

Chapter 10

International School Partnerships

What Is a School Partnership?

The term school partnership refers to the pairing of an Alberta classroom or school with a classroom or school in another country or culture. Partnerships vary significantly in scope and purpose. Some are short term in nature and span a couple of weeks or months, others span years. The length of a partnership depends upon the learning activities that students and teachers wish to engage in. For example, an international visit or student exchange between partners requires substantial planning and demands a longer-term commitment from each partner. Because it involves less planning and commitment, a collaborative art project between two classrooms may be shorter in duration. The length of a partnership is not indicative of its learning value. Short-term partnership activities are a great way to develop the rapport and trust that is needed to plan longer-term partnership activities.

Why Form a Partnership?

School partnerships bridge national and cultural divides by encouraging students and teachers from different parts of the world to learn about, with and from one another. They expose students to new places and perspectives on the world, and to different ways of living and learning. They highlight similarities and celebrate differences, and illustrate how, despite great physical or cultural distance, individuals can learn and work cooperatively with one another.

“I don’t remember the exact name of the school, but I will never forget the name of my pen pal ... I can’t help but read every article I find on Zimbabwe [and think], whatever happened to my friend?”

- Jordan Foo, former student, Hillhurst Elementary School, Calgary, Alberta

School partnerships also instill greater global awareness and responsibility among students. Issues that students may have once dismissed as irrelevant take on new meaning when they learn how these issues affect real people (their partners) in another part of the globe.

Where Do I Start?

Although international school partnerships are established at the school level, school authorities have an important role to play. The remainder of this chapter will identify how school authorities can support international school partnerships. Much of the information has been taken from *A Guide to International School Partnerships* (see Appendix D: International School Partnerships).

Promoting the Idea of Partnerships

Before schools begin to establish international partnerships, they need to know what partnerships are and what they involve. Partnerships are formed with a myriad of goals in mind but they generally revolve around one or more of the following goals.

To enhance curriculum

Grade 3 students from The Hamptons School in Calgary partnered with Grade 12 students at Harry S. Truman High School in the Bronx, New York, to form what has become known as the New York Buddy Project. Using an online platform, the Grade 3 students were encouraged to ask mathematics-related questions of their big buddies in New York. The Grade 12 students used the partnership as an opportunity to learn more about conversions from the imperial system to the metric system.

From *A Guide to International School Partnerships*, p. 7, <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/schooltwinning.aspx> (Accessed August 5, 2010).

To facilitate second language learning

Ukrainian bilingual schools in Edmonton (Delwood Elementary School, Holyrood Elementary School, Balwin School, and M. E. LaZerte High School) are connecting with their Ukrainian partner schools through an online newsletter. The newsletter enables Alberta students to post information about their country, community and interests in Ukrainian and to read and respond to the posts made by their partners.

For more information on this project, contact Edmonton School District No. 7's Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education (IISLE) at <http://languages.epsb.ca/en/about-iisle>.

To explore culture and identity

Students and educators from Talmud Torah School in Edmonton connected with students and educators at Levha Emek Elementary School in Emek Hchla High School in Galilee. Contact and communication took place through the Internet, letter writing, videoconferencing and exchange visits to Israel. Through this dialogue with their Israeli counterparts, students in Edmonton began to understand what it means to be Jewish and live in communities in Israel, and Israeli students learned about the challenges of living a Jewish life in a multicultural society.

From *A Guide to International School Partnerships*, p. 8, <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/schooltwinning.aspx> (Accessed December 8, 2009).

To engage in international development projects or issues

Students from Rideau Park School in Calgary, with the help of Child Speak Canada, began to liaise with schools in Sunyani, Ghana to enhance cultural understanding and appreciation for diversity. As part of both language arts and social studies classes, students became aware of global issues and began their own inquiries as to the educational climate in Ghana. To assist their partner school, students agreed to focus on literacy and technology-related activities and raised over \$800 to purchase books, in the hopes of developing a school library in Sunyani.

From CBE Global Connect, http://www.cbeglobalconnect.ca/cbe_global_citizenship_projects.html (Accessed August 5, 2010).

A Guide to International School Partnerships responds to a multitude of questions related to international partnerships, including the following.

- What are the benefits of partnerships?
- Who should be involved?
- How might a school locate a partner?
- What makes a partnership successful?
- How do partnerships support curriculum-based learning?
- How can technology facilitate partnerships?

The Guide is available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre at <http://lrc.education.alberta.ca/pro/default.html> or may be downloaded for free from Alberta Education's Web site at <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/schooltwinnings.aspx>.



In addition to distributing the Guide, school authorities may promote international school partnerships by doing the following.

- Advertising partnership opportunities on their school authority Web site or Intranet.
- E-mailing or mailing information on partnerships out to schools and teachers.
- Providing professional development opportunities to help teachers and administrators manage effective international school partnerships (i.e., see Chapter 5: Professional Development).
- Showcasing school partnerships in their school authorities.

To promote the establishment of international school partnerships in their school authority, Calgary School District No.19 devoted a section of its Global Connect site to school partnerships (see <http://cbeglobalconnect.ca>). Schools from around the province and around the world can post their profile and/or look through the profiles of other schools for a potential partner. A number of other Internet sites also aim to connect schools from different parts of the world. See Chapter 8: Resources in *A Guide to International School Partnerships* for a listing of these sites (a copy of the Guide is included in Appendix D: International School Partnerships).



In 2008, Red Deer Public School District No. 104 showcased its school partnerships and promoted language learning during its World Showcase. The showcase invited junior high school students to Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School to participate in language and cultural activities. Displays highlighted visits and correspondence between partner schools.

Schools also showcase their partnerships by developing partnership logos that can be used on letterhead, shirts, promotional materials and Web sites. Have students collaborate to design the logo! Make it a contest! Either way, logos are a great way to make partnerships visible! They can be put on t-shirts, made into stickers and/or incorporated into fundraising efforts.



Examples of partnership logos from schools in Red Deer Public School District No. 104.

Helping to Locate Partner Schools

Schools locate partner schools in a variety of ways. Some schools establish partnerships through word-of-mouth, while others post their interest on Web sites. Many schools rely on the support of their school authority to locate international partner schools. School authorities that are new to international education and have not yet developed international contacts can do so by:

- **tracking school authority representatives who are travelling.** When central office staff travel to recruit international students or school authority staff participate in international exchanges or study tours, they are ambassadors of the school authority. Encourage them to keep school partnerships in mind during their sojourn and to develop relationships that may assist the school authority in locating partner schools.
- **welcoming international delegations.** When international guests come to visit school authorities, talk to them about possibilities for school partnerships. Perhaps they can support your efforts to locate partner schools overseas.
- **joining the International Education Advisory Council.** This council contains members who have been involved in international education for a long time and have many international connections. If you are looking for an international partner school for one of your schools, they may be able to provide you with a contact.

- **contacting Alberta Education.** Alberta Education maintains contact with a number of educational authorities from other countries and is home to special language and culture advisors from China, Germany, Japan, Spain and Ukraine. The department may use these contacts to locate international partner schools for Alberta schools (see The Alberta International School Partnership Program on page 138).

When the goal of a partnership is to enhance language learning, school authorities may direct their schools to the following organizations, which have international connections.

- **Confucius Institute.** The Confucius Institute was established in Edmonton as a result of a tri-partite partnership between the Office of Chinese Language Council International (HANBAN), Edmonton Public School District No. 7 and the University of Alberta. Its resources are available to schools throughout the province. One program promoted by the Confucius Institute is Confucius Classrooms, which aims to develop connections between students studying Chinese and schools and communities in China. For more information on the Confucius Institute in Edmonton, visit <http://www.confuciusedmonton.ca/>.
- **Spanish Language Resource Centre.** Located in Edmonton, the Spanish Language Resource Centre is operated under the joint supervision of Edmonton Public School District No. 7 and Alberta's Spanish special language and culture advisor. The centre is associated with the Ministry of Education in Spain and thus has connections with Spanish educational stakeholders. For more information on the Spanish Language Resource Centre, visit <http://www.educacion.es/exterior/centros/edmonton/es/home/index.shtml>.
- **Ukrainian Language Education Centre.** Located within the University of Alberta, the Ukrainian Language Education Centre provides language and cultural support for schools offering bilingual Ukrainian programming. It also engages in educational capacity-building projects in Ukraine, and, as a result, is well connected with Ukrainian educational stakeholders. For more information on the Ukrainian Language Education Centre, visit <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ulec/>.
- **Goethe-Institut.** The Goethe-Institut in Toronto is responsible for promoting German language and culture in Ontario and the four western provinces. It works with the German language and culture advisor in Alberta Education to organize professional development for German language teachers and to provide German language resources. For more information on the Goethe-Institut, visit <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ca/tor/enindex.htm>.

Suggesting Partnership Activities

Partnerships enhance any program of studies and, therefore, the possibilities for partnership activities are endless. To illustrate the breadth of activities that can and have been undertaken, examples of partnership activities have been provided below.



Music and Languages

Students from a school in Spain and a school in Sweden taught one another how to sing Christmas songs in their native languages. They then recorded the vocal performances of their class and digitally mixed the recordings so that students sang together.

From eTwinning, "Christmas Is ...," <http://www.etwinning.net/> (Accessed December 21, 2009).

Health

Kindergarten classes in Spain and Italy read a story that explored the origins of pizza. The Italian class then sent a pizza recipe to their partners in Spain, who videotaped themselves as they learned to make pizza. The video was shared with the Italian class. This project covered a number of subject areas including language arts, mathematics and health.

Languages

Students from Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer, Alberta and École Jeanne d'Arc in Mulhouse, France spent a semester studying in one another's schools to enhance their French and English language learning.

Social Studies

Students from schools in Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain developed several editions of a joint newspaper. Students were the reporters and were expected to comment on current events that affected their country and Europe more broadly. Once completed, the newspaper editions were distributed to teachers, students and parents of each school. This project covered a number of subject areas including foreign languages (i.e., German and English), mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), and social studies.

From eTwinning, "Into News!" <http://www.etwinning.net/> (Accessed December 8, 2009).

English Language Arts

Grade 5 and Grade 6 students from Hillhurst Community School in Calgary and Westridge Primary School in Harare, Zimbabwe, reflected on the Convention of the Rights of the Child through an illustrated personal response. The work of students from both schools was collected, compiled into a book called *The Way the World Could Be* and, ultimately, shared. Writing and illustrating personal responses gave students the opportunity to hone their art and creative writing skills. Reading the personal responses of their Zimbabwean partners gave students from Hillhurst Community School greater insight into their partners' context and worldview.

From *A Guide to International School Partnerships*, p. 21, <http://education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/schooltwinning.aspx> (Accessed August 5, 2010).

Science

Various chemistry and physics experiments were posted on a common platform by teachers from 10 different European schools. Students from each school were divided into groups and then asked to select three or four experiments that they would undertake. Students took videos and pictures of their experiments, which they posted on the common platform, and compared their results with other groups who undertook the same experiments. To promote the project within the school, students also prepared murals that explained their experiments and results. These murals were exhibited within the participating schools.

From eTwinning, "Magic But Real Experiments," <http://www.etwinning.net/> (Accessed December 8, 2009).

Mathematics

Students from a school in Germany and a school in Hungary used the same survey to gather data about the recycling behaviour of people within their communities. The students then graphed and interpreted their results and compared them to the results of their partner school.

From eTwinning, "Is All This Rubbish Waste?" <http://www.etwinning.net/> (Accessed December 8, 2009).

Art

Students from a school in Italy and a school in Germany created art (i.e., paintings, sculptures, photos) that reflected 20th century art movements in their countries. They sent photos of their pieces, as well as short, explanatory texts, to their partner school. Through the exchange of work, students learned more about the art and the history of art in their partner school's country.

From eTwinning, "Talking About Art, Talking About Us," <http://www.etwinning.net/> (Accessed December 8, 2009).

Other ideas for activities.

- Students measure their environmental footprint and then compare their results with their partner. Both schools/classes make an action plan to reduce their footprint and share it, along with their progress, with their partner class/school.
- Students conduct a book study on the same book, e-mail their thoughts to one another and share their work. They consider why their perspectives may be different or similar.
- Alberta students read literature that originates from or talks about their partner school's country and students from the partner school read Canadian literature. They summarize the literature for their partners and critically respond to it. They ask their partners questions related to the story and context.
- School bands or music classes are paired. They record their performances and exchange the recordings with their partners. Classes learn how to play music that is native to their partner school.
- Students from Alberta visit their partner school abroad and host students from their partner school in Alberta (see Chapter 11: Student Exchange Programs, Chapter 16: Hosting International Visitors, and Chapter 17: Educational Travel Abroad for more information).

Unilateral activities, such as the following, may also complement collaborative partnership activities.

- Students conduct research on their partner school's country through the help of:
 - the Internet
 - films, videotapes, books, DVDs
 - community members who have personal knowledge of the country
 - consulates of the country.
- The class or school celebrates the holidays and traditions of their partner school.



Culture Point

Scenario

An Alberta school, recently matched with a school in Africa, was eager to begin its first international school partnership. Students in like grades were paired and encouraged to share basic information about their schools, communities, interests and daily routines. The Alberta school created a secure Web site on which its students could post their entries and then provided the partner school with the password so its students could do the same. The exchange sparked a lot of conversation. Students from both schools were surprised and intrigued by the responses of their peers. They posted follow-up questions on the Web site and eagerly awaited their partners' replies.

To build upon the success of the initial exchange, Ms. Wolfe, a Grade 11 teacher, e-mailed her counterpart in the partner school to see if the teacher would be interested in co-developing a project their students could work on together. Ms. Lumumba, the teacher from the partner school, responded, saying that she was enthusiastic about the possibility. To kick start the planning process, Ms. Wolfe sent Ms. Lumumba one of her lesson plans on international cooperation and development, along with some suggestions outlining how it could be adapted to encourage interaction between the two classes. When Ms. Lumumba wrote back, she complimented Ms. Wolfe on her lesson plan. She agreed that her students would be interested in discussing

this topic and noted her wealth of knowledge and personal experience with development projects. She concluded her e-mail message by saying she was “looking forward to advancing this project” with Ms. Wolfe.

Ms. Wolfe was pleased with the message, but was unsure of what to do next. Did Ms. Lumumba feel that the lesson plan was good as it was? Ms. Wolfe wrote another e-mail asking Ms. Lumumba if she had any suggestions for the project plan and when it could begin. Ms. Lumumba wrote back a week later, apologizing for her tardy reply. She told Ms. Wolfe that her class was commemorating the leadership of her country’s independence leader, who, she said, did much to advance the development of the country. She said that the celebrations tied nicely into the lesson plan that Ms. Wolfe supplied her. At the end of her e-mail, she again thanked Ms. Wolfe for her work to date on the project.

After reading Ms. Lumumba’s e-mail, Ms. Wolfe was even more confused. Was Ms. Lumumba no longer interested in the project? Or had she already started it—using the commemoration celebrations as an entry point—and failed to inform Ms. Wolfe? Ms. Wolfe was frustrated and unsure of what to do next.

Analysis

It is often difficult to identify different cultural communication patterns when individuals are interacting in person; this difficulty increases 10-fold when individuals are interacting over e-mail. (It just goes to show how important nonverbal communication really is!) In this scenario, Ms. Wolfe is a very direct communicator. She is very frank when she inquires about and proposes a project. She is careful to make her intentions and her needs very clear. She is likely from a low context culture, where meaning is conveyed through words and not through the context of the discussion.

Ms. Lumumba, on the other hand, appears to be communicating indirectly. Ms. Wolfe and the reader get a sense that something is not being said but they are not sure what “it” is. An indirect style of communication is common amongst individuals from a high context culture, where meaning is conveyed not through words, but through the circumstances in which a conversation takes place.

In this scenario, Ms. Lumumba is appreciative of Ms. Wolfe’s work but is hesitant to critique it, as direct criticism is considered to be rude in her culture. To highlight the expertise that she can bring, Ms. Lumumba tries to inform Ms. Wolfe of the context in which she works (e.g., she has personal experience with international development, her country has had successful national development strategies). Because she is from a high context culture, she expects Ms. Wolfe to recognize these facts as important to the project and perhaps invite her to submit an alternative proposal. However, Ms. Wolfe, who is from a low context culture, is confused by her lack of directness.

As relatively low context communicators, Canadians should be aware that individuals from high context cultures will rarely come right out and say what it is they mean. This is considered to be brazen or rude. However, without sufficient cultural familiarity, it can be difficult for Canadians to understand what is being insinuated. In situations like this, it is best to engage a cultural informant, who can help to make sense of the situation and provide advice on how best to proceed. For more information on direct and indirect communication styles (also known as low and high context cultures), see Chapter 6: Cultural Considerations.

Supporting Implementation

Partnerships are most successful when partners have similar goals and expectations of how the partnership will function. School authorities can encourage principals/lead teachers from both schools to be in contact frequently in the beginning. Together, principals/lead teachers should consider how much time they can allot to partnership activities and decide what they will try to accomplish within that time frame. Each partner should know what his or her responsibilities are regarding frequency of communication, sharing of information and so on. For more information on planning a successful partnership, see Chapter 4: What Makes a Partnership Successful? in *A Guide to International School Partnerships* (a copy of the Guide is included in Appendix D: International School Partnerships).

Tips for teachers and administrators on managing partnerships.

- Avoid using jargon without explaining it (your partner teacher or administrator may not be using his or her mother tongue to communicate with you).
- Try to learn a few words in your partner's native language.
- Start with a small project to build confidence in the partnership, then get more ambitious.
- If you would like to send something to your partner school, check to see if someone in the community is travelling to that place and would be willing to take small items over for you.

Enabling Access to Technology

It can sometimes be challenging for schools to access the technology necessary to engage with partner schools abroad. However, school authorities can provide schools with the technical assistance necessary to connect with international partners. They may also arrange for the temporary or permanent provision of technical equipment such as videoconference suites. For more information on how technology can support partnerships, see Chapter 7: How Can Technology Facilitate Partnerships? in *A Guide to International School Partnerships* (a copy of the Guide is included in Appendix D: International School Partnerships).

Employees of Calgary School District No. 19 provided the vice-principal of The Hamptons School with training on Desire2Learn (D2L), the school district's online platform. As a result, the vice-principal was able to establish a space for her class to communicate and collaborate with a school in New York, USA (which had been granted "guest" access to D2L).



Permitting International Travel

School authorities can facilitate exchanges with or visits to partner schools by granting permission for students and teachers to travel internationally. Permission should only be granted if the school authority considers it safe to travel internationally and is satisfied that the organizers have been duly diligent in identifying and taking steps to mitigate potential risks (see Chapter 17: Educational Travel Abroad).

The Alberta International School Partnership Program

The Alberta International School Partnership Program (AISPP) promotes the establishment of international school partnerships throughout the province by:

- helping Alberta schools locate international partner schools
- helping international schools locate Alberta partner schools
- publicly recognizing international school partnerships and showcasing outstanding partnership activities
- developing resources that assist schools in building meaningful partnerships.



Schools that have been partnered through the AISPP receive a Certificate of Recognition signed by the Minister of Education and a complimentary copy of *A Guide to International School Partnerships* (see Appendix D: International School Partnerships). To apply for a partner through the AISPP, schools must fill out the application for Alberta schools in Appendix D: International School Partnerships and submit it to Alberta Education.

Alberta schools that have already established partnerships may want to have them recognized by the Minister of Education. They may do so by 1) filling out the application for Alberta schools; 2) having their international partner school fill out the application for international schools (see Appendix D: International School Partnerships); and 3) submitting the two applications together. Both application forms can be downloaded from Alberta Education's School Partnerships page at <http://www.education.alberta.ca/students/internationaleducation/schooltwinnings.aspx>.



Conclusion

School partnerships are a great way to bring an international flavour into the school. They enhance learning by bringing new perspectives and ways of thinking into the classroom. When they involve a variety of groups (i.e., students, teachers, administrators, central office staff and community members), school partnerships are also able to generate widespread enthusiasm and support for international education initiatives. The relationships that sustain international school partnerships may also be drawn upon if school authorities wish to develop student and/or teacher exchange programs, global citizenship projects or collaborative professional development opportunities.



An Unexpected Benefit of a School Partnership

Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School (Red Deer) and École Jeanne D'Arc (Mulhouse, France) have been partners since 1992 and have organized student exchanges since 1993. The excerpt below shows how this school partnership has not only touched the lives of the participating students, but parents as well.

“Our son Jordan took part in the Lindsay Thurber and Jeanne D'Arc exchange in 1997 and I was fortunate to be a member of the chaperones for that trip. Needless to say, Jordan wasn't thrilled! However, it proved to be the beginning of a wonderful friendship when I met his host family.

In spite of Yves's [Jordan's host father] fear of flying, they came to Red Deer and we showed them the beauty of the Rocky Mountains. Then it was our turn to visit them—Alsace, Normandy, Brittany, the Loire Valley and Paris. This summer we spent five weeks travelling with them in Provence and the Cote d'Azur. Our knowledge and appreciation of France and French culture has been so enriched. Our next adventure will be an Alaskan cruise together. They are among our dearest friends, and we are so thankful to the partnership between the schools that started it all.”

Elaine and Roger Ward

You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:

- Chapter 5: Professional Development
- Chapter 17: Educational Travel Abroad
- Chapter 18: Support Organizations and What They Offer
- Appendix D:
 - *A Guide to International School Partnerships*
 - International School Partnerships brochure
 - Alberta International School Partnership Program, Application Form (Alberta schools)
 - Alberta International School Partnership Program, Application Form (to twin with an Alberta school)