

Sustaining a Global Link Partnership



How it began

Our global partnership was formed by the previous Headteacher through a connection with a larger primary school. There was an opportunity to join the school party on their annual visit to The Gambia and link up with a primary school in a similar area. It was the friendship formed with colleagues that created this initial thread and a willingness to explore something new and exciting; an endeavour both personal and pedagogical in its aim. The previous Headteacher visited the school during February half term for 4 years securing grants from the British Council. During this time the emphasis was divided into curriculum work with the children and charitable giving. The community in The Gambia greeted the partnership positively, especially the staff and committees at the school. It was always explained clearly that we were not sponsors of the school but partners learning and working together. 3 members of staff from our school accompanied the Headteacher over this 4 year period and were able to use their skills, knowledge and understanding to strengthen the curriculum work and to give our pupils an insight into the lives of others from another continent, country and culture.

Understanding the journey

The previous Headteacher retired and I was appointed with an understanding from the Governing Body of the school that I would continue to develop the Global partnership. In fact, the link was something that enticed me to apply for the post. I began in January 2007 and 7 weeks later was on a plane to The Gambia. I was expecting to be travelling with a member of staff who had been on previous visits but unfortunately a few days before we were leaving she developed a reaction to the malaria tablets and could not make the journey. I was however lucky to be able to join with the other school party who helped tremendously with the planning and organisation. Personal preparations were not easy, I bought the lonely planet guide, read about where we were going and found out where The Gambia was!!! The advice in the guide book was to be conservative with clothing, wear long sleeves and cover the knees. I imagined an 'Out of Africa' style look. I found out when I got there that I was too hot, too uncomfortable and had packed the wrong things!!! A trip to the tailors for the obligatory clothing item made me choose something cool and easy to wear. I wore a couple of items several times, with a quick wash in the bucket each new day. I now pack summer clothes and do consider wearing skirts and shorts that cover the *tops* of the knees.

The trip was financed as part of a three year partnership grant and this was the final year of the project. Books were being produced by all participating schools. It was my responsibility to use the books in the classroom and gain feedback from staff and children. This was the easy part!

What was more difficult was the expectation of culture. At the initial greeting at the



school I had heard something about a goat, a speech and some dancing. Put that together in your mind and where does it leave you- still thinking of a goat, a speech and some dancing. It was both wonderful and daunting to be greeted by a crowd of people some of whom had travelled a great distance on foot to be present. The expectation of what to say I have learnt now but at that first visit I just muddled through!!! The goat was bought to form part of the lunch

and the dancing and drumming lasted for several hours. There was a carnival atmosphere and a real community spirit. It was addictive!

Expectations

In Gambia the school community had expectations of the link and each year *we* seemed to fall short of those expectations, mainly because they saw us as 'big providers', rich people.

When I use the term *we* I mean the people that have come together to support the children from the Gambian primary school. These people are, myself, deputy Headteacher from a similar UK primary, the previous Headteacher from my school and a retired teacher from my school. Myself and the deputy Headteacher represent the parents, staff and children from our schools.

Opportunity, friendship, interests and finances have brought us together as a group, we are not exclusive but recently no other members of staff from our respective schools have been able to come along for a number of reasons, family, finances, uncertainty... The group are dedicated and passionate about the support they give and have been personally willing to finance elements of the annual trip when a grant has been unavailable.

Together we have worked hard to gain the trust and respect of the community and to make them realise that we were here to support teaching and learning and that all our support would be for the benefit of *all the children involved in the link from both schools*. We wanted to be givers and receivers in the partnership. We were all committed to supporting Global Education but we needed to work together to make the link secure. We knew that we needed to branch out as far as possible and look at ways to strengthen our link.



Strengthening the link

At the start we knew we had to define limits about what we were able to do. We needed a clear focus and to establish some connections that would strengthen our capability and secure sustainability. We began by organising Gambia Link group meetings where we were able to establish some ground rules and aims that everyone was happy to call



their own. At first this was the four of us plus a committed parent. Like most relationships there are aspects that are entirely unique to that group and our group was no different. We were coming together for a whole host of reasons, some personal, some altruistic, some for discovery, but mostly for children. We were honest with each other and we knew each others' strengths and interests. We found an article from an education magazine about a

project in Africa and we used it as a basis to establish a vision, some aims, a list of what we could do and most importantly some clear ideas about what we wouldn't do.

Our vision and aims:

To embrace learning and teaching and collaborate for the benefit of all the children

To support a community with education

So that:

The children are happier, healthier and better nourished and therefore receptive to education. There is affordable nursery provision in the area for all children. The teachers are equipped with skills and equipment that benefit the whole community- especially through training.

Our Priorities:

- *Curriculum- joint projects, project resources*
- *Food- garden developments, support*
- *Nursery- support with staff payments, training, materials, ideas*
- *Teacher Training- staff training- INSET, sending staff to the Gambian College*
- *School materials*
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Things we have chosen not to do

Support individual children

Support IT developments- hardware

Correspond -child to child

Support large building developments

We knew that the British Council were keen for schools to connect worldwide without any charitable obligations but felt that with our community this would not be possible. In order for us to receive we would first have to give something. We knew that finances needed to be managed for continued sustainability and that there was a limit to how much you could ask parents for. We also wanted to keep the curriculum work separate from any



charitable giving. So we set limits. £600 per annum was as much as parents could provide and we all personally raised funds in our own way. We have a bank account for the link and decide how much we spend together. The meetings and discussion include the Headteacher from our Gambian link school and we document spending in two books one is kept in the Gambia and one in the UK. We declare spending to the Governing body and parents committee at the schools and maintain transparent and accurate accounting. We have a Gambia Link development plan which is simple and easy for everyone to follow. It sets out our priorities and provides opportunities for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Over the 8 year partnership ~~we~~ we have been able to successfully provide requests from the community from our agreed priorities and these form part of our measures of success. In particular, we have sent 2 nursery teachers to The Gambia College to train, we have supported garden developments and we continue to ensure that children have books to write in. Some of our biggest successes have come from the curriculum work carried out with children. Seeing photographs of children completing identical project work in all three schools, sharing the products and learning from that engagement is very powerful for everyone involved. We are working together and we are getting to know each other. They know we will be back next year which means that the connection goes deeper than a visit, an observation and a tourist attraction.

Other ideas and channels of enquiry have also helped to make the thread thicker and stronger. We were successful in securing a grant from SEEDS FOR AFRICA charity and they provided £1000 for 2 garden walls. One is located at the primary school and the other at a nursery annex. We have made a connection with a business man in Holland who personally helps support projects at the school.



We have networked to develop relationships with Gambian members of parliament and government officials, who have visited our school in the UK. This makes leadership and management of the partnership more professional. Letters have been written to different organisations for support, for example the world health organisation, The Border Agency.

Governors at my school have always supported a reciprocal visit for the Headteacher from the Gambia and these have been a valuable way to make the link real for the children, staff and parents.

We have successfully applied for grants from the British council, TIPD and the local authority to help finance visits and curriculum work.

It has taken a while to become independent when planning and organising the visits but with the help of mobile phones it is relatively straight forward. The curriculum work continues to go from strength to strength and the link has a good future. We are

open minded in our attitude towards the link and want to remain alert to possibilities. We have high expectations on relationships and continue to keep the focus on maintaining these strong friendships.

Other schools have successful partnerships and like ours have completed great projects. We hope they will continue as long as possible. We enjoy listening to the successes of other people and are always looking for new ideas to enhance our own link. Our most successful projects have been making books, weaving and storytelling.



The staff involved directly in the partnership have qualities that add to the success of the link, energy, passion, enthusiasm and a sense of adventure are amongst the easiest to define. Others are a dogged approach to getting things in place, adaptability to the pace of change, an open approach to people and culture and of course a real belief in making our children develop an awareness of the world they live in.

The British Council have provided guidance on partnerships

- A **partnership agreement** is a working document that helps you and your partner school:
- agree a **shared vision** for working together
- establish mutually agreed **educational goals**
- set out the basis on which you are going to **work together**
- ensure that both **partners are clear** about and in agreement about what is to be achieved
- identify areas of potential **curricular collaboration**
- **evaluate** the effectiveness of the partnership
- raise issues of **accountability and responsibility**
- ensure the **participation of several staff** in each school
- provide a **firm foundation** for your partnership that will survive changes in personnel and other circumstances.

Although it is easy to use it as a check list after the event, putting the things in place takes collaboration, a sense of trust and qualities in people that are based on dedication to really make the partnership valuable and sustainable.

Personal Reflections

An important element of our Global link is a sense of going on holiday. We make sure that there is 'downtime' planned for and included in the programme. We stay in a lodge that allows us to have space to ourselves and also to meet other people, some travellers and other local people who help to provide other learning opportunities for us. Chatting and spending time with people has been one of the highlights of the experience. Making a connection with another human being willing to share their stories with you is a wonderful thing especially when their stories provide an insight into a different culture. The friendships we have made with other colleagues from the other UK schools have also



been something that I value. The camaraderie and sense of fun has been wonderful and I look forward to it each year. Sharing a 'julbrew' (the local beer) with a lovely group of people is great.

Where possible I try to put the sense of perspective away from looking at differences to one focused on sharing our similarities. This shifts the emphasis slightly and in my view makes the partnership stronger. For example, we work hard to think about projects which focus on the pupils as equal learners approaching a new skill, knowledge or understanding with the same expectations of success.

I would recommend a global link to anyone and it has provided me with a wonderful set of memories. Sustaining something this valuable is well worth the effort.