International School Partnerships

Toolkit: How to build sustainable partnerships
Contents

- What makes a school partnership sustainable? 4
  - 1. Guiding principles 5
  - 2. Developing curriculum projects 8
  - 3. Keep communicating 16
  - 4. Resourcing partnerships 22
  - 5. Involve other schools 30
  - 6. Involve your communities 34
  - 7. Teachers’ professional development 38

With thanks to:
Abbottabad GGCHS School, Pakistan
Bachpan School, India
Cramlington Learning Village, UK
Deptford Green School, UK
Egerton Primary School, Kenya
Egerton Primary School, UK
Fort Hill Community School
Juliet Johnston School, Ghana
Mireille Atta
Muthill Primary School, UK
Nagarjuna Academy, Nepal
PCE Demonstration School, Ghana
Rainbow College, Nigeria
Southroyd Primary School, UK
St Kizito SS Bugolobi School, Uganda
Teesdale School, UK
What makes a school partnership sustainable?

Schools in more than 50 countries have discovered that an international school partnership provides an ideal way for young people to learn about the wider world, become active global citizens and prepare for work in a global economy.

School partnerships enrich the curriculum and motivate young people. It is not only young people who benefit: teachers have also discovered they can develop their professional practice through international exchange and training. Sustaining a partnership might be a challenge at times, but many schools agree that the benefits are well worth it.

A sustainable school partnership is based on a long-lasting relationship that is strong enough to overcome challenges to its survival. Within this toolkit you will find lots of practical information to help you progress your partnership into the future. You can read about the experiences of schools whose partnerships have thrived in spite of the obstacles they have faced together.

1. Guiding principles

Building on the strong foundations of your partnership, remember to keep in place the British Council’s guiding principles for school partnerships:

1. Educational: Your partnership should have genuine educational aims and joint curriculum projects must explore global themes.
2. Equity-based: There should be reciprocal learning and both schools should contribute to the partnership.
3. Sustainable: Both schools should be committed to a long-term relationship.

Get active

Write a list of what you consider to be the key features of a successful school partnership and discuss with colleagues.
Both Muthill Primary School in Scotland and Juliet Johnston School in Ghana are small rural schools in close-knit communities.

Muthill was interested in multicultural and environmental issues for many years, but the initial drive for the partnership came in 2005 after Muthill’s deputy head visited a school in Ghana to help with English language teaching. She wanted to use her experience to benefit others, so contacted the Local Authority International Co-ordinator, who told her about the possibility of having a school partnership.

The schools established a partnership agreement during their first visits to each other and agreed a common goal to “experience and develop a globally enriched curriculum together, where cultural diversity is welcomed and explored.”

Some curriculum work on English was started in both schools, as communication was mainly by email, texting and letter-writing. The Scottish school also decided to find out more about their partner through a cross-curricular project on Ghana.

With the partnership agreement in place, both schools were able to start exploring how the partnership could contribute to their curricula. Food and nutrition was an obvious topic. In Ghana, a trip to the local Cocoa Research Institution generated a lot of useful material for pupils to work with in different areas of the curriculum – the growing stages of the cocoa pod, products made from cocoa, the role of fair trade. It worked very well as a cross-curricular initiative for history and geography.

Muthill also took part in a ‘Grow Your Own Potatoes’ competition, researched how potatoes are grown and sent their findings to Ghana. Another topic revolved around water and particularly focused on the ease with which Scottish people could access it and, therefore, how much less careful they are at using it economically than their Ghanaian counterparts.

Team-teaching during the visits was photographed and filmed and shared with each other. The learning from this had a significant influence on the way that Muthill does its Rights of the Child work.

With six years of partnership activity behind them, the schools are only too aware of the effects of the partnership on pupils. Most pupils are able to critically analyse and apply facts about a number of global issues. They have also developed more positive attitudes to diversity.

The partnership was mentioned repeatedly in a school inspection report which noted that pupils were taking responsibility for helping to develop the partnership and that “equality and ethnic, cultural and religious diversity” were promoted through the curriculum and school link. One of the Scottish teachers points out that underlying preconceptions and stereotypes have been challenged:

“(The partnership has) changed perceptions in a positive way and is making us all more globally aware of diversity and equality issues... Scottish pupils were amazed and happy to learn that Ghanaian children have access to Game Boys and such like, as well as more traditional toys... The pupils have not only learned about their topics... they also have a deeper and wider understanding of them.”

Pupils’ comments about their experience of the partnership range from, “We have learned about the culture and now I know what every day is like in Ghana,” to “I have learned that there is too much poverty in this world and that people are suffering at this very moment from sickness and lack of food so it should be stopped now.” But, the last word should go to the pupil who commented, “We are really one school with Europe, sea and lots of Africa between us, but that doesn’t matter.”

The Muthill Partnership Co-ordinator is very positive about the quality of relationship between the two schools. Communication is good and the outward and progressive attitude of the Ghanaian school matches well with her own school’s approach. The partnership’s strength is its joint planning and careful management of the fund-raising to complement but not lead the educational work. Their strong bond and shared vision, the recognition of the benefits in both schools and the enthusiastic support of the local communities make her optimistic about the future sustainability of the partnership.
2. Developing curriculum projects

The rationale and focus for a school partnership is to enhance teaching and learning in both schools. This can be done most effectively through the planning, implementation and sharing of joint curriculum projects.

A useful model for learning together
Projects enable young people to learn:
• about each other
• from each other
• with each other.

Principles
Curriculum-based
• Use activities that support current lesson plans. Projects should not be add-ons.
• Subject areas should be common to both schools – although they might have different names, e.g. Social Studies or Citizenship; Music or Visual and Performing Arts.
• Any subject area can be used – creative projects attempt to incorporate two or more areas but innovations need to be feasible for both schools.

Similar ages, similar stages
• The key relationship is between the class or subject teachers who will implement the projects.
• Young people should be at similar stages in their education systems.
• Project work is more effective when carried out by groups rather than individual students. This also avoids the problem of classes of unequal sizes trying to work together.

Equitable and co-ordinated
• Make sure young people from both schools contribute in an equitable manner to the final product.
• Feedback from the partner school is very important and can develop a further round of enquiry.

Small is beautiful
• A number of well-executed, complete, successful small projects is preferable to one ambitious, perhaps incomplete, large project.
• The time-span of projects should be no more than one academic year, but three small projects will create a firm foundation for the partnership and give young people a sense of achievement.
Nagarjuna Academy in Nepal has been actively involved in making changes to the learning experience of pupils since the early days of its partnership with Cramlington Learning Village in Newcastle.

From 2006, both schools encouraged teachers to use project-based teaching methods to embed a global dimension into their school ethos. Over the past few years the schools have completed three projects which have broadened the vision of pupils and teachers alike, as well as having an impact on both their communities.

The first project, ‘Two Rivers, One World’, gave pupils the opportunity to study local rivers in both countries. The team in Nepal studied the habitat of the Bagmati, while their counterparts in the UK conducted tests on the River Tyne. The tests were carried out in different seasons and results were compared and analysed. Pupils exchanged presentations of their results and discovered significant differences between the rivers. The Bagmati was found to have little or no aquatic life in urban areas due to high levels of sewage. This was an eye-opener for all at Nagarjuna Academy. Instantly aware of the environmental implications of their project, the Nagarjuna pupils, in partnership with local non-governmental organisation WEPCO, launched a programme to raise public awareness of sanitation and cleanliness.

Sagna Kasaju Shrestha, a teacher involved in the project, explains the personal impact, “Before our involvement in the project, I (knew absolutely nothing) about the condition of the river. I was unaware that we ourselves are responsible for the degradation of our environmental resources. I now understand what a global chain system is and I am aware of how my activities might eventually even harm others living in a different part of the world.”

Teachers’ visits between the schools have helped develop the link, strengthening partnership activities to ensure sustainability. In 2008 the headmaster of Nagarjuna Academy, Sunil Sijapati, made his first visit to Cramlington where he shared information about Nepalese culture and presented pupils with a rhododendron, the national flower of Nepal. The students at Cramlington planted the flower in their greenhouse. This inspired Sunil to construct the ‘Eco-garden’, a similar structure, at Nagarjuna.

These successful visits led to their second project ‘Culture and Diversity’. The main aim of the project was to highlight cultural values to develop respect for diversity and a sense of belonging. Pupils in Nepal shared information about their culture, religious values and even folk tales. They introduced prominent Nepali festivals to the UK students to give them a better understanding of Nepalese culture. Similarly, the UK students visited their local heritage sites and shared stories with their Nepali friends.

The last project was ‘Global Warming’. On World Environment Day, Nagarjuna pupils marched out into the streets with placards in their hands to raise awareness in the community. They also visited their local vegetable market and encouraged the re-use of bags, while Cramlington pupils did the same at their local supermarket.

Within the last six years, teachers at Nagarjuna Academy have seen a dynamic shift in their teaching and learning process, moving to more practical, interactive sessions. Recognising the effectiveness of project-based learning, Sunil says, “We have been encouraging our staff to move from the traditional way of teaching to more student-friendly methods. Interacting with our UK partners we have realised that books are the main barriers to learning. I have been motivated to use a hands-on approach to teaching here in Nepal too. We have decided that the main motto of my school for the next academic session will be ‘Let the students speak...’”

Both schools have benefited from the partnership. It has not only helped the pupils and teachers of these schools, but more importantly, their partnership has made a real difference to their local communities. The partnership has shown that there is more to the world than meets the eye.
An example of a project life-cycle

**Planning stage**
1. Each school identifies year groups and/or classes who want to participate in projects.
2. Teachers discuss possible subject areas and topics within their own school and with their partner, including input from students.
3. Timelines are established and lesson plans drawn up.
4. Learning outcomes and criteria for success are determined and resources located.
5. A communications plan is agreed, including how information will be shared.

**Initial work**
1. Students in each school begin research/investigations individually or in groups. Work is monitored by teachers.
2. A first draft is produced by students and, following feedback from the teacher and class, groups prepare final drafts of the assignment.
3. The work is presented within each school.

**Sharing work with each other**
1. Each school decides what work to send to its partner and how, e.g. by email, post, online, by hand.
2. The schools make the presentations available to their partner school.

**Feedback**
1. The class reviews the work sent to them.
2. Comments and questions are formulated and exchanged between the schools.

**Response to feedback**
1. Students discuss and respond to the feedback from their partner.
2. This is shared between schools.

**Review and evaluation**
1. Students and teachers summarise and review the learning outcomes of the project.
2. They evaluate the project against pre-agreed criteria.
3. Suggestions are made for future projects.
4. The completed project with input from both schools is presented to the whole school, parents and other stakeholders.

---

**Explore**

**Curriculum projects**
Ideas for curriculum projects are widely available on the internet. British Council Schools Online has a number of template projects to help you explore together:

https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org/resources/global-learning-resources
While all school partnerships are unique, the historic connection between Egerton Primary School in Cheshire, England, and its namesake in Njoro, Kenya, is special.

The school in the north west of England was founded in 1893 by Lord Wilbraham Egerton of Tatton Park and its Kenyan partner was founded by Maurice Egerton in 1939. When the schools discovered each other’s existence in September 2005, they formed a partnership they expect will last the test of time.

“The programme provided us with a very strong, clear and high-level framework to work with and the benefits have been evident,” Alison Hooper, head teacher of Egerton Primary School in Cheshire, explains. “We secured the International School Award and our students have an understanding of what it means to be a global citizen and they have a real appreciation of other countries and cultures.”

One unexpected benefit of the partnership for Cheshire’s Egerton Primary School has been the impact the teacher visits have had on the professional development of Alison and her fellow teachers. In particular, the experience of teaching the African students on their visits to Kenya has had a great impact.

“When you can deliver an inspirational and creative lesson with just a blackboard and a piece of chalk, then you know you are a good teacher,” Alison reveals. “It is an incredible personal and professional challenge and it does change you, how you teach and how you work with your students. It also makes you so aware how, in comparison, in England we have so much more as teachers with PCs, white boards and so many more resources.”

And there have been benefits for their Kenyan partners too.

“Our visits haven’t focused purely on just teaching and teaching staff, we’ve worked with a number of different professionals in Njoro, including school counsellors, and on a number of projects,” says Alison. “For example, we’ve worked together a lot on safeguarding children, governance and school leadership.”

Despite the apparent inequality in terms of money, resources and even time, the ‘Egertons’ partnership places a great deal of emphasis on equity, with both schools committed to developing global curriculum projects together.

“We are an equal partnership based on teaching and learning,” says Alison. “And maintaining that equity, ensuring teachers, pupils and communities on both sides benefit, is a key part of our sustainability plan.”

The head teacher acknowledges that fund-raising to cover teacher visits will be a challenge for both schools but remains positive.

“There are advantages to funding the visits ourselves,” she explains. “For example, it gives us a lot more freedom to pick and choose when the visits take place. We can now also step back and consider how often we need the visits to occur. Perhaps even every other year, we’ll see.”

To manage the partnership, both schools, in Cheshire and in Njoro, have set up a group comprising of teachers, parents and pupils tasked with developing a sustainability plan.

However, Alison will continue to manage the partnership and while she understands this is something not all head teachers can do, she firmly believes they should play a key role in the partnership.

“Managing a partnership is quite a big responsibility that involves lots of trouble-shooting and budget management and I think it is important a head teacher is involved,” Alison explains. “I also think a head can do a lot to raise a partnership’s profile amongst governors, parents and the local community.”

Indeed Alison’s enthusiasm and commitment has been crucial to generating school-wide and community support for the partnership. From inviting local press and community leaders to meet the Kenyan head teacher on her visit, to articles in parent newsletters and updates to governors, she has worked tirelessly to ensure as many people as possible can contribute to – and benefit from – the partnership.

“I do feel it is very much my duty to respect the legacy of the Egerton family and to continue this historic partnership”, Alison concludes. “But also to continue to build on all the good work we have done already. Global education is fully embedded in our curriculum and we hope to keep it that way.”
3. Keep communicating

Regular, effective communication is the life-blood of a school partnership. Yet this often proves to be the greatest challenge for schools, even more so when there are considerable differences in access to communications technology. One partner can become impatient with the slowness of communication, while the other feels it is unreasonable to be put under pressure for information. Ironically, these misunderstandings can only be resolved through communication.

Principles

A two-way street
• Both partners are responsible for maintaining communication. It should not be the role of one school to initiate communication whenever the partnership wants to move forward.
• Perceptions about timescales differ – some schools prefer to do things quickly and adhere to a strict schedule, while others might be more relaxed about a delay. It is important each school is aware of the other’s concerns and assumptions.

When communication fails...
• ... resume communication and don’t blame your partner. Start the conversation again.
• No answer to an email? Try a telephone call. Be persistent.
• If you have been inconsistent in responding to your partner, apologise and start again. Don’t assume they are no longer interested.

Whose responsibility?
• It is important to appoint a co-ordinator but the success of the partnership does not rest with them. Establishing a web of communication between head teachers, teachers and young people increases sustainability. The more links there are, the more likely the partnership will thrive.
Communicating with the internet

Teachers
Email is the easiest means of communicating but it is important to be aware that access to the internet may not be the same for both schools. Classroom access is common in the UK but the same is not true for schools in other countries. Even when there is an internet connection, there might be time restrictions. Use of home computers by some teachers can also mean a one- or two-day delay.

Connections in some countries can be slow and unreliable, so the turnaround time for email can take longer than expected. Very large attachments to emails can make the problem of slower connections worse, so it is useful to request an acknowledgement of receipt when sending large documents and images by email.

If you are using a home computer, you can set up a separate email account for school partnership activity. When using a school email account, remember your partner might need to contact you during the school holidays, so provide an alternative email address. If you are aware that your partner school cannot check their emails regularly, it is helpful to send a text (SMS) message alerting them that you have sent an email.

Young people
Even if teachers have internet access, it might be that only young people in the wealthiest urban schools outside the UK will be able to go online using classroom computers.

Video-conferencing, Skype and other technology can provide a great way for young people to communicate with each other, but the reality for many is that it is unavailable. Time differences also mean that these encounters often take place outside school hours for one, if not both, partners.

It is more beneficial for students to communicate in groups rather than one-to-one. As school partnerships become more established, some young people will make personal links with each other, but be aware that this can lead to reinforcement of gender, ethnic and national stereotypes. While it might not be possible to avoid the situation, the relationships need to be managed carefully.

Social media
Social media, such as partnership Facebook and Twitter accounts, is a great solution for instant communication, but it is not suitable for sending curriculum work. Some local authorities have websites where schools can share their project work, or it could be posted on a school’s website. Schools can even set up a joint website dedicated to their partnership – the possibilities are endless!

Communicating without the internet

For some schools, using the internet is just not possible, while for others access will be intermittent, for example at weekends or once a month when a teacher visits an urban centre. This will have an impact on the nature of the partnership and the curriculum work. It is important that schools are aware and tolerant of the limitations their partner experiences. It often demands a more creative approach and can be used as a working illustration of the digital divide and inequity between the UK and some countries.

Partnerships without full internet access rely on the telephone or text/SMS messaging for short messages and the postal service for more detailed communications. This needs forward-planning and budgeting and the timescale and scope of a project need to be taken into account. For example, it may be unrealistic to plan more than one curriculum project per year and feedback will have to be limited.

Sometimes a UK school might attempt to solve the problem by donating computers and setting up an internet account for the partner school but this can create more problems than it solves. It carries the risk of changing the focus of the partnership from learning to charity and might be unsustainable. There are usually deep infrastructural and sociological reasons why schools do not have internet access and ignoring these can create real difficulties for your partner school and ultimately jeopardise the partnership itself.
“Maintain contact and involve everyone,” is how Fort Hill Community School, England, plans to keep its relationship with its Ghanaian partners alive.

Jako Carstens, maths teacher at Fort Hill Community School in Basingstoke, sees no reason why his school’s successful partnership, the ‘Climbing Mountains Partnership’, with PCE Demonstration School in Akropong, a village to the north of Ghana’s capital city, should come to an end.

The partnership, which began with a single email in 2008, has grown each year and drawn in support from local businesses and charities, interest from local primary schools and has had an immense impact on staff and students from both schools. So much so, their latest joint project is one they are all fully committed to – putting in place a concrete plan to ensure the partnership is not only maintained, but continues to grow.

One challenge that Jako and his colleagues faced was finding the funds and resources to ensure teacher visits could continue, especially after previous visits had proved so productive and invaluable. However, this challenge appears to have been met after the Basingstoke school struck up a relationship with its local Co-operative store during a fair trade project with its Ghanaian partners.

The manager of the Winklebury branch continued to express an interest in the partnership and the projects the schools were undertaking, including one on the Olympics and Paralympics and another on HIV and AIDS. Jako kept him involved and, as a result, not only has the manager become a governor of the local school, but the Climbing Mountains Partnership was also chosen as the store’s ‘Charity of the Year’.

The status will allow the school to hold fund-raising events at the local store, such as bag packing and car washing, and will go a long way to funding the next visit to Ghana for Jako, a fellow teacher and six students. Unsurprisingly, he describes the store manager’s support as “incredible”.

The evolution of this relationship highlights a factor which Jako believes will be crucial to a successful partnership in the future. “Involve everyone and anyone you can,” he argues. “Engage as many students as possible, engage other staff, engage other schools, engage parents and engage local organisations, churches and community groups. They can all add to and gain something from a partnership.”

And it seems to work. For example, it is two separate ‘engaged’ parents that mentioned Fort Hill’s partnership with PCE Demonstration to the local Rotary Club President. The result: potential sponsorship from the local fund-raising organisation.

Furthermore, brainstorming sessions with his fellow teachers have proved a great source of inspiration for project ideas and Jako is quick to praise his head teacher for the unflinching support he has found “invaluable”. In fact, he acknowledges that without this support from senior management, “it would have been difficult” to manage the partnership. For example, his tutor group responsibility was passed to a colleague to allow him more time on the programme.

Yet looking at the overwhelming benefits the partnership has brought to Fort Hill, it is easy to understand why they are keen to maintain their partnership with PCE Demonstration. For the school, it’s led to them achieving the much coveted International School Award and developing an innovative global curriculum; for the teachers, like Jako, there has been the professional development (including gaining business, communication, media, networking, event and project management skills); and for the pupils it has increased motivation and a commitment to a fairer, more sustainable world.

Yes, there are always challenges but to Jako, they are all surmountable as long as there is communication. “Just maintain contact,” he advises. “We use the post to send large pieces of work but I also keep in touch with John and Jude (in Ghana) via email, text and Facebook. I even called them to wish them a happy Christmas.”

“For me, and my students who now have pen pals in Ghana,” Jako continues, “PCE Demonstration School are not just partners in global education but they have also become great friends. And who would give up a great friendship?”

Case study: Just maintain contact
4. Resourcing partnerships

**Fund-raising**
Many school partnerships begin to rely on the availability of grants to fund visits, to facilitate communication and provide curriculum resources. A major obstacle to the sustainability of a partnership can develop when these grants are no longer available – but it does not mean partnerships have to be abandoned. There are many creative ways to access funding for a partnership.

However, fund-raising must be managed carefully to avoid damaging the schools’ relationship and the partnership’s aspirations for learning.

**Principles**
The goal is to continue to develop the partnership
- Funds can be raised to provide project resources, equipment to improve communication between schools or visits to facilitate the educational relationship between the schools.
- Funding projects like building a classroom or charitable donations can jeopardise the equity of the partnership.

**Fund-raising methods complement desired learning outcomes**
- A fund-raising campaign should promote positive images of each other’s countries, using inclusive and culturally sensitive language.
- Partners who want to provide funding should be in tune with the education aims of the partnership’s projects.
- Short-term goals (sustaining the partnership over the next term or two) provide good opportunities for both schools to get involved and build a sense of achievement together.

**Equity is best**
- While one school might raise more funds, both schools can fund-raise and share resulting resources equitably. If the UK school raises most of the funding, it should be used to support equitable activity, e.g. fund the visits by the same number of teachers from each school.

---

**Get active**
Before embarking on fund-raising with your partner school, it is a good idea to revisit your motives for wanting a partnership so that it doesn’t undermine what you set out to achieve. Consider and discuss with colleagues the following:
1. Identify the aims of your partnership.
2. Rank them in order of importance.
3. Consider the impact of fund-raising on each aim.
Sources of funds

Businesses
Many large companies have corporate social responsibility policies for making donations. Find out what interests companies and follow the application guidelines to access their funding.

Some companies sponsor educational competitions for schools. Partnership work can provide interesting and innovative material for an application. A prize could be just what you need to resource the next step for your partnership.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
Some NGOs provide funding for projects that fit their objectives. This is particularly true for environmental organisations. If you take into consideration the concerns of organisations which share your partnership’s global aspirations, you might be able to access resources for shared learning. Projects could focus on climate change, habitat preservation, endangered species or soil erosion, to name but a few areas. The focus could be on a particular ecosystem, e.g. the rain forest, beach erosion, coral reefs, wetlands or even the urban environment.

Internal fund-raising
Schools are usually very good at raising funds, often with the help of parents and the local community. Students are inspired by social enterprises and enjoy raising funds by selling produce from projects, raising livestock and making crafts. Sponsored events, such as sports days or educational activities with a business or enterprise focus, are often well supported by the wider school community.

Explore

Fund-raising
• The Connecting Classrooms online course ‘Sustainable Partnerships’ (section 3) explores the issue of fund-raising. http://tinyurl.com/dycy9ud
• The following publications provide excellent advice on fund-raising and can be shared and discussed between partner schools:
  • Unlocking the educational potential of fundraising activities http://tinyurl.com/bwo3shs
  • UKOWLA, Toolkit for Linking: Resourcing the Link. http://tinyurl.com/j72l2wg
  • OXFAM, Toolkit for fundraising http://tinyurl.com/cx4jrf2
Staffing your partnership

The goal of an enduring partnership is for it to become embedded deeply and widely across the school. Partnership sustainability is in large part about the active involvement of people within the school, including teachers, teaching assistants, the leadership team and governors, students and their parents. Research suggests that commitment to building relationships and a long-term future are essential for the durability of a healthy partnership. Vulnerability is increased if the partnership relies on only one or two people; therefore greater security can be provided by setting up partnership committees for both partners, involving at least one school administrator. If every committee member maintains regular communication with their partnership counterpart, a number of connections will be formed to strengthen the relationship. Whenever a new member joins the committee, the partnership is rooted more deeply in the school community. Young people, parents and interested community members bring valuable perspectives to the committee, although some prefer to set up separate student committees. Whatever the structure, it should be established in both schools. The committee can play a valuable role by matching interested teachers with their counterparts and encouraging all teachers to get involved. Good communications, such as noticeboards, presentations in school assemblies or a newsletter, are essential in supporting the whole-school approach.

Equipment
Equipment might be useful in sustaining the partnership, but it can be costly to buy and maintain. Useful items might include:

- a computer with internet access – in a teacher’s home or in the wider community.
- a scanner to send images of students’ work.
- a printer so that the partner school’s work can be shown to the students and displayed.
- a digital camera.
- a mobile phone or landline which allows schools to get in touch quickly.
Bachpan School in Gujarat, India and Southroyd Primary School in Leeds, England have not looked back since they discovered each other through the British Council’s school linking website in 2004. The following months and years saw transformation in both schools, with global themes embedded in their curricula and each school achieving the International School Award. More importantly, their students now see themselves as citizens of a global village.

The partnership has more than met the schools’ expectations to improve understanding about the challenges faced by everyone, regardless of nationality, race or religion, and how our lives have an impact on others, even when they live thousands of miles away. Dave Manton, Southroyd’s Partnership Co-ordinator, found that “the challenges we faced have been minor hurdles on a path of many benefits.”

The partnership was just a small undeveloped seed when the schools embarked on their first teacher visits in 2004. However, the impact of the partnership increased as more and more teachers visited their partner school. For Southroyd, a tipping point came when enough staff members were convinced of the significant benefits of having a global partnership and the shared learning projects became embedded widely across the curriculum. The impact at Bachpan is described by Sanjay Chatrath as “…a lot of skills development – students have become more confident; teachers and students understand global issues better and talk about them; their communication skills have improved. Until some time back it was ‘me and my’, now it is ‘we and ours’.”

Although a dedicated co-ordinator is essential, the partnership will only develop in this way if it has the backing of the school’s leadership team. The head teacher’s involvement was crucial for partnership values to become integral to Southroyd’s ethos and central to Southroyd’s development plan. This transformed the school and the partnership became important for recruitment, attracting teachers who were committed to international learning. True sustainability followed. The lives of students, staff, management and governors have become so immersed in the partnership that now its continuation does not rely on one person.

Recognising the importance of the teacher visits for both schools, Dave explains how the decision to fund the partnership was reached. “The personal contact has been essential to the growing maturity of the partnership. ICT might be a vehicle for developing an international link, facilitating each others’ worlds to be mutually accessible, but at the end of the day it’s the face-to-face human contact that affects the lives of everyone concerned in our partnership.”

“When we came to the end of our funding from the Global School Partnerships programme, we approached industrial sponsorship. Disheartened by the lack of support, we decided that the partnership, embedded within our very identity as a school, was too important to lose. It became clear we needed to fund-raise for the link ourselves. As a result of a School Council meeting, the students at Southroyd conceived ‘Keep Connecting Week’, a week of fund-raising ideas to ensure that the partnership would continue.”

Why is all this important? Dave’s answer: “Our children continue to leave school as global citizens, prepared for the challenges and opportunities presented by a globalised world. It is hard to measure the impact of such incredible enrichment that the global school partnership has contributed. In a UK school, whose catchment offers little enrichment because there is little multicultural diversity, the partnership has enabled the small minority of students from a different ethnic background to celebrate their nationalities and enabled the whole school to experience the pleasures and benefits from living within a multicultural society.”

“Just spend five minutes watching our children interact with our guests from Bachpan during a typical break-time in visitor week,” he continues, “and you’ll see any differences of creed, race, background, history, are invisible. Children are drawn together instead by the shared interests and qualities that bind them regardless of nationality and heritage.”
Building professional networks

As your partnership develops, you might find you need advice and guidance from other teachers. You can usually gain all the support you need from each other by coming up with solutions together and addressing challenges you could not solve on your own.

Benefits
- Mentoring for new partnerships
- Mutual support in the face of challenges
- Generation of new ideas
- A forum for offering and receiving advice
- Sharing experiences and good practice
- Sharing resources, workloads, ideas and schemes of work
- Increased capacity
- Local school relationships are strengthened
- Successes can be celebrated together

Local area networks

A local area network is an established group of teachers from local schools involved in partnerships. The network meets and communicates regularly to share ideas and discuss practical issues, providing support for its members.

The network does not have to be large or complicated. You can set up a local area network in five easy steps!

1. Find out which of your neighbouring schools have partnerships.
2. Contact them to arrange an after-school meeting.
3. Discuss common issues and share best practice.
4. Meet regularly to support each other.
5. Take it in turns to coordinate meetings to share the workload, e.g. a chairperson rota.

Mock agenda for the first meeting
- Introductions
- Where are our partners and what projects are we doing?
- What have been our successes?
- What do we want to gain from a professional network?
- What are our common challenges?
- How can we solve these?
- Agenda for next meeting and nomination of co-ordinator

Membership of the network

Many different types of schools could join the network.
- Primary and secondary schools
- Mainstream and special schools – this encourages inclusive practice
- Schools with learners from different backgrounds – this recognises the diversity within countries and is good preparation for engaging with diversity at a distance
- Single-sex and mixed schools
- Religious schools
- Specialist subject schools

The diversity of the network can generate a rich resource, as each school brings different approaches and ideas to share. It can also increase the learning of all members.

Clusters

Some schools form cluster partnerships which involve two or more schools in the same locality partnering with two or more schools in another locality. Normally these are within easy travelling distance of each other so that face-to-face meetings can be held at least once a term. Each school within the cluster has a direct relationship with one of the schools in the partner country. Clusters work together on project activities with each partnership contributing to one overall project. Sharing work within a cluster brings an added dimension to learning and strengthens working relationships between schools in the same locality.

Co-ordinators in both countries take responsibility for ensuring cohesion within their clusters. If you are not currently working in a cluster, perhaps you could make contact with other schools in your area and find out if their partners are located near your partner.

Professional services

British Council

www.britishcouncil.org/schoolsonline has a variety of programmes which support schools to link with each other to explore global education and enrich teaching and learning. We can provide professional development and resources.

Charities and NGOs

Contact local charities and NGOs working in education as they might be able to support your partnership.
Case study: Involve another school

Deptford Green, an inner-city, multi-ethnic, mixed comprehensive school in London, England and St Kizito SS Bugolobi, a mixed Catholic school in Uganda, have a well-established partnership. Rainbow College in Nigeria, a prestigious mixed secondary school, also with a strong student leadership, has recently joined the two schools in the partnership.

Although the three schools have different contexts and needs, they share a strong commitment to the school within its community; they think globally and promote international mindedness. They believe global citizenship is only possible when we understand each other.

Both Deptford Green and Rainbow College are introducing the International Baccalaureate Diploma for the first time, which is how the two schools initially met and recognised the potential for a trilateral partnership. By adding a third school to their existing partnership with St Kizito, Deptford Green saw they could share experiences, best practices and achievements, as well as learn from schools in other parts of the world and have a wider perspective on Sub-Saharan Africa. Expanding to include a third school opens new possibilities for enriching the curriculum and provides exciting opportunities for teaching in each other’s classrooms.

Deptford Green and St Kizito have a mature and embedded global partnership and have the confidence, commitment and creativity to welcome new, dynamic learning challenges, building on lessons learnt on their global journey. They are keen to engage with the new perspectives that linking with Rainbow College will bring.

Some of their existing curriculum projects easily lend themselves to expanding to include a third school, such as creating an anthology of poems called African Voices and a shared art exhibition. Looking at food security through action research carried out by students visiting their local food markets and comparing food prices and lifestyles, creates opportunities for real-life learning outcomes. The Geography scheme of work, A Comparative Study of Kampala and London, taught, reviewed and amended over time could provide a useful model for a comparative study of Lagos and Kampala or London for Geography teachers at Rainbow College, who in turn could enhance the learning in the Geography classrooms at Deptford Green and St Kizito. Already, Rainbow College is planning a two-part comparative research study of the physical and regional geography of Nigeria and Uganda. These examples all have tangible and measurable outcomes: an anthology of poetry and art work to disseminate, joint research findings to read.

Teachers planning lessons collaboratively from three very different schools, with different cultural perspectives, creates a powerful tool for school improvement because it has the potential to create very compelling learning experiences. Through the curriculum projects and youth exchange programme the partnership is helping to shape young people as active global citizens who have the necessary skills to contribute to the global economy. They respect and co-operate with others, they can challenge injustice, think critically and are able to celebrate differences in the way we live our lives, as well as finding mutual commonality and a sense of shared humanity. Teachers believe the partnership is empowering young people to take control of their lives by extending their boundaries and their worlds.

“All the global dimension issues have made me a more diverse person in all that I do and to be appreciative of all that surrounds me and to use all that I have responsibly and effectively.”

Student, St Kizito SS Bugolobi School
What is a community?
A community is a group of people with something in common. They might live in the same area, have a common background or have shared interests, such as religion, politics or sport. In any one area there are many communities and people are likely to belong to more than one community at a time.

How can the community contribute to a sustainable school partnership?
Community involvement in your partnership can be a good way of sharing workload, spreading impact and finding resources:
• Local businesses may be interested in supporting the partnership financially or in-kind.
• If the local community already has connections with your partner country, they might be able to provide support with communications, practical advice about culture, or identify in-country support for your partner school.

It is helpful to find and involve individuals, groups and communities with origins in your school’s partner country (diaspora communities).

What can you and the wider community do together?
• Display joint project work in community spaces, e.g. libraries, mosques.
• Contribute to local newspapers and radio coverage about global development issues.
• Produce a regular global school-community partnership newsletter, or a website or blog.
• Bring community members’ expertise into the school, e.g. arrange a talk or skill-sharing session.
• Work with local history, music or art projects to explore contemporary and historical connections between partner countries and regions.

How can your partnership benefit the community?
Communities have their own interests and agendas, so your relationship with the community should aim to be mutually beneficial. Show how your school partnership can benefit them and they will get involved.

Your school partnership can benefit the community by:
• becoming a source of public education about global issues
• contributing to social cohesion by bringing communities together
• strengthening existing community links
• making a difference to community issues.

Experiencing the benefits will ensure their continuing commitment.

Get active

Community-mapping
Establish partnership committees, comprising school and community representatives in both locations, which meet regularly and have clear roles and responsibilities.

1. Who could be on your committee?
Consider parents, governors, community leaders, local businesses, NGOs, charities and community organisations (e.g. a local youth centre leader), pupils, local clubs, and faith organisations (e.g. churches and mosques).

2. What could they do to help?
They could provide a meeting space, financial sponsorship, time, resources for projects, knowledge, deliver assemblies and have involvement in projects.

Plan community involvement
1. Identify activities related to social justice and equity, peace and conflict, diversity or sustainable development that already exist within the local community.
2. Think about why individuals or groups may want to get involved in your partnership.
3. Think about what aspect of partnership activity would be most relevant to them.
4. What challenges and opportunities might their involvement bring?
5. What are the communities’ expectations?
6. What is the best way to make contact with them?
7. What are their preconceptions about your partner and the aims of the partnership?
8. How will you keep the community involved?
Case study: Engaging the wider community

“In many ways the schools appear to be quite different. Abbottabad GGCHS School has 3000 girls and, like a lot of schools in Pakistan, is very challenged in terms of resources, while Teesdale is a relatively small school of 700 boys and girls with, in comparison to our partner school, quite a wealth of resources at the pupils’ disposal,” writes Cassie Flint of Teesdale School describing her school’s partnership.

“However,” she continues, “the similarities are much more evident – both towns are some distance from main cities. They could be perceived as monocultural, both are high in the hills and both places are known for their beauty!”

Contact came first in the form of a parcel of letters and Teesdale were amazed by the care the pupils had taken. One of the issues for contact is that, while we in the West increasingly take for granted communication technologies, it is very often not the case for a partner school. At first, Teesdale was heavily dependent on receiving post in the conventional way, which meant that there were long periods of ‘transit’. It was always a great event when the post arrived – there was something really magical for students and teachers alike in seeing a letter or card that had been written by a student so far away.

The partnership’s next avenue of communication was through Skype, which was quite easy for Teesdale, even though organising a whole class with one tiny webcam was not at all straightforward. Abbottabad GGCHS School did not have a computer, so when they used Skype, the equipment had to be arranged specially. Students and teachers were able to ask each other questions and see what each other looked like and even ended up singing together on their first call! An important consideration when using Skype is the time difference. Teesdale students were arriving at school when Abbottabad’s students were finishing their day in Pakistan.

In spite of communication challenges, communication is a strength in the partnership’s curriculum work. Radio broadcasting is an important activity. It started as part of the joint curriculum project for 2011–12. The activity enabled both schools to share and understand the cultures of both countries. Teesdale School has their own radio station while Abbottabad GGCHS School made an arrangement with Radio Pakistan’s Abbottabad station. Three programmes have been recorded so far; one in Urdu and two in English. The programmes included interviews, skits, songs, quizzes and poetry and hard copies were shared with Teesdale School.

The activity was designed to broadcast items of interest about both countries and to increase cultural understanding. It promoted the idea that young people can bring about peace, not only into their own communities but also globally. It also introduced students to different types of communication for their partnership and provided an effective way to access and engage the wider community.

The activity turned the students into teachers and energised them. They were given the opportunity to plan, record, host and organise all their programmes. They wrote scripts for dramas and interviews. They carried out programme research on culture, significant places, the education system and the economies of Abbottabad and the UK.

Sara Awan, a student at Abbottabad, says, “I am very happy that I have a job opportunity,” as she was offered the role of anchor for a youth programme at Radio Abbottabad as a result of this experience. It is a real example of how school partnerships can develop skills for employability.

Cassie Flint concludes by saying, “In terms of maintaining the partnership, I guess inevitably the focus is on the teachers who find themselves partnered together and I have to say that this relationship for me has developed into a friendship. I believe through talking and emailing we have both developed a considerable understanding of each other’s culture and practice, which we now share with our own colleagues and students. The strength of a Connecting Classrooms partnership lies in close communications between practitioners working in very different schools and facing equally different challenges, because we are able to maintain a professional and personal dialogue. It was very clear from the recent visit that my colleague, Rafia Naz Jadoon, made to our school, that the future of our partnership, and for the students in the connected classrooms that we both work in, is very bright indeed.”
7. Teachers’ professional development

Connecting Classrooms online courses and workshops help you to develop your skills in teaching the essential skills young people need to be fully prepared for life and work in a global economy. Developed by the British Council and leading education experts, the training packages introduce participants to new interactive approaches and techniques while helping them to develop practical activity plans for use in the classroom.

There are courses in teaching critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, digital literacy, student leadership and personal development, citizenship, communication and collaboration. You can find out more on Schools Online: https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/develop-your-skills/professional-development-courses/teaching-the-core-skills

“It’s simple but important... an unforgettable experience which left a special mark in my personal life and added a vital asset to my development as a teacher!”

My involvement in Connecting Classrooms has made me see things from a different perspective. It increased my knowledge about education and motivated me to learn about and get involved in worldwide issues. It never occurred to me that such an experience would affect my career so much!

Not only has it taught me how to share my experience with colleagues, but it has also made me aware of international projects that have been of great help to my school. It has given me confidence and I am proud of my achievements, not least of all the effect of our work with the pupils. Getting other teachers involved in the whole process has resulted in a more dynamic school and active learning for pupils throughout their academic journey.

I have been able to support improvements in our English department, new teaching methods and an up-to-date approach to education. My professional development has been recognised by my school and in particular by the principal. I have now increased my professionalism and am recognised as an expert in teaching and this has motivated me to take up more responsibility and become more involved in strategic planning for a better learning environment.

Connecting Classrooms has contributed hugely to my professional life!”

Mireille Atta, Antonine Sister Roumleh School, Lebanon

Case study: Motivated to learn and change