

# THINKING THINGS THROUGH: LINKING



**This set of activities was designed to equip educators to engage in discussions and make informed decisions about 'North-South' relations in school linking in the UK and internationally.**

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## Thinking Things Through: Linking

North-South (N-S<sup>1</sup>) school linking has the potential to provide the a useful foundation that could enable learners to engage productively with complex and interdependent processes that shape global/local contexts, identities and struggles for justice today. However, depending on the approach and methodology adopted, school linking can also reinforce stereotypes, promote a patronising attitude towards the South and alienate students further in relation to global issues and perspectives.

The rationale and objectives of N-S school linking need to be examined carefully before educational processes take place. For example, it is still quite common to see educators embarking on linking partnerships in order to 'help' the South (and feel good about it), or to make students more aware of (and grateful for) their own privilege for living in the North. Both cases tend to reproduce ideas of development, poverty and privilege that reinforce unequal/colonial N-S relations and assumptions of cultural supremacy amongst people in the North/West.

For N-S school linking to fulfil its potential to enable informed dialogue, mutual learning and ethical partnerships, educators will need to have a deeper understanding of the social-historical context of North-South relations and a more informed stance in relation to issues of power, identity, voice, representation, poverty and development. This involves asking questions, challenging one's own assumptions and engaging positively with multiple perspectives and difference.

This resource was designed to support educators to develop the awareness and skills to address some of the barriers to responsible N-S school linking practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms North and South are used in this project to convey common representations of the divide between the 'developing' and the 'developed' world. We are aware these terms are contested and we have chosen to use them strategically to facilitate the pedagogical process in this resource.

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## Task 1: Getting started

*If you already have a link (or have had one in the past)*

1. Think about your own experience of linking – what were your motivations?
2. What have you learned (so far) from this experience? How do you define 'learning'?
3. What was the most significant story or event that you can remember?
4. Can you remember an incident that challenged you?
5. What was the common ground in your partnership? What was not common ground?

*If you are thinking about starting a link*

1. Why do you want to link?
2. How much experience do you have of communicating across 'borders' (of class, cultures, ethnicities, gender, etc.)?
3. What do you think will be the common ground in your future partnership? Where are your ideas coming from?
4. What do you think could be challenging?

## Task 2: Other Voices

Look at the perspectives below. First, identify if they are coming from Northern or Southern partners. What do the perspectives imply about power relations? For each perspective, think about: who decides the agenda, in whose name and for whose benefit? What are the short and long term implications of unequal power relations in each case?

\*These perspectives were collected from educators and activists involved with school linking and/or development education.

*Sometimes they send us things that are useless, but we can make use of anything.*

*First you came to us as missionaries, then you came to us as colonisers, now you come to us as linkers.*

*When you suggest a link, are you offering us a relationship or do you just want to sell us your language and culture?*

*When you come to us you are a visitor. When we come to you we are a resource.*

*We are trying to make our lives better. The North needs to think about how it is contributing to our problems, with its governments, its unfair systems, its authority. The imbalances make our lives a bit too hard for us in the South.*

*We don't want a link like last time ... we want a real partnership this time.*

*If you have a link with a school in England and you are benefiting from it, you are very lucky. Even if things are not great, you should not complain about anything. You should not bite the hand that is feeding you.*

*We thought we were okay until our partners described us as poor.*

*We are fed up with being the recipients of charity.*

*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time ... but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

*There is a sense of being used to suit the needs of the North.*

*When you link to England you should do what they ask you to do or they may decide to find another school.*

*An invitation to form a partnership, should not assume you are a guest at the table. It should assume that you share the table and the right to plan and execute the agenda as an equal.*

*We are busy making our living ... every extra letter I have to write becomes a burden.*

### Task 3: Case Study

Read the case study and consider the questions below:

A group of UK teachers visited India from a cluster of primary schools which had been linking for three years.

After the visit the UK teachers made the following comments:

**Teacher A:**

They are poor, but they have supermarkets and are so happy. We have so much, but we are not happy.

**Teacher B:**

They are in the Stone Age.

**Teacher C:**

They are not in the Stone Age, they are 100 years behind.

From your perspective, is there a problem in the ways teachers A, B or C frame their partners? What assumptions are being made in the statements?

The teachers from India came on a visit to the UK at the end of the summer term and promised that they would send materials from India for the beginning of the academic year, but the teachers in the UK still hadn't received any by the end of September. The teachers in the UK called a meeting at which they were told that the reason they had not received any materials was because the Indian teachers had not returned to India after their visit, but had stayed on.

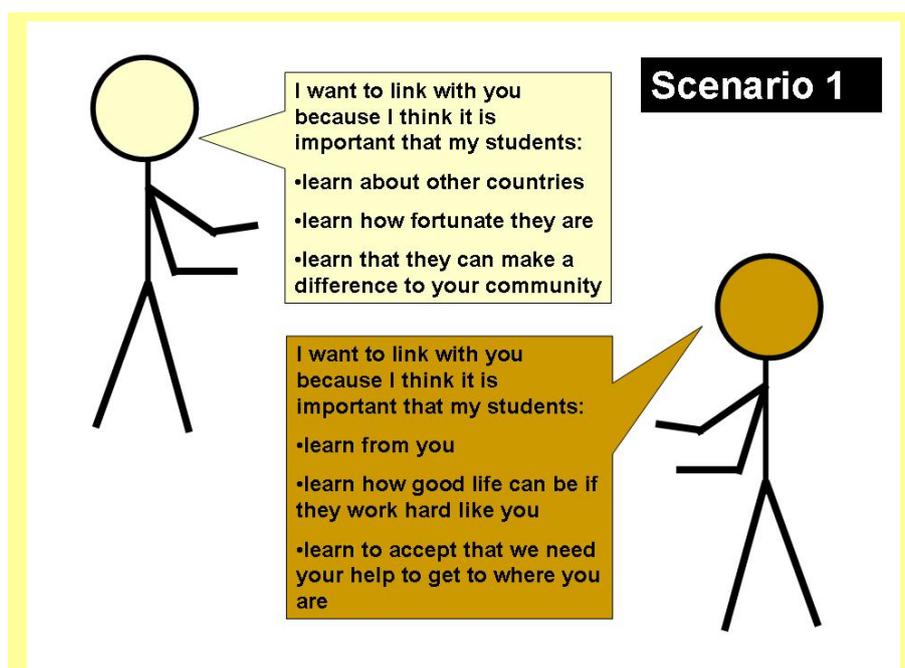
How do you think Teachers A, B and C responded to this incident based on what they had said before?

These were the comments they made:
Teacher A: I can't understand why they want to stay here.
Teacher B: I'm sure not all Indian people are as deceitful.
Teacher C: I can't believe it after all we've done for them.

From your perspective, what are the potential implications of these responses? What would need to be in place for this partnership to have a more constructive outcome?

## Task 4: Analysis of scenarios

You will find three different scenarios below with comments from three different people. First examine the scenario yourself – what assumptions are being made on both sides of the partnership? Where are both sides coming from? What are the possible positive or negative outcomes of this relationship?

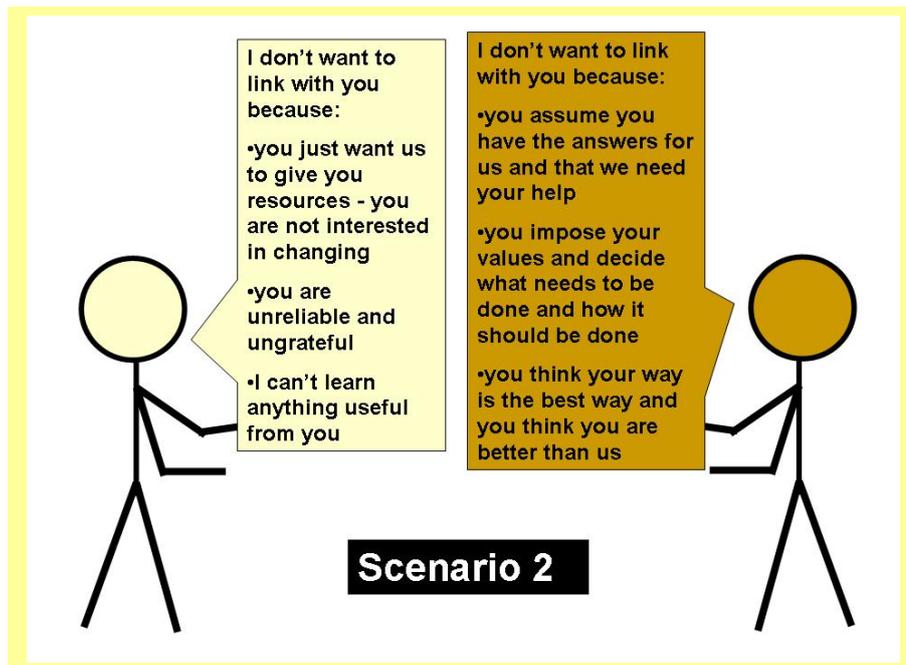


**Educator 1:** I think it is lovely that they are getting on so well. In this partnership, the Northern side will have a chance to learn a lot about the culture of the Southern partner while the Southern partner will gain a lot of useful knowledge from the North and will hopefully be able to progress. The North will probably also fundraise for the Southern community and the Southern partner will also be able to use these resources to improve learning in their school community.

**Educator 2:** This partnership will reinforce racism and stereotypes as it does not challenge the notion of superiority of the North. From this perspective, Southern people only have 'culture', only the West has useful knowledge (that can contribute to progress and development). The South is always 'lacking', in a recipient position and those in the North, through their 'benevolence and charity' use the Southern community to justify and increase their power and privilege.

**Educator 3:** Both partners assume that the North is the model of progress and development that all other countries should adopt. This is just like what happened in colonial times, but this is still reinforced by governments and the media. In order to make this partnership work, both partners should find out about why poverty exists and the Northern complicity in keeping the South poor.

**What is your analysis? How does your analysis compare to the perspectives above?**

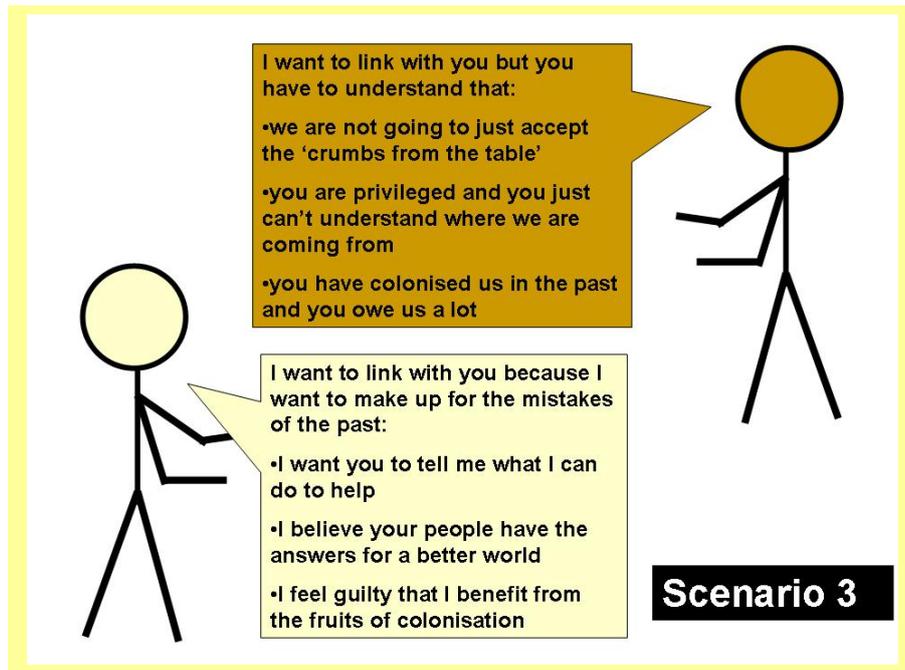


**Educator 1:** This is very unfortunate. They should be able to find a common ground. The North should challenge its stereotypes that the South is unreliable and ungrateful and the South should challenge its stereotypes that the North is arrogant. They should both arrive at an agreement on how to spend the resources in order to bring progress and development to the Southern community.

**Educator 2:** The Northern partner wants to impose its ideas of progress and development on the South and this is an attack on the South's right to decide how they want to develop. The Southern response is courageous and spot on – the response of the North is a typical response when the South does not conform to the humble and grateful position of the recipient of charity.

**Educator 3:** The North is in a mission to civilise and uplift the South without a deep understanding of the social-historical roots of the problem of inequalities in terms of power and resources. The North needs to do some homework and change its attitude to create better grounds for dialogue.

**What is your analysis? How does your analysis compare to the perspectives above?**



**Educator 1:** This is out of line. Colonialism is in the past and we cannot be held accountable for it. The South does not have the answers to our problems – they are part of the problem. They need to catch up so that we can progress together.

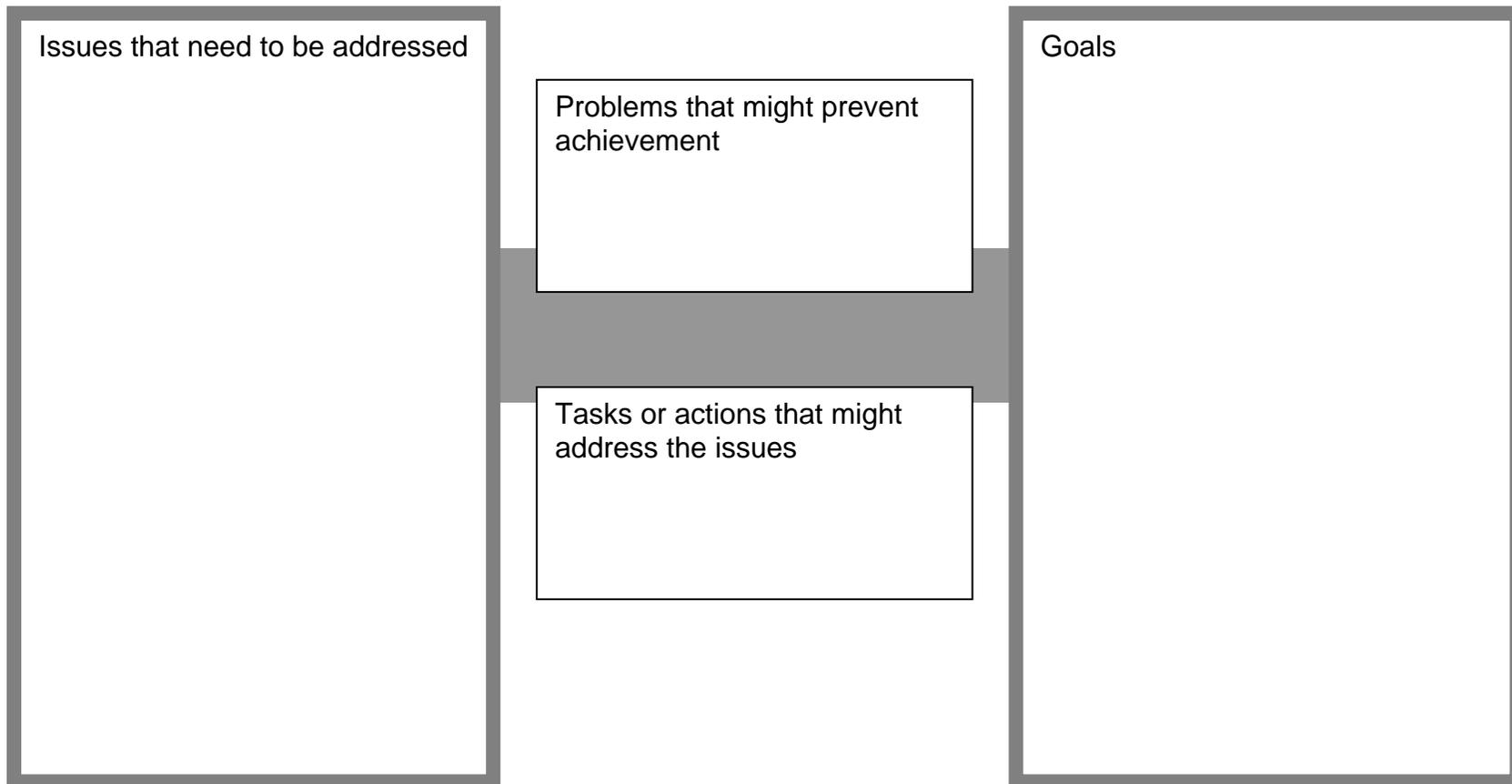
**Educator 2:** This is one way to redress the problem. The North still benefits from exploitation that started in colonial times and that continues today, so they need to stop thinking they have the answers and listen to the South.

**Educator 3:** This scenario is also very problematic because it reverses the imbalance of power. A partnership based on individual guilt or shame is not an equal partnership either – it still uncritical and simplistic. For mutual learning to happen both sides need to be challenged.

**What is your analysis? How does your analysis compare to the perspectives above?**

## Task 5: Evaluation 'H'

Fill in the 'evaluation H' form below with your ideas about the issues that need to be addressed in linking, the problems that might prevent effective engagement and constructive outcomes, the tasks or actions that might address the issues and the goals to be achieved. What do you think your Southern partners (or potential partners) would say if they had been asked the same questions?



The diagram is an 'evaluation H' form. It consists of a large vertical rectangle on the left, a large vertical rectangle on the right, and a central horizontal bar. The left rectangle is labeled 'Issues that need to be addressed'. The right rectangle is labeled 'Goals'. The central horizontal bar is divided into two sections: the top section is labeled 'Problems that might prevent achievement' and the bottom section is labeled 'Tasks or actions that might address the issues'.

Issues that need to be addressed	Problems that might prevent achievement	Goals
	Tasks or actions that might address the issues	

## Task 6: Evaluation H – perspectives from Ghana and Sierra Leone

The responses below are from a group of teachers from Ghana and Sierra Leone involved in N-S school linking. Compare the two evaluations (the one you completed and the one below) – what is similar and what is different? What do you think needs to happen for the concerns of the teachers from Ghana and Sierra Leone to be addressed?

### Issues that need to be addressed

Inadequate resources

**Inadequate communications**

**No freedom in decision making**

Delays of information on both sides

**No transparency on financial matters**

No policy in governing the link

The grant is not shared equally

Northern schools are more secure than the Southern schools

Communication

**Cultural differences**

**Understanding of the link**

**Commitment**

Funding/money

Fair treatment

**Lack of resources**

**Attitudes due to Former British**

**Colonisation**

South will commit to linking as a community passion and include all. North commit according to the size of the grant.

Increases existing inequalities

\* Bold shows issues identified as particularly important

### Problems that might prevent achievement

Commitment: as a community (South commits as a community; North commits according to size of grant – nothing extra).

Task focussed – work/project mentality

Grants not equally shared – control in the North

Equal standards – Northern partner expects something different than they expect of themselves

Cultural differences such as teaching methods, foods – people focus not task focus

Understanding the link: some schools don't understand – some see Northern school in the role of donor

### Tasks or actions that might address the issues

Identify creative or attractive sustainability for both North & South

Note that we speak a different language – even if it is English

Identify mutual benefits and with equal voice

Not focussing on monetary issues

Transparency and accountability of accounts

Visits as learning resource for teachers – affects attitudes

### Goal: Good Link

Long term development

Equality – equal voices

Fair treatment e.g. on visits

Resources

Respect for others views

Trust

Monitoring and evaluation

Partnership agreement

Shared aims

Equality of sacrifice

Unallocated funds more beneficial

Good communication

Transparency and openness

Clear expectations

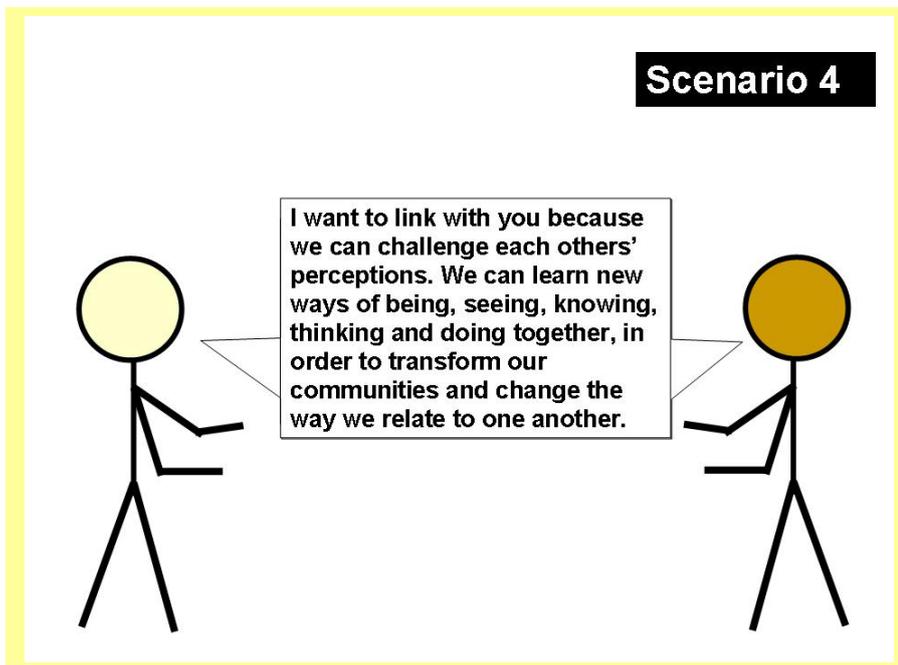
Developing our own learning through the link- leading to challenging previous assumptions/relationships

eg colonial attitudes

Projects used as basis for collaborative work eg topic – Ideal city

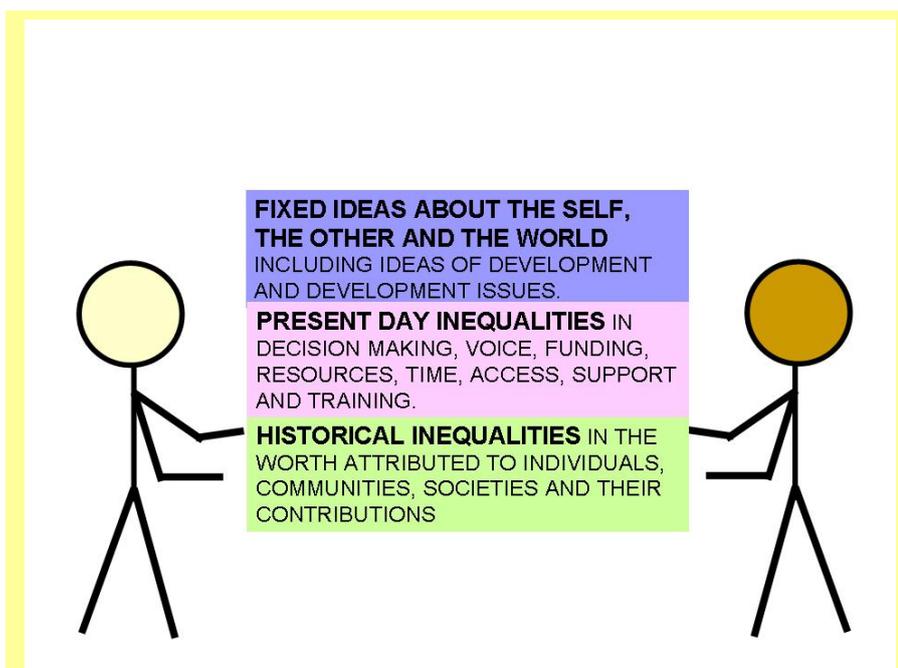
## Task 7: Clusters of barriers

In the 'Thinking about Linking' initiative, we propose that an ethical link is one in which assumptions are challenged on both sides. This is represented in the scenario below:



However, given the social-historical circumstances affecting the N-S relationships at global and local levels, we need to identify and address the barriers that prevent this from happening. This starts with an examination of our perceptions of the world, of ourselves and of those we consider 'other' (or 'different') in order to establish relationships that can go beyond the current limitations.

In the 'Thinking about Linking' initiative we focus on three clusters of barriers:



Look back at the barriers you have identified in task 5 and the barriers the teachers from Ghana and Sierra Leone identified in task 6 – can you categorise these barriers according to the three clusters above? Is there any barrier that needs a different cluster?

## Task 8: Addressing cluster 1: learning to reach out (fixed ideas about the self, the other and the world)

The conceptual framework of the international initiative 'Through Other Eyes' ([www.throughothereyes.org.uk](http://www.throughothereyes.org.uk)) can be a useful starting point to start addressing the first cluster of barriers. This conceptual framework suggests that, for us to learn to 'read the world' through the eyes of others, we first need to learn to unlearn, to learn to listen, to learn to learn and to learn to reach out. These ideas of learning are explained in the table below:

**Learning to unlearn** – learning to perceive that what we consider 'good and ideal' is **only one** perspective. Our perspective is related to where we come from socially, historically and culturally.

**Learning to listen** – learning to recognise the effects and limits of our perspective, and to be receptive to new understandings of the world.

**Learning to learn** – learning to receive new perspectives, to re-arrange and expand our own and to deepen our understanding - thinking beyond our limits.

**Learning to reach out** – learning to apply this learning to our own contexts and in our relationships with others continuing to reflect and explore new ways of being, thinking, doing, knowing and relating.

How would you match these ideas of learning with the perspectives below?

"When other people talk to me now, instead of trying to convince them of my perspective, to complete their sentences or to attempt to find commonalities, I first suspend my judgement and try to focus on what they are saying. Next, I examine my own reactions to see where I am coming from."

"I had never thought about how much influence my parents and my teachers have had in my thinking. I have now realised that I have taken things for granted and never asked myself why I thought that way."

"Engaging ethically with others means being open to explore things together, to learn and to teach, to challenge and to be challenged, allowing for mutual transformation."

"When I am open to learning from others, I recognise that my own understanding is limited and that other people's different understandings can challenge and expand my own."

## Task 9: Addressing cluster 2: equality of sacrifice (Present day inequalities)

A useful strategy to address the second cluster of barriers (i.e. present day inequalities) is to focus on the concept of 'equality of sacrifice'. Read the two narratives and consider the questions below:

### **Abonse: practicalities of communications**

#### **Posting and receiving letters:**

You need to travel on foot from Abonse to the nearest town Aseseeso (4miles) which is 1 hour 15 minutes walk to get a car to Adukrom (2miles) to get to the post office to either post letters or open the post box for letters.

Then after everything you come back to Abonse through the same route simply because there is no transport service available from Aseseeso to Abonse or vice versa.

#### **Emailing or checking emails:**

You have to travel on foot from Abonse to the nearest town Aseseeso (4miles) to get a car to Adukrom. Then take another car to Apirede, one mile away, where the nearest café centre is. You pay for the time you spend, and extra for printing a page. There may be power cut during the time you are checking the email. And when this happens the power does not come back on and you have to go back and restart the journey all over again the next day.

I can remember that the first information sent to us by Margaret about this project. It took us three working days to get the email - the first problem was due to error at the café centre, the second was due to a power cut and then, on the third day, we had to extend the journey to Mampong which is about ten miles away from Adukrom . This meant a journey of 16 miles from Abonse to receive the emails.

Checklist of useful questions (from the Linking Toolkit published by UKOWLA in 2006)

- Have you considered equality issues within your link?
- Would your partners say that they have an equal voice?
- Have you tried to discover the values and priorities of your partner community?
- How are you addressing material inequalities which might exist within your link?
- Have you considered how your assumptions may be affecting your link?
- Are you aware of the pressures and demands the link may be imposing on your partners?
- Have you considered changes that are needed within your community and to which your partners could make a contribution?
- Are you using your link to address social cohesion within your own society?
- Have you understood the sacrifices your partners are making on behalf of the link?
- Are your sacrifices equal?

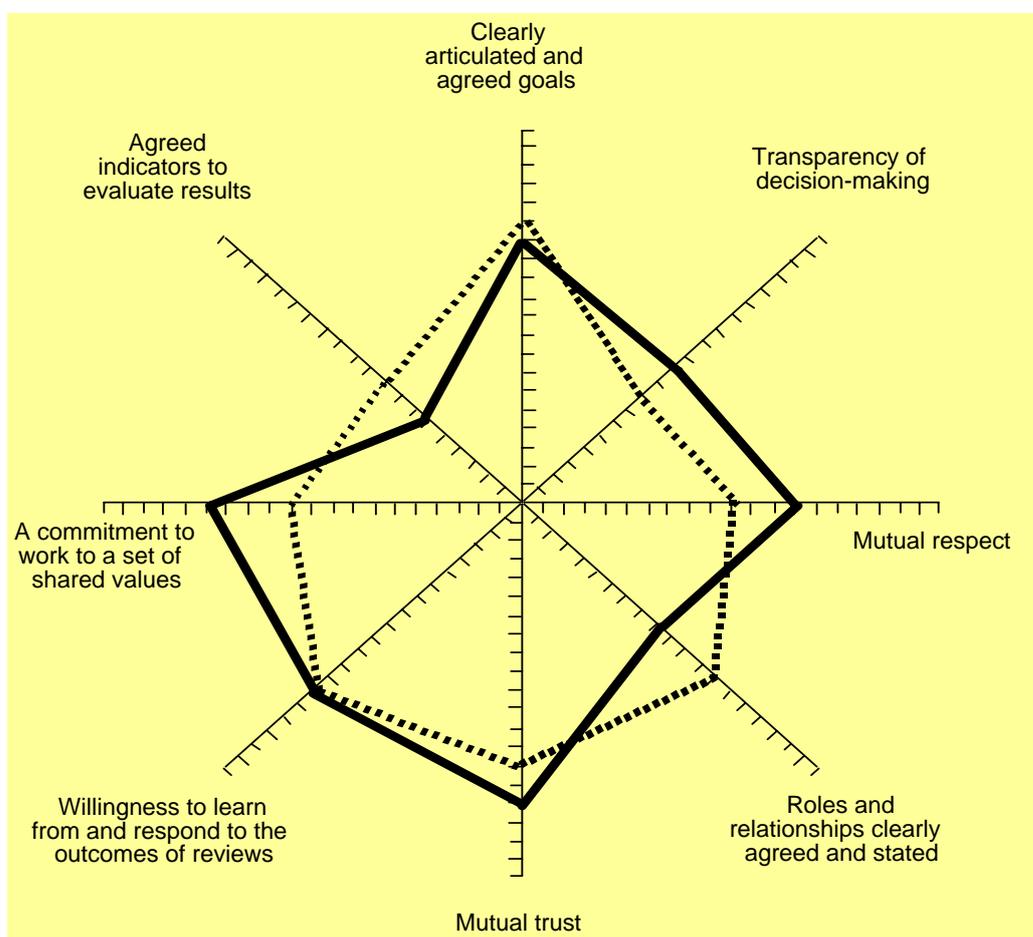
## Task 10: Addressing cluster 2: WWF-UK tool (Present day inequalities)

Another useful tool for addressing issues of voice and equality in a link is the WWF-UK Partnership monitoring tool.

This tool involves examining the partnership between organisations using eight criteria which you select jointly with your partners. The degree to which the partnership meets these criteria is plotted using a 'spider diagram' with eight axes. You and your partner independently mark on each of the eight lines where you think the link is. Then compare the results; and you may be surprised at your results.

The sample evaluation below shows the criteria selected by Northern and Southern partners in a school link project and a comparison of their evaluations.

[key: centre point 0; 1 very low to 10 very high; = partner A; ---- = partner B]



How similar or different do you feel your evaluation would be from your partners' evaluation?

## **Task 11: Addressing cluster 3: Enquiry on colonialism (Historical inequalities)**

In order to address the historical inequalities cluster, it is important to look at a key moment of intercultural contact in global history that still has major implications for N-S relations today: colonialism.

In this project we suggest a methodology based on dialogue and enquiry for exploring this issue. In this methodology, participants are exposed to a stimulus and have a discussion on a voted question that should not focus on consensus, but on finding out as many perspectives as possible on the selected topic.

A power point presentation with a stimulus for enquiry around colonialism and linking can be found at...

The slides are reproduced below.

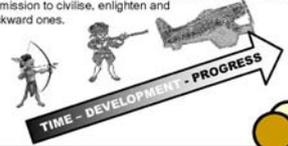
Southern Voices in Linking

## Dialogue and Enquiry on COLONIALISM

A KEY ISSUE WHICH NEEDS EXPLORING:  
**COLONIALISM**



Many people both in the North and the South argue that colonialism has created a timeline of progress and placed cultures and societies at different points on it. The societies that have been placed at the top tend to see themselves as developed, civilised and successful and to view other societies as primitive and backwards. Some of these societies have taken upon themselves the mission to civilise, enlighten and educate the backward ones.




**In defining others as inferior, ignorant, traditional and barbaric, the colonisers have learned to think of themselves as superior, enlightened, modern and civilised.**

Societies that were colonised have responded in different ways, including:

- some have accepted and adopted a view of themselves and their culture as inferior
- some have appropriated some elements of the colonising culture and made them their own
- others have rejected the colonising culture completely.



Other aspects of this colonial heritage may include:

- the notion that beliefs and ideas that one holds have universal value
- the belief that 'we' have the solutions to 'their' problems, the desire to 'help them' and to control agendas, processes and outcomes
- the desire to study, to analyse, to categorise, to record, to inscribe and to judge the other.




This still shapes and limits the way we view ourselves, perceive the other and engage with the world.

In order to address these limitations, we need to look into our 'cultural baggage' and open up to different understandings.





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We need to remember that, because we are coming from different contexts, we will see and understand things differently.

This difference is the greatest source of learning in the link as it can open up different possibilities of understanding on both sides.




A link is an opportunity to explore and 'unpack' our cultural baggage and to transform our understandings of the world in order to create new ways of being, seeing, knowing, thinking and doing together.

But this is not easy. Unpacking means challenging ourselves and transforming our own baggage.




**A good link is a link where perceptions and assumptions are challenged on both sides – without mutual challenge there is no mutual learning.**



### Dialogue and Enquiry Procedures

1. Look at a **PERSPECTIVE** (stimulus)
2. Draw or write your **FIRST THOUGHTS** and share it with someone
3. Make a **QUESTION** starting with 'I **WONDER**' in pairs
4. **VOTE** on a question to be discussed by the group
5. **TALK** about it with a view to unpack and explore different possibilities/perspectives
6. **SHARE** what you have learned

### THANK YOU

For more information, please contact:  
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## **Task 12: What next?**

Extra materials and literature to support learners and facilitators (to be developed)

- 'positive' examples of links, or linking activities, which recognise issues of power and difference;
- possibly an update of the rather old Manchester DEP Southern Voices resources (particularly on Colonialism)
- webquest.