systematic approach for implementation of STEAM education in schools

SCHOOL-BUSINESS-NGOs COOPERATION GUIDELINES

It takes a village to raise a child.
African proverb

For supporting all-round growth of youth and the development of their key competences for lifelong learning, schools are not alone. Various organisations are looking for ways to contribute. Schools as the principal hosts of young people's learning process can harness that will and openness - to build relationships and cooperation that makes a difference for students.

No matter where your school stands on cooperation with businesses and NGOs right now, we are convinced there is more to explore and gain. We invite you to use these guidelines to assist you in this undertaking in whatever way you find helpful.

NB To be kept in mind: the ethics of working with children, youth and schools. This is the bit that you as a school representative need to be in charge of. In case of sensitivity, think twice and, where necessary, consult with appropriate parties.

(RE)THINK ABOUT THE 'WHY' -
HOW DO YOU MAKE IT WORTH YOUR AND THEIR WHILE

Real, honest and shared reasons for cooperation make up the foundation. Be clear about what do you want to achieve and what is important for your cooperation partner.

First, the big 'why'. When we are all occupied with what we do already, why to invest energy into furthering cooperation between our school and businesses and NGOs in our communities? This is one of the key questions. The answer - and your school's own specified understanding / vision in this field - is something you should clarify on among teachers and leadership as it will serve as your key driver.

From the general point of view, these ideas may serve to spark off your reasoning:
● Your students need exposure to people and organisations in the society - for their inspiration, motivation, career planning and furthering their first-hand understanding of how the world works;
● Cooperation between your school staff and businesses and NGOs can help to link academic concepts with 'real life' in a way that can never be achieved by school alone;
● Making effective use of extra opportunities, knowledge, skills, networks and resources that are there in the community - for the benefit of the students (and also teachers!);
● Keeping school life in tune with other parts of the society - to understand the expectations and the changing role for educational institutions inside it.

You may also build and use some guiding questions such as these:
● What are the needs of your students right now? (you can go rather particular here, outlining the needs of specific student groups and also go down to individual students)
● What are the needs of your teachers so that they could create better learning environment for their students? (same here: you may want to include particular groups of teachers or individual teachers - what would help them flourish further)
● What are the needs of your whole school in order to carry out its role better? (here you might also want to look at your school development plan)

For identifying the needs in your school, you may want to look at your school's development plan, internal analysis document or other analyses about your school, or carry out a survey.

So, cooperation in itself is not a goal - it is a 'tool' to achieve something else. However, during the process - in order to have this 'tool', it might need to be a goal in the short term. That is why it is very important to look at the 'whys' also from the point of view of your potential cooperation partners. Understand their side of the story and and help them to meet their goals, if agreeable. Finding common ground is crucial - for both sides to achieve what is important. Find out what drives the organisations to cooperate with (your) school. Use this information to support their interest and take it into account also in the design the processes of working together.

Some common rationale for other organisations to cooperate with educational institutions may be the following:

- Contributing to the development of the society, investing in better education (here the word 'better' will very likely mean different things for different people and organisations - for example more financial literacy for some, for others more focus on critical thinking or entrepreneurship or teamwork or practical approach etc);
- Raising the organisation's profile / brand awareness / attractiveness as an employer;
- Motivating employees with new opportunities and challenges, enhancing teamwork;
- Improving communication / presentation / mentoring / … skills of the employees.

For understanding the needs of your potential cooperation partners, check their vision and mission statements, their values and available planning documents. Seek out information about their previous projects where possible.

Think how you can help your potential cooperation partners reach their goals by letting them help you; look for common and / or complementary themes, win-win solutions and potential synergies. The 'why' for cooperation needs to be there for both sides.

(RE)THINK ABOUT THE COOPERATION PROCESS

Here you can find the overview of the basic cooperation steps. Based on your willingness and needs, you can go deeper with some of them, or further outline activities for each stage. Here you can also think about your own and your organisation's particular style and way you want to do things and how you might want to improve what you do already now.

1. Identify the potential cooperation partners

What kind of businesses or NGOs would you like to partner? What do you want in a partner? What are the businesses, NGOs and other organisations that your students are most interested in? Where are your students' parents working? There may also be a number of education related NGOs that are specialising on working with schools or specific initiatives and programs that are targeted to children and youth. With these kinds of partners, it may also be that they have already worked out some standardised processes for you to follow.

For identifying potential cooperation partners, you may start thinking about the organisations where your students' parents work. Also, which are the organisations in your neighbourhood? Which are the organisations in your own and your colleagues' network? Do your research and ask around for suggestions. It may make sense to start from involving your closest stakeholders (e.g) parents or education-specialised stakeholders, and then growing your circles wider step-by-step.

2. Make contact

Write, call and/or visit the potential cooperation partners. In most cases it is a good idea to follow up your e-mail with a phone call, and meetings are the best for creating a more personal connection and deeper-level discussion. Here it is also the place to bring up and clarify the initial 'whys' of your cooperation and set the basic common ground and goals.

3. Develop partnership content

For further development of the partnership content, first determine who should be included in the details' development from both sides. Make sure to involve soon enough the team members who will need to execute and support the activities so that they develop necessary ownership. Planning the activities together will create more committed engagement for carrying out the plan. It will also minimise misunderstandings and problems during the implementation phase.

Then, work on the content and develop the goals (what would success look like?) and the action plan. And, very important! Set also the process of how you will all work together, review the progress and communicate to each other - e.g. how often will you meet, in case of questions is e-mail or calling preferred etc.

It is important to keep your plan realistic and in good match with your capacity. Think how much time you and your colleagues have available, assess your skills' level that is necessary for carrying out the tasks and see that you would have access to the necessary resources. With a new partner and a completely new project, it may be a good idea to start from simpler one-time undertakings and then move on to more complex ones.

4. Keep a healthy relationship

Keep regular and proactive contact with your cooperation partner(s). Ensure that activities are on track and meet the goals and needs. If changes need to be made, revise plans and agreements with your partner. Timely communication is important. Also, it is important to show appreciation of your partner's contribution.

Be attentive and mindful - it is rather natural that your school's way of working and culture may be rather different from that of your cooperation partners. When questions and misunderstandings arise (and likely they will!), it is useful not to make assumptions, but clarify the expectations and practices.

5. Discuss and review your partnership - mid term / annual / final etc

Plan ahead for the review of your cooperation activities. Depending on what you are doing and what is making sense, it may include mid-process review meetings and annual / final meeting. And, remember - part of it is celebration of what you are doing and achieving together. Make the results visible for yourself and your partner.

When you are preparing for the partnership content development phase and are weighing your needs and potential forms of cooperation, here are some ideas that may become handy. The ideas are presented according to different themes and in the order of commonly 'lighter' formats to more complex ones - as you are getting better knowledge and experience of each others' goals and ways of work, you can gradually dig deeper in cooperation. Some formats can be classified under different themes (and in some occasions have been repeated in these lists already) - feel free to keep re-grouping them just as it makes best sense for you.

Learning enrichment
- Guest lessons by the employees of your partner organisation to further the learning content
- Serving as judges / experts for events / contests related to certain learning content
- Sponsoring student research / events / contests / supplies related to certain learning content
- Sponsoring / co-hosting some field trip related to certain learning content
- Co-hosting an event dedicated to certain learning content
- Co-hosting a project to solve 'real world' issues
- One-on-one tutoring for particular students
- Group tutoring for students with particular learning content interest
- Being supervisor for a student's research paper

Career exposure
- Guest lessons / talks focused on career stories, particular jobs or organisations
- Partner organisation visit
- Job-shadowing
- Co-hosting a project to solve 'real world' issues
- Sponsoring / co-hosting some field trip to vocational school / university (possibly focused on certain field)
- Work sampling: students trying out some job task for real
- Internships: formal time-limited work experience for students
- Summer jobs
- Student mentoring and coaching
- Providing scholarships to support studies in certain fields

Citizenship
- Guest lessons / talks focused related to active citizenship
- Recognising student research related to active citizenship / community issue topics
- Joining in clean-up days and other voluntary work activities / charity fairs / visits to animal shelters / learning something new and useful together (eg first aid, recycling, cooking) etc
- Providing recognition to students enacting certain values
- Co-hosting an event dedicated to certain community issue
- Sponsoring events / contests related to certain community issue
- Co-hosting a project to solve community issues

Supporting families in need

- Sponsoring supplies / field trips / extracurricular or holiday activities etc

Teacher / staff support, inspiration and recognition
- Providing supplies / sponsor events for staff recognition
- Nominating teachers / staff for local and national recognition
- Inviting teachers / staff for visits / job-shadowing / 'internship' in the organisation
- Inviting teachers / staff to attend seminar / conference related to the field of work of the organisation together with the staff of the organisation
- Consulting / assisting / training / mentoring teachers / staff in a specific field eg subject-related, financial, legal, communication matters
- Assisting / initiating community fundraising activities for teachers / staff to implement special projects in their classroom / school
- Establishing grant program for teachers / staff to implement special projects in their classroom / school

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