

## 23 March 2022 - Part 3 of Online Inspiration Session SchoolLinks

### Results | Exchange session: how can we maintain a strong school link?

Framework of values:

1. Create a truly shared vision and goals (in the case of school links, that would translate into the action plan and your vision on growth of your school link).
2. Develop a sense of community (in the case of school links that translates into the action plan working groups and the collaborative behavior within and between the two groups where trust is an important value).
3. Identify group norms (agreements we make about how we communicate and creating a safe space to communicate openly and be vulnerable)
4. Use discussion and dialogue (discussion is used to move the conversation further, mainly for sharing opinions and decision making). Dialogue is used to explore different perspectives for the purpose of sharing and broadening knowledge)

Group exercise:

Challenge	Opportunity/solution
<p>1. Real exchange: difficult to talk and discuss.</p>	<p>Communication is one of the key elements of a successful exchange (see pt. 2 above), both schools have the responsibility to inform their partner school about anything regarding the action plan and this is something that should be discussed at the start of the partnerships.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In the first meeting the schools decide which teachers will represent each school in the school link (the so-called school link working groups)</li> <li>2. The schools decide how they will stay in contact and whether there will be a structural communication schedule (e.g. day-2-day consultation by email and/or WhatsApp and a bi-monthly video or audio call to discuss the progress of the action plan.</li> <li>3. How will results of activities in each school be shared with the partner school? The exchange and learning aspect is very important in a school link, so this deserves much attention from the start of the partnership.</li> <li>4. Who in both schools will be responsible for planning meetings? Are notes going to be taken?</li> <li>5. Commit to open communication. That also means not being shy to address concerns and difficulties.</li> </ol>

<p>2. School Board Changes and how to deal with them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explanation to incoming management</li> <li>- Have a small presentation about the school link ready to get incoming management on track.</li> <li>- Official document for partnership agreement (for VVOB to explore)</li> </ul>
<p>3. Changing visions between schools</p>	<p>A changed vision does not have to be a problem when there's open communication about the changes. When a difference in vision occurs, have a conversation about it with your partner school and try to explore what that means for your action plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the changed vision impact the continuity of our action plan?</li> <li>2. Can we make minimal adjustments to our action plan to keep the activities meaningful, relevant, and feasible?</li> <li>3. Have a meeting to discuss these adjustments and decide who edits the action plan.</li> <li>4. Are the adjustments so drastic that we need to get our action plan reapproved by VVOB?</li> </ol>
<p>4. ICT challenges leading to communication breakdown.</p>	<p>The ideal way to communicate across borders would be to have video or audio calls, but we know this is not always possible or without difficulties. It is good to think about alternative ways of day 2-day communication, like emailing, working with WhatsApp groups, or to have direct and personal WhatsApp contacts within your partner school or even through a Facebook group. Conversations/discussions can also be recorded and shared with the partner school to watch and reply to.</p> <p>In case of activities like online guest lessons in each other schools (if the schools have the infrastructure to do so), it's also good to have a back-up plan in case of internet hiccups. A pre-recorded lesson for example with the guest teacher joining in via telephone and assistance in the classroom by a local teacher. Of course, this implies more preparation and deliberation between the two teachers.</p> <p>Make sure you make agreements about your collaborative behavior. This links directly to communication. For example, when you communicate by email or WhatsApp, agree to commit to responding as fast as possible. Do not ignore messages from your partner school. If something is unclear: address it.</p>