

EVALUATING YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Why do we need evaluation?

Evaluation is often a neglected aspect of international work. Even when external funding necessitates having an evaluation strategy it is frequently left to the end of the project when it is too late to make changes or entrusted to an external evaluation process.

This section illustrates how a more dynamic approach can help to improve the work of the international partnership and strengthen the links between the institutions. It also focuses on self evaluation where the participants in the project help to prepare the evaluation criteria and manage the evaluation strategy. There are three key questions which define self evaluation:

How are we doing?

How do we know?

What do we do next?

It is also important to consider the potential impacts that international work can have on both teachers and pupils because it is these impacts which the partnership will need to evaluate. Impacts might be in terms of:

Pupil understanding (about a particular issue or a country)

Standards (measured in a variety of ways)

Professional development of teachers

Others suggested by the partnership

An international partnership might have some impacts which are common to both schools plus others which are more important to one of the institutions.

Evaluation at the start of the partnership

To be effective self evaluation needs to be on the agenda from the very start of the school partnership. It is therefore useful if both partners have a similar view of what evaluation actually means within an educational context and both are committed to an ongoing approach rather than simply looking back at the end of a particular project. Evaluation supports international work by:

Checking whether the agreed objectives are being met

Bringing achievements into the open and providing opportunities to celebrate success

Identifying areas for improvement where things have not gone well

Simplifying future decision-making

Evaluation is mostly used to find evidence of progress and achievement and to help develop the next

step in a project. If evaluation strategies are present from the start of a project, it can help to simplify:

- The creation of the project
- Consultation with partner schools
- The completion of any application forms
- The development of the project
- Report writing

However it is important to remember that it is impossible to evaluate everything. The schools involved in the link need to select the areas they want to focus on, the tools they are going to use and the staff and/or pupils who will have responsibility for managing the evaluation in each institution. It is also useful to look ahead and work out when different parts of the evaluation process should take place – perhaps at a partnership meeting or during a videoconferencing session.

Stages in evaluating international work

The following list could be applied to any discrete activity such as a curriculum project or a pupil visit:

1. Identifying the aims and objectives of the project or activity
2. Agreeing the priorities of the evaluation
3. Analysing the present situation – how are we doing?
4. Planning for evaluation- who will be responsible for collecting the evidence or data?
5. Defining the indicators, choosing the right instruments, asking the right questions – how do we know?
6. Analysing and interpreting the evidence or data
7. Managing change – what do we do next?
8. Incorporating the findings into a final report (if one is required)

In order to detect any progress or a particular effect it is vital to know both the original situation and what the school link hopes to improve or change. Some examples are:

- Attitudes (environment, food, social.....)
- Knowledge (citizenship, language...)
- Skills (presentation, ICT, communication ...)
- Visibility of the project at school

Every international project is different so the list may change considerably from one school partnership to another. School partnerships are essentially about the impact of the international dimension work on school pupils so it is important to ask the question:

How do we know about the impact?

Evaluation can be applied to processes (co-operation, communication, methodologies), to products (performances, publications, websites) and to effects (on knowledge, skills, attitudes). It can also be qualitative or quantitative. The following list gives some indication of the range of materials and activities which can be generated by a partnership and are worthy of evaluation:

Statistics of participation in partnership activities

Partnership chronology

Questionnaires

Emails between staff

Emails between pupils in partner schools

Photo of a display

Sketch and/or report from a pupil who has gained a lot from the school link

Calendar showing partnership events

Schedule of a visit

Assembly schedules highlighting partnership events

Project reports

Evaluation report

Press cuttings

Evaluation instruments

The following list provides a selection of instruments but a more complete list may be found at:
<http://www.mice-t.net/mice.html>

Questionnaires

Interviews

Observation

Participation

Document and product analysis

Group discussion

Report back, presentation

Diary

Using the results to make changes

The outcome of most evaluation activities is likely to be a mixture of the positive and negative. It is important firstly to celebrate the positive things, perhaps at a project meeting but also to adapt any longer term plan to take account of the negatives and to make changes.

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Guy Tilkin (Landcommanderij Alden Biesen, Belgium), Co-ordinator of two EU projects on the theme of school self evaluation which have applications for all international school partnerships.

The project, 'Healthy Schools' was selected because of the international nature of the issue of healthy lifestyles and its significance and current importance within UK schools. Eleven Year 6 pupils have been involved in the project so far; encompassing a science based project supported by work in PE, PSHE, Art, DT, ICT and Languages (8 boys & 3 girls). The experiences so far have widened the children's knowledge and understanding of different cultures. Their ICT skills via email/personal contacts have developed and it is hoped they will further enhance these skills with video conferencing whilst in Russia. Evaluation has been as a staff with parents, with our link school (Hummersknott). Also through displays, presentations and the children's work itself.

There are three main areas to the project:

1. Citizenship, PSHE, RE, Technology in the UK are linked to English classes in China. Pupils learned about customs, history and traditions associated with the main festivals celebrated in each country. Teachers and pupils created resources that were sent to the partner school. The biggest celebrations were Christmas (in China) and Chinese New Year (UK). All years in both schools were involved.
2. There was also a Year 8 English project with Grade 2 English classes in China. Teachers and classes were linked and an action plan was created around our English department's Schemes of Work: Newspapers and Media; Speeches and Persuasive writing; Autobiography, including studying 'Chinese Cinderella' by Adeline Yen Mah; Poetry; writing styles; Shakespeare.
3. An international pupil forum was created for pupils involved in the project exchange trip. Pupils discussed ideas for present and future projects then wrote, designed and compiled articles for a bi-lingual newspaper.

The most successful aspect of this project has been celebrating each others' festivals. The reason for this success was the fact that this activity reached and involved a wide variety of pupils and teachers across a number of year groups and subject areas.

A Chinese cookery club was established in November 2005 and the children involved wanted to know that their experience would lead to something else. We therefore decided to hold a full Chinese Evening that would be catered for by the Chinese cookery club. A number of enthusiastic teachers in Technology helped to make the evening a success. A lunchtime club had also been established in November to start designing and building a Chinese Dragon – this club also attracted children from all year groups. The music department played an instrumental role in directing the evening and again a variety of pupils were involved in stage production, lighting and sound. Over 100 pupils were involved in putting on the event from all year groups. However the evening was only able to take place due to the hard work and effort of our Chinese Assistant who was on secondment from our partner school.

- The schools have had a cross curricular project for 3 years – Performing Arts, Music, Technology. Students from years 12 and 13 (up to 40 in number) visit each other's schools
- Each time we worked with a Class 11 in Germany whose English was excellent – our students don't begin German until Year 9
- In 2005 the German students learned dance and drama and we added scenes to a play our students had already performed in England. This year German students acted, filmed and composed music for 3 films which were edited and shown to parents one evening in school. Important benefits – making friends, cultural interchange, our students doing some teaching and gaining confidence, English and German students practising language or in some cases learning bits of a language they have never learnt
- We gathered together written comments from all the students
- The funding was partly through the British Council Anglo-German scheme plus fund-raising by students through film nights, battle of the bands and community performances (it was a very small student contribution)
- Each year we have made a DVD – last year of the play being performed with extra scenes, this year three films were made and edited with background music composed by students
- The staff gained a lot through seeing how another school functions.
- The Heads of both schools feel that the project brings positive publicity!

CASE STUDY 9

THROSTON PRIMARY SCHOOL, HARTLEPOOL, ST. THOMAS' JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL, DUBLIN AND ST. LUKE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Throston Primary School, Hartlepool has 304 pupils on roll plus a 39 place nursery.

The school serves an area of quite severe social deprivation. It is outstanding in its provision of care, support, guidance and is committed to the development of the Arts and International links.

Details of the partner schools

St. Thomas' Junior Primary School, Esker, County Dublin is a co-educational school catering for 4 to 9 year olds and is located in a rapidly developing suburb in the west of Dublin city. The school has 465 pupils with 25% of them from international backgrounds. We have a staff of 24 teachers and 2 special needs assistants. The intake is quite mixed.

The third school in the partnership is St. Luke's School, Belfast. This is also a primary school and although committed to the project staff were unable to attend the World Links conference.

When did the partnership start? How was the partner school located?

The project started with St Luke's School 2 years ago from a meeting arranged by the British Council for interested schools in Ennis. This was part of the East-West programme which links schools in Northern Ireland with partners both in the Republic and in England. Unfortunately the original school partner was not able to proceed so St. Thomas's in County Dublin joined the partnership in 2005.

Case Study of a particular activity or all joint activities to date

This involves Year 3 pupils in literacy, geography and ICT work. Each school has fulfilled their part in the project leading to valuable learning experiences about similarities and differences in culture. We evaluated the project by looking at the quality of work produced, the children's interest and the willingness of parents to allow their children to visit Belfast.

Extra funding from the British Council alongside our own fundraising made a flight to Belfast possible. St. Thomas' school pupils came by air to Belfast so the three schools could meet together. Pupil mobility was one reason why I expressed interest in East West Programme. Our previous experience in the first Comenius projects was only of teacher mobility. (I am delighted that primary children can now travel within a Comenius project.)

Common ground covered in the curriculum:

- Healthy lunches and healthy lifestyle (including Greenschools)
- Playground games - contemporary and traditional
- Common literature – book reviews exchanged

The outcomes were artefacts, DVDs and outcomes from the day spent together (28th March). Pupil profiles and school profiles were also

Staff enjoyed the project because it was not extra work, it was part of our curriculum. They also learned from visiting the other schools and with other colleagues. The Head Teachers have been wholly supportive of the project and have been important points of contact. From v Belfast I brought back the idea of the outside covered classroom for the nursery and little roads across the grass. St.