direct modelling and instruction was explicit. Again, there were cultural obstacles to be challenged and explained, and it was in these moments that professional conversation became the richest and most useful. Gifts and donations were sent back to the school with the teachers but the difference this time was that a collaborative language project had also been decided upon. Both schools recognised that there were language barriers that were less easy to overcome when not face to face, and it was agreed that the use of an interpreter could be useful for some interactions. This was testament to both parties wanting the partnership to continue to flourish.

The frequency of contact that the next stage of the partnership adopted was once every half term. Letters and donations were still sent to the Tanzanian school, but each had a dual focus. Charitable work was undertaken to improve some of the facilities, but learning opportunities were sought to tackle the perception that this was being done to help poorer counterparts. Individual children were linked with named pen pals whereas before letters had been generic. Commonalities between the two settings are always used and farming word projects, weather comparisons and town studies have all been collaborative projects with input from each school. Photo 3 provides evidence of some of these lessons and projects.

Photo 3: Photographic evidence of some joint teaching ventures



In 2018 the head teacher at the UK school retired and as a leaving gift was bought travel vouchers from the whole school community. She chose to use the voucher to travel to Tanzania and visit the partnership school. CC requirements had changed to provide no funding for reciprocal visits and the school had felt that in the interest of parity they would not apply for the funding and work to ensure that regular teaching opportunities were utilized to maintain contact with the school.

I accompanied the head teacher for a repeat trip which was personally financed but ensured that as part of the trip three days were spent visiting to the school to keep the momentum. This interpreter, who we shall call 'Fred', accompanied us for this trip and once again in the staff room stories and recollections were shared, with an added layer of detail provided by Fred to help explain any cultural nuances (the Swahili time mistake still being a favourite to share with the staff and children!) With the help of Fred, we identified that there were neighbouring schools who had shown interest in the partnership and the notion of expanding the network of schools was introduced to form a cluster.

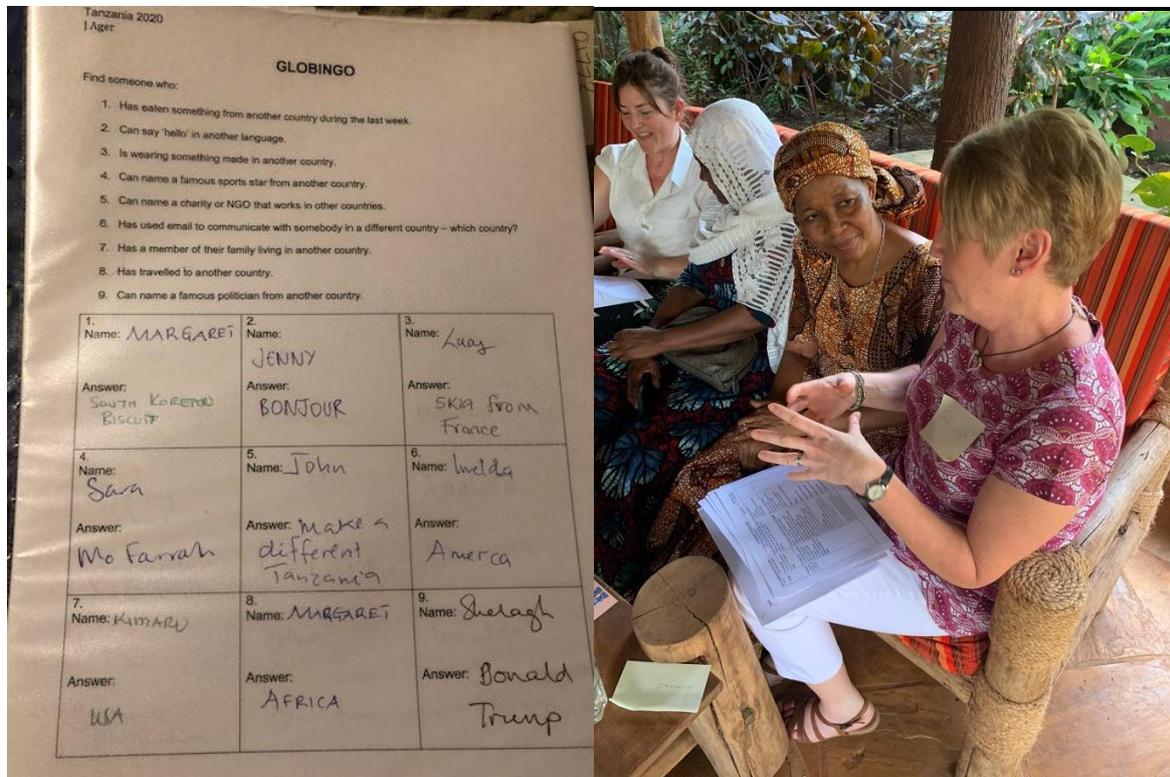
## Birth of a cluster

By July 2019 there were several local UK schools keen to form a cluster and explore working together. Some of these schools already had partnerships with Tanzanian schools and wanted to develop them further, some were looking to forge a partnership but wanted some local knowledge to do this with the security, support and guidance that a cluster can offer.

We met regularly as a cluster group and invited a representative from Cumbria Development Education Centre (CDEC) to support our plans for further collaboration. After an initial audit and self-assessment of what our needs as a group were, I was appointed the cluster lead and we started an application for a CCGL grant. Having well-established relationships with the staff at my partnership school, we declared them the lead school in Tanzania.

After a successful submission and shared planning meetings, we visited Tanzania as a cluster group in February 2020. I planned a training session for all of the teachers to meet each other before visiting the schools. The motive was to form relationships and jointly plan what each school wanted from the partnership. My experience of sharing experiences with my partner school and seeing how important spending some time getting to know the staff was in terms of then engaging in collaborative work, was the driving factor behind organizing the meeting early in the week. Remembering how the Swahili time mix up had cracked the ice in my initial meeting, I planned an icebreaker. Photo 4 shows an example of the warmup activity used; 'Globolingo'. Fred attended the meeting to help with translation and this was received well by the Tanzanian teachers.

Photo 4: Globolingo and staff training



Following an icebreaker session, I used materials provided by CDEC and adapted them for our needs. From the self-assessment tool that all of the schools had engaged with, a dominant theme for further school and learner development emerged. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the education goal and consists of smaller goals that are aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all promote lifelong learning.

Using the Level One training materials, we explored the relevance of global citizenship for the children at our schools and explored different international approaches for encouraging children to develop the skills, knowledge and experiences they will need to engage with the world. Part of the session also modeled some popular global citizenship teaching techniques, and then time for each partnership to work together to produce an action plan.

This session had been deliberately planned to use no digital technology as electricity and technology is not available at every school. Some sessions could be adapted and taken in to school if deemed suitable. The action plans, examples of which can be seen in Appendix Four, encouraged the teachers to discuss five positive areas from the partnership to date and three actions to develop.

As can be seen from the examples, the teachers used words such as 'support', 'strong', 'good friends', 'trust', 'equal', 'commitment'. This hopefully conveys to all that notions of equality and reciprocity, despite the obvious demographic and economic differences, are still at the heart of the partnerships.

When we met as a whole group an open discussion ensued about the charitable aspect of the partnership. It was agreed that one 'area to develop' on the action plan could be related to a development priority for the school in Tanzania that could be helped financially by the UK school. Two 'areas to develop' would then be focused on teaching and learning. From the four joint action plans, three Tanzanian schools included a building project e.g., new porch, concrete for floors, and a kitchen project. One school chose to focus on teaching and learning. However, this decision was made and seen to be mutually beneficial as the developments were high on the agenda of the Tanzanian headteachers' priorities. This needed to be recognized and they rightly state that the children need to be learning in quality, safe classrooms. Although this was not the aim, or the motivation to pursue the partnerships, for the Tanzanian teachers it has helped to prove a commitment by having the combination of actions and of recognising the whole school picture and unavoidably unlevel playing field in terms of resources.

This leads back to the idea that partnerships between schools in the 'global north' and 'global south' can never be truly equal. However, educational value and worth can still be gained from all schools involved if this is accepted and jointly planned and I think the partnership is testament to this. It does raise further questions regarding motivations of schools seeking to be involved in the partnership.

However, it is hoped that the narrative encapsulated in this study demonstrates the challenges of operating and sustaining a successful partnership - alongside the merits, in order to provide a truthful account. A big commitment from all participants is time. Overcoming language barriers and cultural differences can be difficult. When deliberating motivators for involvement in a school partnership these are important challenges to consider alongside the merits. Transparency between schools involved in a partnership in terms of the motivation is crucial in ensuring equitable communication towards decision making and forward planning.

By co-producing action plans and taking the time to engage in joint training this has enabled a community of colleagues to grow. This community has been the driving factor behind learning, relationships and experiences that are firmly embedded into the individual schools and have had an overwhelmingly positive impact on staff and students. The relationships between the cluster schools are now well established on a professional level. This has impacted on the quality of teaching within the school as it is real, meaningful and connected.

Forging partnerships through CCGL has fostered an ethos of pupils being passionate about wanting to make a positive impact on the world and to learn more about and from their friends and peers in Tanzania. Two headteachers and one assistant headteacher are part of the UK cluster and two Tanzanian members are headteachers; with the support of the senior leadership teams (SLT) and with the partnerships featuring on school action plans this has helped to drive forward the inclusion of global learning within the schools' curriculums.

Regular communication has been integral here to maintain relationships. All cluster decisions are made with the agreement of every school. As cluster lead, I have utilised WhatsApp groups, emails, and regular face to face contact to keep the momentum. Clear, agreed actions or steps to move forwards are shared to ensure partnerships have longevity. The visit from the UK teachers was highly successful and on return to the UK motivation, commitment and creativity levels were high. Two weeks after our return the Covid-19 pandemic drove the nation into lockdown and self-isolation. We had spent a long-time arranging visas and passports for a reciprocal visit booked for June 2020 for our Tanzanian colleagues to visit, but alas, this was not to be.

The impact of Covid-19 on the CCGL project was devastating as it meant that a reciprocal visit could not be organised, and the project is now finished. However, the impact on the partnership has been beneficial in some respects. The use of online conferencing facilities to meet has been revolutionary. Fred has been integral to arranging facilities and the means for this to happen. He has seen the transformation and curiosity within the schools and staff and has been keen to continue to help the partnership flourish.

It is the relationships that have kept the momentum and attitude moving forwards. Participation in this research study has meant meeting the teachers for further discussion and to explain a survey. This has been seen by the staff as further commitment and they have reciprocated by giving their full approval and participation. The main findings of the teacher's views will be presented next.

# Data Analysis

In this section I provide analysis of the data collected as part of the study.

## Development of the partnership over time

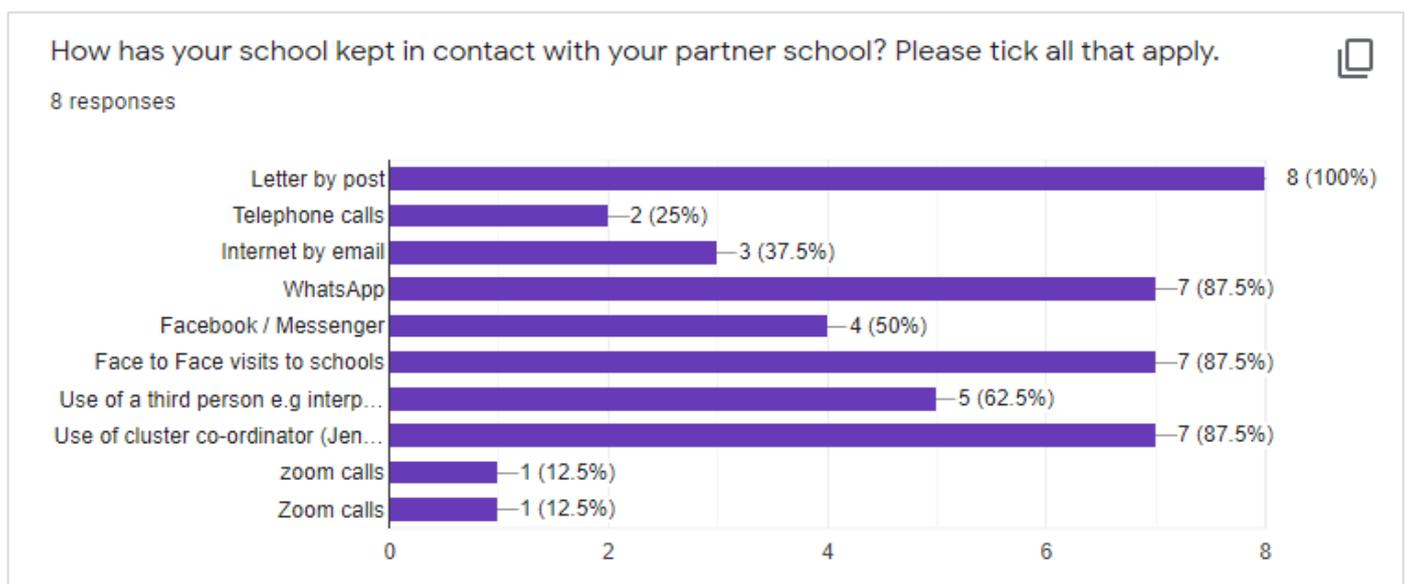
The historical data outlined in the story demonstrates a shift in attitude. The progression from low levels of engagement and annual cash donations, to planning lessons, writing action plans and increased communication means that we can assume that attitudes and relationships between partner schools have changed. Arguably the longevity of the lead school’s involvement has provided a strong model that has assisted other schools in the cluster to develop relationships and partnerships further.

Questions surrounding how the partnership operated at a procedural level were included in the survey by way of ascertaining what recommendations schools would make for effective communication strategies. These can be seen below.

## Communications

Figure 1 shows how schools communicated through the partnership. Postal letters had the highest response and as this was initially the only means of communication, which was to be expected. WhatsApp, face to face meetings and communication via the mobile phone of the cluster coordinator had the next highest responses. The cluster lead being a visible, constant presence with a defined role could be an important aspect that other schools embarking on a partnership should consider.

**Figure 1: How schools have communicated during the partnership**



In addition to a cluster lead or cluster coordinator, a third person to assist with translation has been beneficial to the partnership, although successful communication and reciprocal visits had happened without this option previously. Using the same person, who is again visible and constant, has been a source of help as can be seen in one response to the follow-up survey question: 'which is the easiest form of communication?':

*'Through the third person interpreter. He can communicate with both schools and speaks English.'*

Two responses indicated that the use of the third person (who also acted as interpreter) had made communication easier. During the interview two of the rural Tanzanian schools added that face to face visits and conversation with the third person had enabled better communication as his language proficiency was better. They explained that him visiting the school, both with the UK teachers, and in isolation to deliver messages and teaching materials, had helped as he could more quickly explain the aims.

The majority of respondents to the question about the easiest form of communication (six out of eight) found that using WhatsApp was the easiest way to communicate. From the follow up interview it was ascertained that each teacher had exchanged their mobile phone contact number with their counterpart colleague, and this had increased the frequency and ease of communication. One respondent, both in the survey and interview, acknowledged that technology and signal could be a problem, but when both were working well this was the easiest way to communicate. It was noted that shorter messages were ideally exchanged via WhatsApp, but any queries or arrangements were better communicated through the interpreter. One UK teacher expanded further within the interview to add that being relatively new to the partnership, the use of the interpreter had helped her to gain in confidence when navigating conversation and also in gauging the expectation of what to suggest by way of collaborative teaching input, in terms of resources and staffing of a suggested lesson.

Although technology had been limited in the past, there has been a marked increase in communication using mobile phones and in particular WhatsApp over the duration of the partnership. During the interview dialogue the use of email was explored. Not all of the Tanzanian teachers had access to an email account, and some had relied upon the use of friends or the interpreter's account for receiving longer emails. When it came to organizing visits and the CCGL program paperwork, this had been relayed through a third party as other methods of communication had been slow. Tanzanian teachers did note that receiving letters by post had a positive effect on the children at their schools and brought the partnership to life for the children. Only two of the Tanzanian schools had access to electricity and not all teachers in Tanzania received mobile phone coverage at their workplace. For some, this meant sporadic communication but, other than a delay, this was not highlighted as a problem.

I asked participants what had made communication between partner schools difficult in order to understand the difficulties of communication from the viewpoint of all the teachers. The responses exemplify the challenges. A main theme is poor internet connection. The schools involved in the partnership are primarily rural and in the subsequent semi-structured interview the teachers explained they often only received a telephone signal when visiting

the nearest town. The use of a third person to help, in the form of Fred, has provided a solution in the form of him regularly visiting the schools and acting as a 'go-between' by delivering and sending messages. This has been made possible with the agreement that Fred's fuel costs are covered from the cash donations that are provided to help support some of the building ventures and all schools in the partnership have mutually agreed this is of great benefit. The pandemic was also mentioned in the responses. When the schools did close in Tanzania many of the staff returned to their local villages. Priorities in both schools turned more towards the welfare of the school community in the initial stages of lockdown and the school partnership and curriculum links were not priority. This resulted in less communication between the partners, although personal communication to check the welfare of all involved was still conducted.

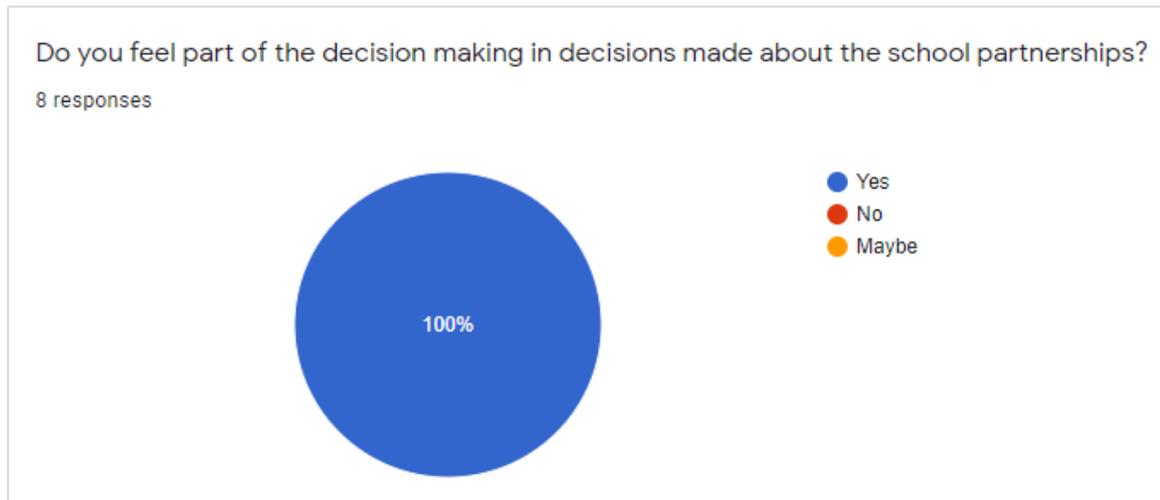
## **Working around issues of equality, trust and reciprocity over the course of the partnership**

In this section I explore issues of equality, trust and reciprocity in the partnership.

### **Equality**

All participants in the survey felt they were involved in making decisions concerning the partnership (Figure 2). During the semi structured interview, one headteacher explained that having the use of Fred to interpret the written and spoken word had positively impacted on this. As the cluster groups have met regularly in both countries and decisions have been shared, this has directly fed into action plans which steered the course of visits and collaborative teaching projects. An expansion on the questions in a discussion also highlighted that one of the reasons the partnership had longevity was that everyone felt included in the decision making. The initial phone call, prompted by the UK lead school, had been one of the few decisions that had not been made collectively.

**Figure 2: Involvement in decision-making in the partnership**



## Trust

Gauging trust, if we base it upon the interactions and social exchanges that are prevalent in this partnership, can be measured through interactions, commitment and presence of the partnership participants. When asked to participate in this study, the response was overwhelmingly positive. This willingness suggests that participants felt safe, respected and loyal to the cause of the partnership. Full cooperation in meetings, training, and exchange visits would indicate that faith in the partnership has allowed for it to flourish. As part of the survey, participants were asked to describe their relationship with their partnered school. Words that could be synonymous to a definition of trust were provided: *supportive, respectful, helpful, collaborative, respect*.

Actions can sometimes speak louder than words and inferences can rightly or wrongly be made. However, if we think back to the story being based upon an initial visit being organised by text message and subsequent activity: funds being transferred between countries and banks for travel; houses being opened to host teachers with meals provided; travel to the local town for online facilities to communicate; a willingness to step outside of comfort zones with teaching in another language – trust is apparent in these partnerships. In the semi-structured interview, I asked if there was trust in the partnership. There was laughter:

*'Asante. Of course we trust you. You have helped us. You have been there and maintained contact. We share experiences and it works both ways between the two schools. Do you trust us?' (Teacher interview)*

The question they asked back was not about the partnership but about them. With a big smile on my face, I answered:

*'We have shared a lot together and I am thankful to be part of such a successful partnership and to work alongside colleagues who are happy to learn together. I think that should answer your question.'*

## Reciprocity

If we consider reciprocity as things being exchanged which are mutually beneficial e.g., knowledge, communication, or questions, then the duration of the term of the partnership indicates that there have been benefits to all parties. If there were no benefits one could surmise that there would be no reason to continue putting in time and effort. The survey asked participants to give examples of the impact of the partnership and whether they would make a recommendation to other schools to engage in establishing one. The answers given highlight specific learning opportunities that have had impact on the children in the schools and emphasizes the community engagement and expansion of learning and world view that being in communication with another culture has offered. For example:

*'To support more schools in term of sharing learning experiences, children letter friendship, school visit and teachers exchange knowledge.'*

*'To set up links and to enrich the pupils and staffs' knowledge of understanding of different cultures. It also works both ways between the 2 schools.'*

*'Our children and whole community have broadened their understanding of our global world and their place within it.'*

## Perceived benefits and drawbacks of the school partnership over time and how this has changed

The relational aspect of the initial partnership has been the driving force for the growth, success and motivation to grow the partnership further. From an awkward, humble start sixteen years ago, the two lead schools have navigated the main challenges of communication and meaningful interaction to a well-developed, sustainable working relationship. The global learning aspect of being involved with a partnership has raised engagement, provided a hook and meaning for the children in both countries and equipped the children with knowledge and skills to engage and thrive in an ever increasingly connected global world. The partnership has enabled the children to engage with another culture, recognise similarities and differences between cultures, and identify and recognise global problems. Cultural awareness, tolerance and problem solving to effectively communicate has been an integral benefit to the partnership and this continues to develop over time.

In its infancy, the partnership operated due to the enthusiasm and commitment of one member of staff in each lead school. Curiosity paved the way for further interaction and, on experiencing the impact the shared learning experiences could provide in relation to pedagogy, engagement and knowledge exchange, this fuelled a deeper commitment.

Over time the relationship has flourished, and the challenges of communication and recognition of joint learning experiences has been the impetus for growing the cluster further. With the admission of new schools into the cluster from within the same localities in Tanzania and the UK, this has the effect of building upon that community. Success is

infectious and stories are powerful. By sharing the good practice from the initial partnership and highlighting the achievements, by putting the challenges into perspective and growing a larger support network, the success of the partnership continues to flourish.

## Perceived impacts of the school partnership on pupils and staff over time

In this section I examine data on the impact of the school partnership on participants.

The written letters exchanged between the schools continues to be a powerful method of communication for the children. One teacher described the joy of the child taking home a colourful letter, with a name written to them and for them. There is consensus here of the power and engagement of this with the children across the whole partnership. For the schools who were further into the partnership there was an increased confidence in terms of the children asking questions of each other and directing the letters to individual children. Observing the children in my own class receive such letters is still magical and, despite the ease of communication that can be achieved through the internet, the letters have continued to arrive and been sent. The difference between those schools in the infancy of the partnership is the level of formality and general content of the letters and any video messages. Again, the relational aspect comes into play. Specific questions have been asked of individual children from other children in their partner school e.g. *What is your pet cat called XXXX? Exactly what vegetables are grown in your garden? Which football team do you support, I support Liverpool.* Using the names of the children that are being written to has increased a feeling of community. Initially letters started with 'Dear friend' and a general overview and questions.

The same relaxed manner and increase in confidence has been witnessed amongst the longer-term partnerships. On one collaborative project focused on SDG16 'Peace, justice and strong institutions', children in both settings were asked to debate what would make their setting more peaceful and just. In the early partnership days this could have been considered a controversial topic to explore as the Tanzanian counterpart school did not recognise a debate as a useful pedagogical approach. This lesson was team taught on a visit to Tanzania. It was recognised that the other UK teachers on the trip, who had met their Tanzanian colleagues for the first time, would have not felt comfortable to engage in such an open-ended discussion and were more comfortable at that stage in adopting the more formal, traditional pedagogical approach they were witnessing whilst on site. The children in the UK and Tanzania felt empowered and confident to discuss SDG16 further in video messages to each other after recognising names and faces from years of correspondence.

Another example of the impact that teachers articulated include increased confidence. Confidence is mentioned alongside experiences, inspiration, and wanting to learn. This captures the impact that is difficult to quantify, but as an educator, wonderful to witness. This exemplifies how the partnership can help to tackle cultural barriers and allow all of the students the opportunity to become self-aware, confident thinkers who have the opportunity

to use their voices to contribute positively to society in the future. Response examples from the survey giving examples of the impact are as follows:

*'Whole school unit of work on similarities and differences in girls' and boys' education in both countries.'*

*'New experiences for the children and staff. Through the letters they learn from different countries where the children come from. They learn from the exchange, and they learn from each other. They want to learn more and learn more English so they can understand better. They ask questions like rainfall and vegetables. They want to learn better.'*

## Discussions and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore long term school partnerships from the perspectives of both Cumbrian and Tanzanian teachers. The research questions driving this study are outlined and discussed below after consideration of the data and narrative.

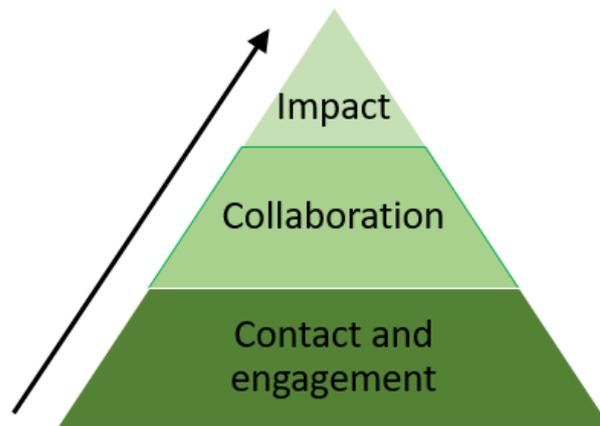
### Responding to the research questions

#### How has a long-standing school partnership developed over time?

Recounting the narrative of our long-term partnership shows how increased contact and engagement led to further collaboration between the schools within a partnership, and increased impact. Regular communication and engagement led to a strong foundation for further relationship building. This in turn progressed to collaborative working, teaching, thinking and collective engagement.

This is illustrated below in a model produced for the purpose of this study (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: How increased contact and engagement developed strong foundations that led to impact**



Imperative to the partnership withstanding over time has been the relationships that have developed, and crucial to the relationship building were the initial visits funded by the Connecting Classrooms fund. Sharing the experiences of another culture and navigating the complexities this can involve (think back to 'Swahili time') has made for a shared history, founded on each side of the partnership being outside of a comfort zone, taking a risk and having professional trust in shared endeavors. Peer to peer teaching during reciprocal visits and taking the time to co-construct action plans have all firmly placed the idea of working

with colleagues in the heart of the partnership. We cannot deny that charitable giving has not also had its place. Over the course of the partnership and cluster partnership, school communities have separately fundraised and contributed to developing school buildings and resources. However, this is an aspect that has been in addition to the teaching, learning and professional relationship building.

## How have the school partners worked around issues of equality, trust and reciprocity over the course of the partnership?

The word 'issue' could be misleading as it could imply that these themes have caused problems or difficulties. The word can also take the meaning of something worthy of discussion or debate and this would be a more useful definition of the noun. Regular communication, collaborative practice, openness and transparency have been key to ensuring these issues have not been problematic. Being involved in joint decision making has allowed for equality in terms of the outcomes of what each school wants to gain from the partnership and their motivation for being involved. Acknowledging at the staff training evening that there are many inequalities that are outside of the control of the partnerships, and are deeply ingrained within our global society, was powerful. Committing to the partnership and the inescapable fact that the Tanzanian schools in the cluster are very rural, off the beaten track, lacking electricity and online means, but being given access and opportunity to engage with a different culture and influence classrooms and pedagogy worldwide has been the biggest factor in working around these issues.

The schools, initially thankful for charitable giving, have now moved beyond accepting donations and pen pal style relationships. They have experienced how their story; their voice and their engagement has impacted on a larger scale and hence have been motivated to do more. They want the children in their care to have the opportunity to engage and be exposed to interactions with different cultures and explore common global concerns; reciprocity can be seen as the knowledge and experience exchange – freely given by all involved in the partnership.

## What have been the perceived benefits, drawbacks and impacts of the school partnership?

The initial benefits from the initial partnership were based upon monetary transactions. The correspondence clearly showed the gratitude from the Tanzanian schools and how letters were outlining the need for resources within the school. The support and resources have always, and continue to be, well received. However there has been a noticeable shift in focus. Correspondence now focuses on comparing how the vegetables are growing, to compare with seasonal produce in school gardens here, or a project focused on pupil voice and SDG 16 which captures what is peaceful and just about the school settings in each country, and what the children's hopes and dreams are. Letters are more personalised, and

more communication takes place using technology in the form of texts, WhatsApp, and the use of Zoom. The vegetable project mentioned was instigated by a Tanzanian school rather than as a comparative project. This is in its infancy and has been slowed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the increased confidence from the Tanzanian teachers has been palpable.

Working as a cluster group, some school partnerships have fared better than others through the current pandemic. Drawbacks relating to staff changes have affected the progress of one school and a lack of response has hindered another. This is where Fred once again has played a vital role. Having access to support in the region of the schools has been paramount. He has access to technology, a full command of the English language, and access to transport. He has helped to navigate any drawbacks and is now an important member of our partnership. He does this willingly as he sees the benefits for the school, staff and children in his local surrounding area.

## Reflection

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the journey of school partnerships between primary schools in Cumbria, UK and Moshi, Tanzania. The literature review highlights that school partnerships can provide an important, real platform for experiential learning between learners in different cultures. National initiatives have provided funding and frameworks to support schools in their journey, but the impact of being involved in a partnership is less documented. By sharing this study and providing insight from all involved in the partnership, I have highlighted that the complexities and challenges can be overcome to provide meaningful learning encounters for all involved. By acknowledging the role of equality, trust, and reciprocity in partnership building, and how this can be the basis of a strong relationship, I have recognized how these can be challenging themes between schools in the global North and South. This study can contribute to the recognition of the positive role that overseas partnerships can play in developing opportunities for children to learn and connect with the global world.

Much of the initial success of the partnership can be traced back to the impact that the reciprocal visit by the lead schools (funded by CCGL) had on the teachers. This face to face, lived experience had a profound impact and was the catalyst for further development of the global learning teaching at the lead schools. As the partnership has grown, the community and the momentum has continued with agreed purpose.

This research is useful for schools who are in the infancy of establishing a link with an overseas school, or those who wish to develop their relationship further. Previous research has not documented how schools continue to develop and grow their partnerships after a reciprocal visit and how long partnerships exist for with / without a reciprocal visit. Currently there is no funding for reciprocal visits via the CCGL programme. But, while the initial visit was a turning point in terms of engagement and attitude, at times the partnership has thrived and continued without regular face to face contact.

The findings show that as technology has advanced and social media becomes more widely used, new ways of maintaining contact and sharing an experience can be found. This would

be a fruitful area for further work in terms of researching the impact of a partnership that has been initiated and maintained without a visit.

## **Ways forward for partnerships**

A main aim of this study was to share a story of success. The information shared could provide support and help to schools and settings about to embark on their own journey. By way of support and advice I have provided some points of learning that have worked in this partnership and may be useful for other developing partnerships. These are:

1. Collectively explore what the motivations for developing a school partnership are.
2. Consider your setting. What experiences do you want for the children in your school? Do you want a contrasting or similar setting to partner with?
3. Do you have any links already in your community that you could build upon?
4. Approach the senior leadership team. Explore whether everyone in the school values the role a partnership can play.
5. Know your curriculum. Can you make links with your school curriculum to embed the learning experiences?
6. Research the country of the school you would like to connect with. Become culturally aware and communication is easier to navigate.

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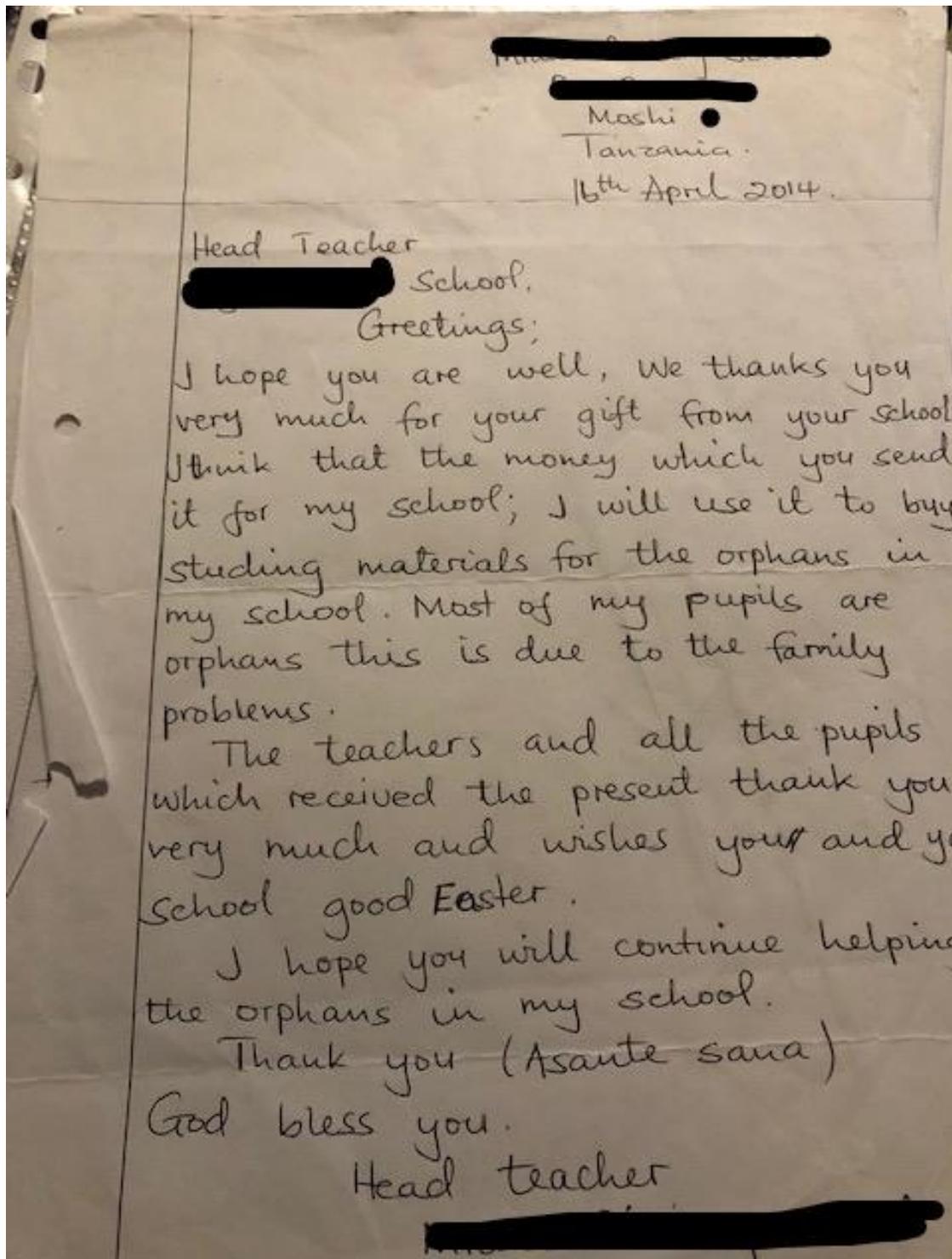
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## Appendices

### Appendix One (a)

April  
2014



[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
Mashi •  
Tanzania.  
16<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Head Teacher  
[Redacted] School,  
Greetings;

I hope you are well, We thanks you very much for your gift from your school. I think that the money which you send it for my school; I will use it to buy studying materials for the orphans in my school. Most of my pupils are orphans this is due to the family problems.

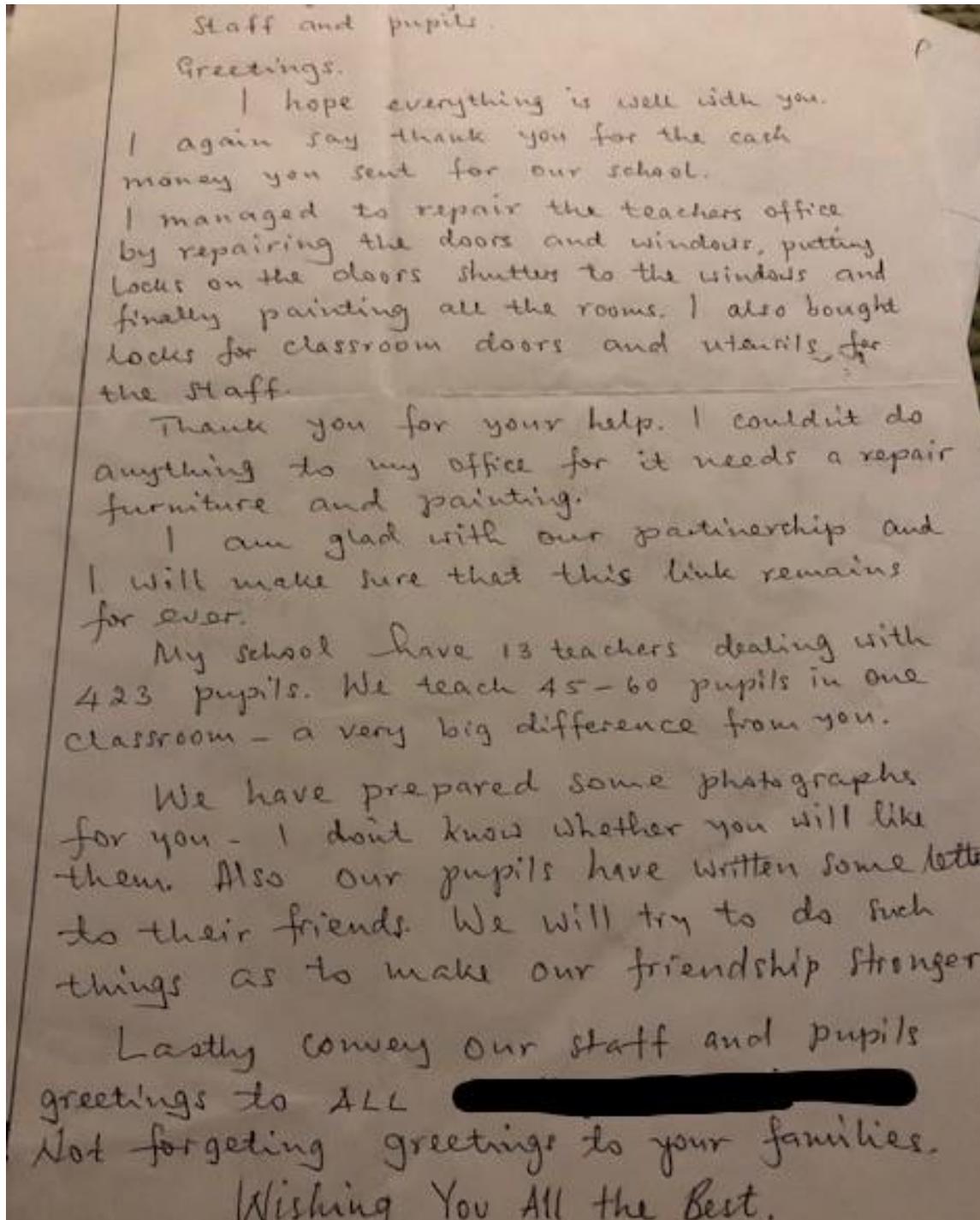
The teachers and all the pupils which received the present thank you very much and wishes you and your school good Easter.

I hope you will continue helping the orphans in my school.

Thank you (Asante sana)  
God bless you.  
Head teacher  
[Redacted]

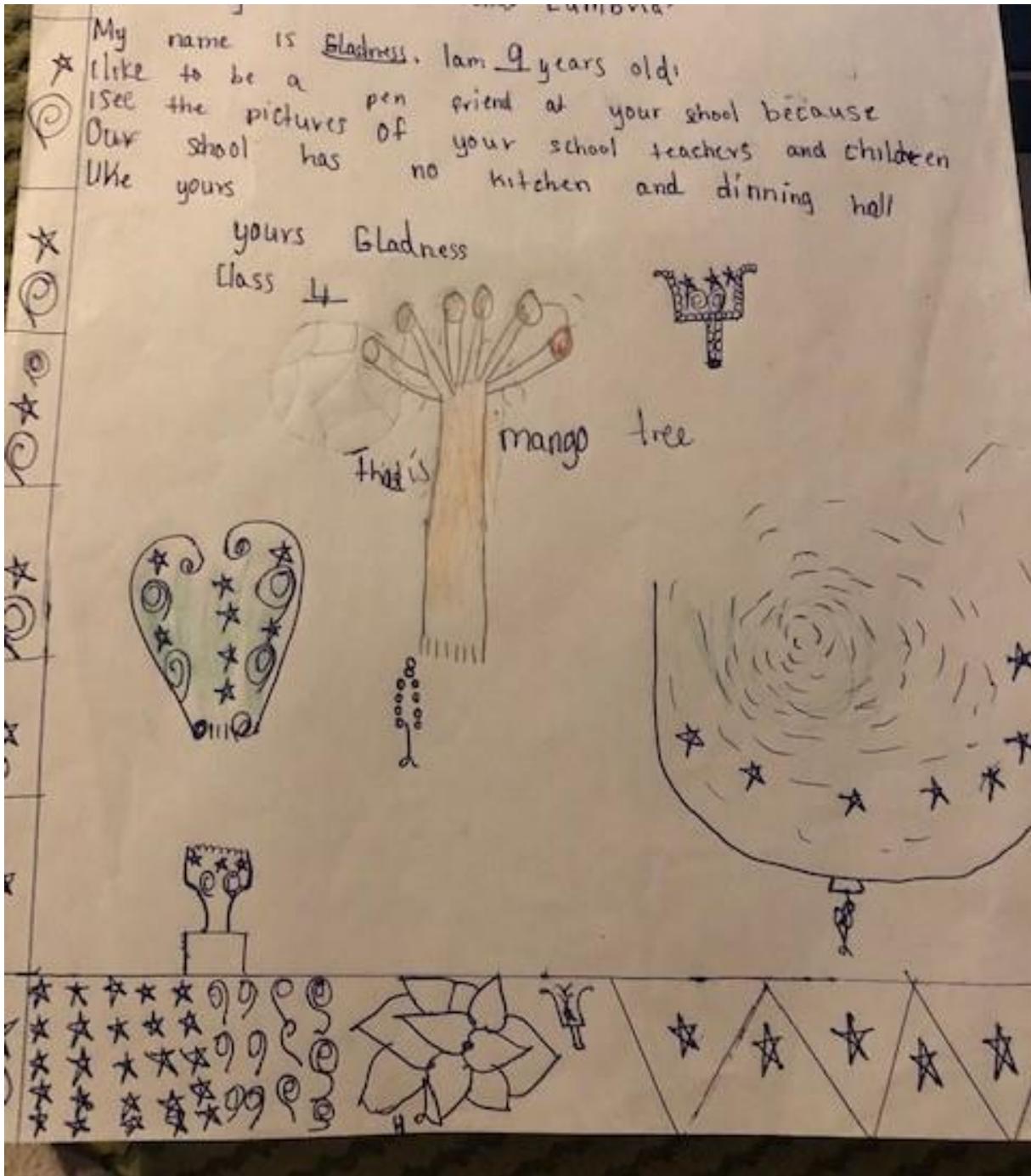
## Appendix One (b)

July 2013

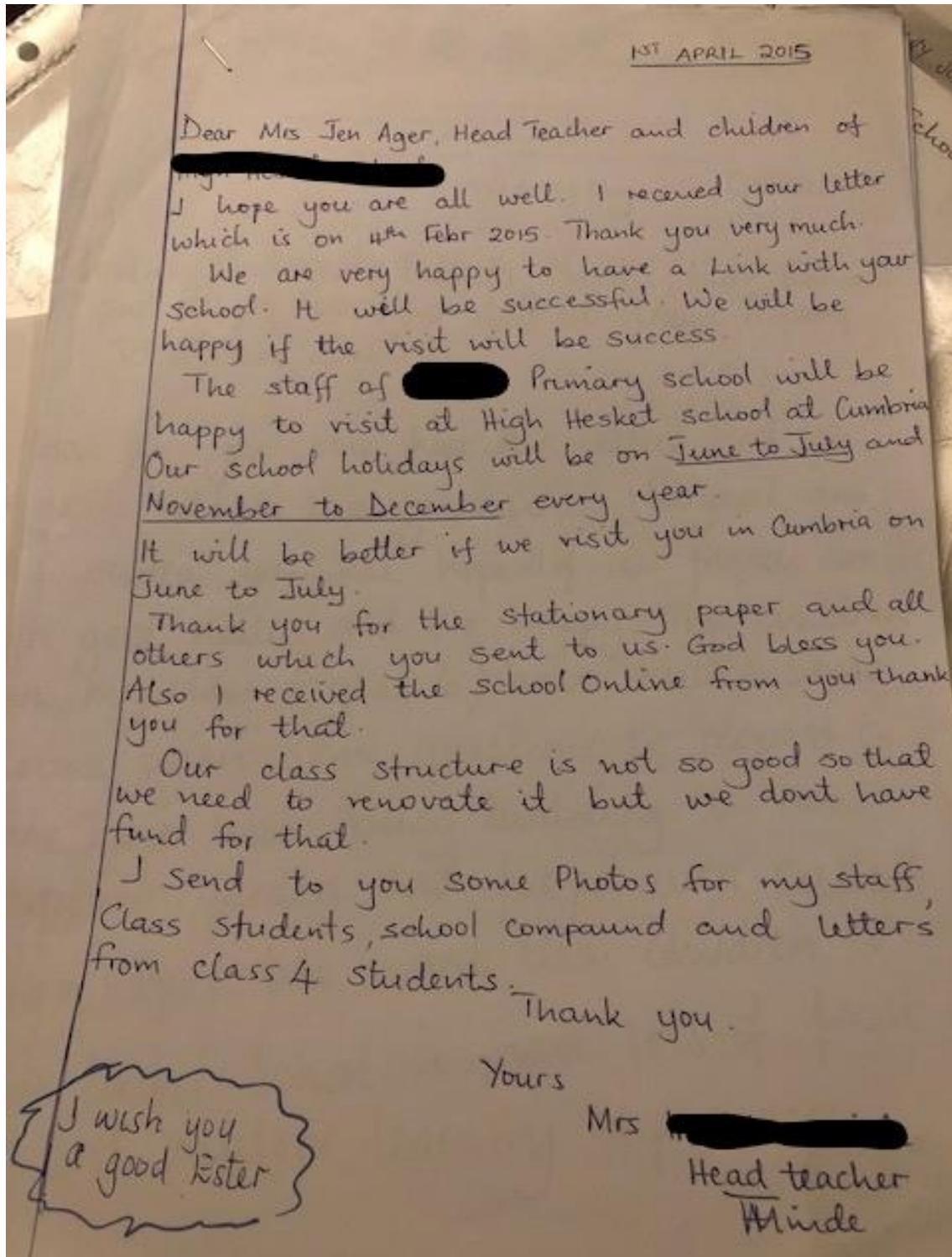
A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and is somewhat faded. There are some blacked-out redactions in the lower half of the page. The letter is addressed to 'Staff and pupils' and contains several paragraphs of text.

Staff and pupils.  
Greetings.  
I hope everything is well with you.  
I again say thank you for the cash money you sent for our school.  
I managed to repair the teachers office by repairing the doors and windows, putting locks on the doors shutters to the windows and finally painting all the rooms. I also bought locks for classroom doors and utanils for the staff.  
Thank you for your help. I couldnt do anything to my office for it needs a repair furniture and painting.  
I am glad with our partnership and I will make sure that this link remains for ever.  
My school have 13 teachers dealing with 423 pupils. We teach 45-60 pupils in one classroom - a very big difference from you.  
We have prepared some photographs for you - I dont know whether you will like them. Also our pupils have written some letters to their friends. We will try to do such things as to make our friendship stronger.  
Lastly convey our staff and pupils greetings to ALL [REDACTED]  
Not forgetting greetings to your families.  
Wishing You All the Best.

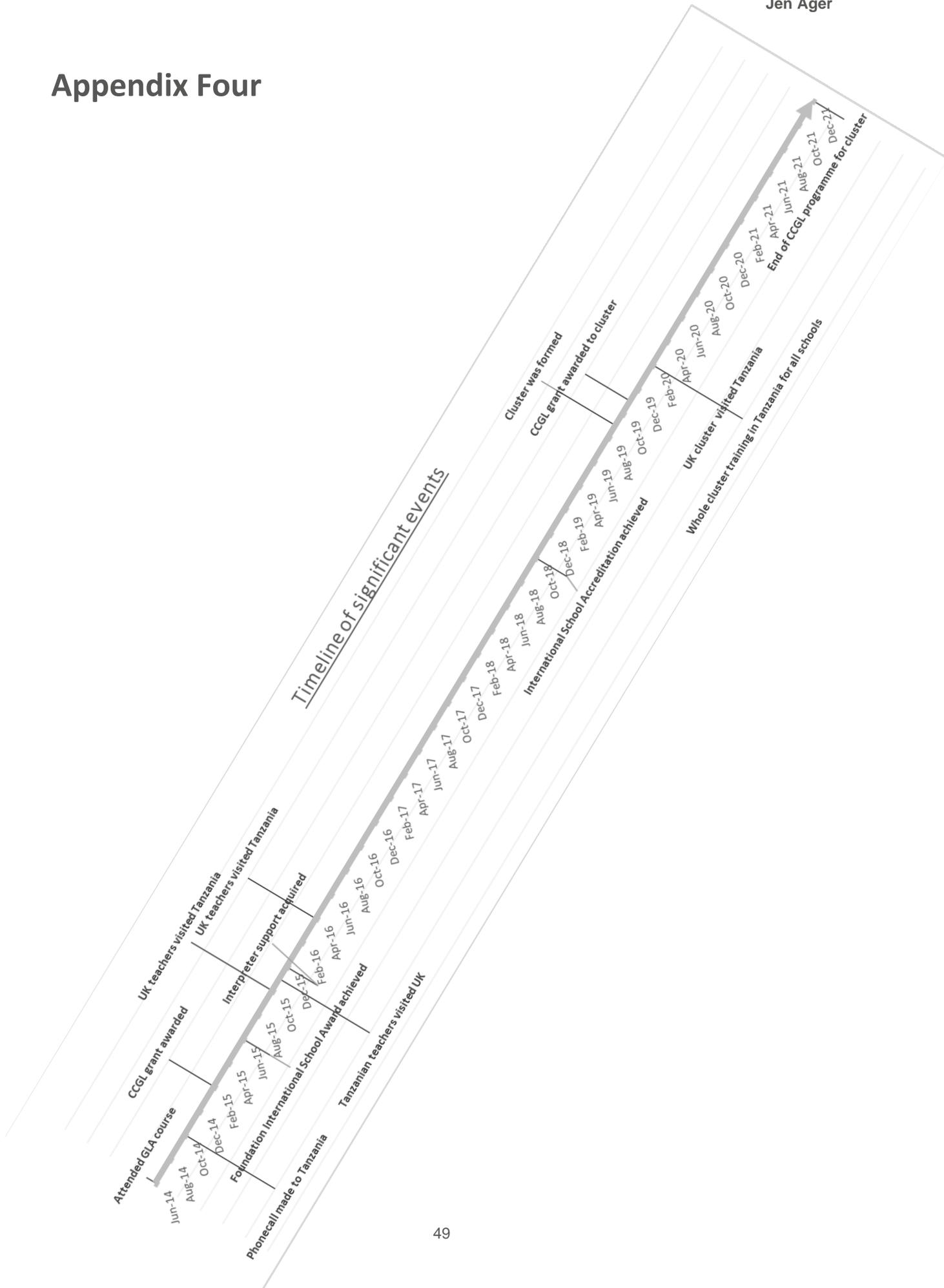
## Appendix Two



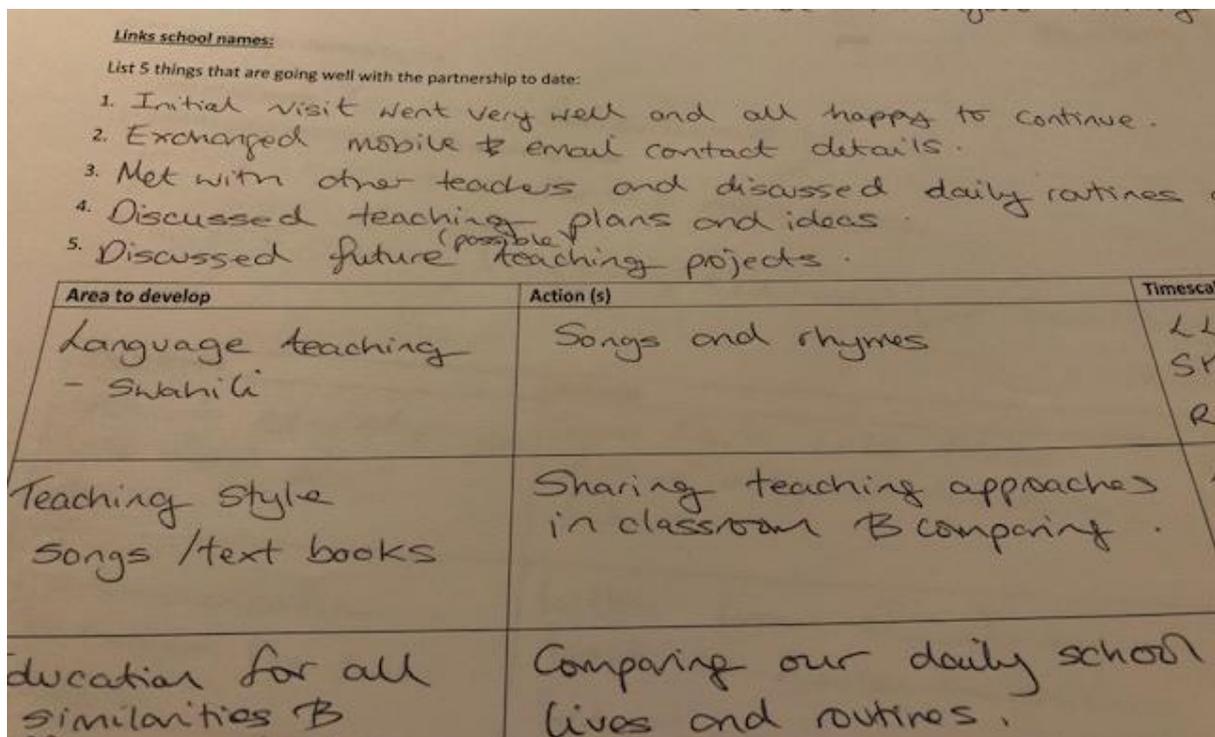
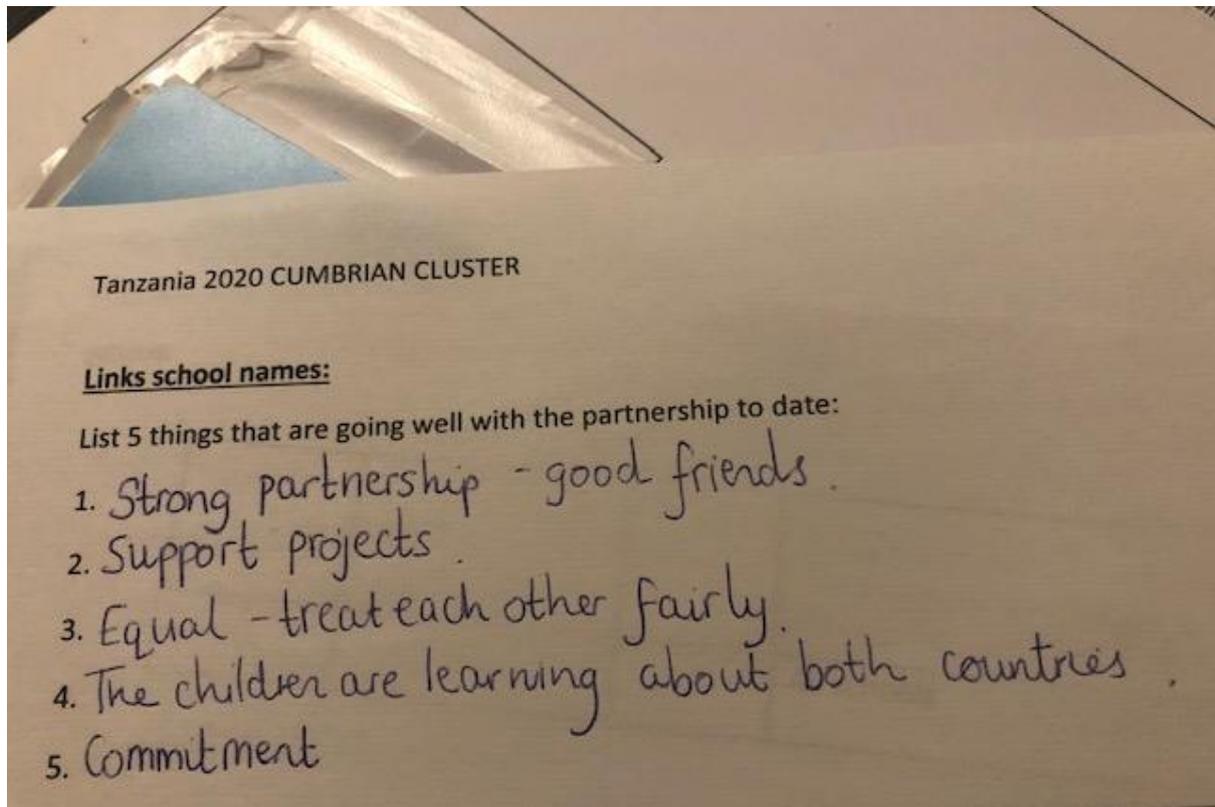
## Appendix Three



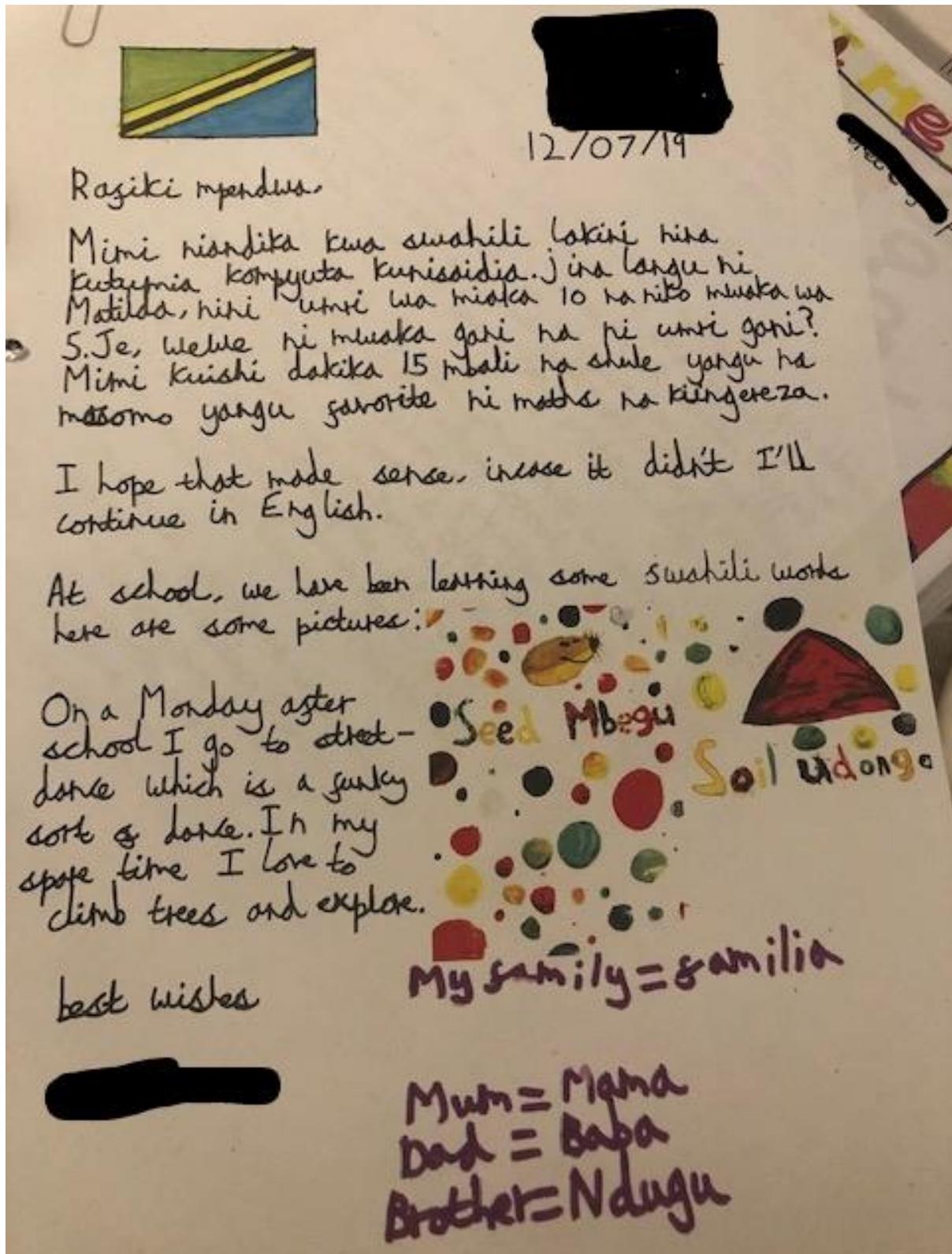
# Appendix Four



## Appendix Five



## Appendix Six



## Appendix Seven

Section 1 of 2

### Looking through both lenses: exploring long term school partnerships from the perspectives of both Cumbrian and Tanzanian teachers. ✕ ⋮

This research project aims to illustrate the journey of school partnerships between primary schools in Cumbria, UK and Moshi, Tanzania. The research project is being conducted by Jen Ager and funded by The British Council's Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning programme. The research will focus on three main themes: sustainability; reciprocity and equity. The goal of the research is to highlight good practice of successful partnerships and provide support and advice to other educators wishing to engage in a global partnership. This will be in the form of a written report that can be accessed online.

This survey is being distributed to all of the educators involved in the school partnerships that have High Hesket CE School as the lead school, irrespective of how long they have been partnered with their schools. The survey will inform a wider research project which focuses on four key questions. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The survey includes 20 questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes. The information you provide is confidential, however anonymised quotes may be used, or the researcher could seek further clarification. If you request confidentiality, beyond anonymised quotes, the information you provide will be treated only as a source of background information, alongside literature-based research and interviews with others. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study. You can withdraw from this study at any time, and without having to give a reason for withdrawal. If you require any further information you can contact the researcher by email: [jen.ager@high-hesket.cumbria.sch.uk](mailto:jen.ager@high-hesket.cumbria.sch.uk)

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:• you have read the above information• you voluntarily agree to participate• you are at least 18 years of age. If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.



## About the Authors

Jen Ager is an assistant headteacher of a primary school. Committed to providing experiences for children to learn about the world around them, Jen is passionate about global learning and preparing children for the future world.

## 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](http://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.