

LEARNING WITH PARTNERS

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Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS

- Why should you foster learning with partners?
- What challenges can occur?
- How can a school leader enhance learning with partners?

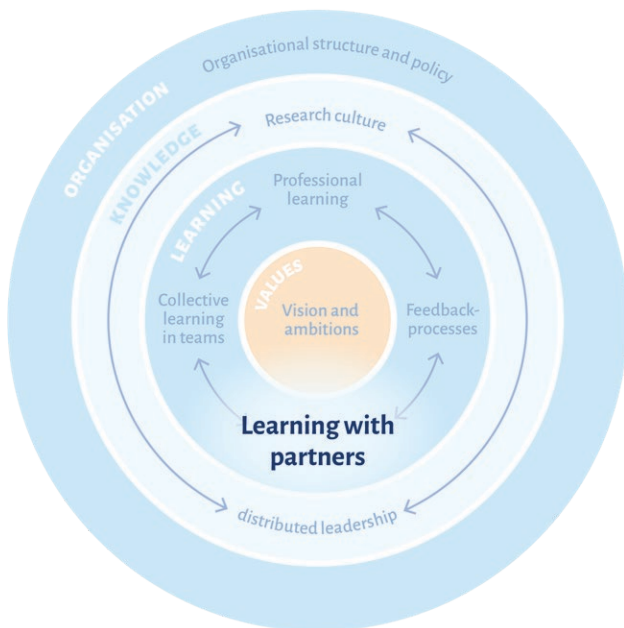
Deliberate collaborative learning activities between (external) partners, such as parents, educational institutions, other schools/organizations, can bring new ideas and provide feedback with a fresh perspective. In schools that are learning organizations both school leaders and teachers develop learning relations with others inside and outside the school. Through such learning relations knowledge and expertise can be shared and utilised to improve the teaching and learning of both teachers and the partners involved. For developing interdependent learning relations in partnerships with other organizations or professionals three things are important to keep in mind:

1. *A shared vision for learning and developmental outcomes for students.*

This vision acknowledges the critical, complementary roles of schools, partners, and families. A shared vision also helps partners avoid working against each other and instead pursue a common vision of student success. For further information check out Headstart#13.

2. *A diverse set of partners with effective communication mechanisms and relationships among multiple staff at multiple levels.*

Strong and sustainable partnerships need relationships that are built at multiple levels (for example, at the district, school, and classroom levels) and among multiple school staff, including district and non-teaching staff. A diverse set of partners creates opportunities to learn from different perspectives and come up with new ideas. For these relations to become effective in terms of learning, a culture of mutual trust and psychological safety are important preconditions. Mutual trust,



This is the eighth Headstart in the series of eight dimensions of the Learning Organisation model

WHY LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS FOSTER LEARNING WITH PARTNERS

Collaboration with partners, experts, and external organizations aimed at learning with and from each other leads to new insights and better decisions regarding vision, policy, and actions in schools. Therefore, it is important for professionals to participate in networks and projects with partners and experts.

safety and interdependency are needed to establish sustainable relations with partners.

3. Organising processes and structures for sharing knowledge and other resources

One feature of strong collaboration is the ability of partners to access information and other resources through their social relations. Although some information will be relatively easy to access (e.g. test results), most of the expertise of teachers' and other professionals' is tacit. Creating opportunities for teachers to meet and exchange (their knowledge and experiences) with partners supports the development of trust and facilitates the exchange and utilisation of resources that are embedded in the social relations with partners.

WHY IS LEARNING WITH PARTNERS CHALLENGING?

When teachers participate in networks or collaborate with partners, it doesn't automatically lead to better teaching or professional growth. The challenge is leveraging the knowledge gained from these networks or collaborations in the school. This knowledge needs to be shared with the right people, like a team of teachers, and then adapted to fit the specific context of the school or classroom. Only then can it be effectively used. This process of adapting and applying new knowledge in the school context is crucial for making an impact on school development.

Using each other's expertise to come up with better solutions and applying that knowledge requires a high level of trust, equality, and interdependence. This can be difficult because partners outside the school often have different perspectives and use different language than teachers. However, even when teachers and partners have the same goals, understanding each other and applying the new knowledge together can be tricky.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LEADER

Learning with partners doesn't happen automatically. Leaders can play an important role by helping teachers build strong relationships and take advantage of the resources available through their networks. Furthermore, school leaders are key in supporting teachers to build

strong, interdependent relationships with partners. They can help teachers become more aware of their professional networks, including with parents and external partners. For instance, school leaders and teachers can evaluate these networks to better understand the diversity of the relationships and the level of trust, psychological safety and interdependency within them.

School leaders can also support teachers through leading by example. When they share their own experiences of learning with external partners and acknowledge the challenges they face, it helps make learning with partners more natural for teachers.

Setting clear goals and developing a shared vision together with teachers can help teachers to decide what kind of expertise is needed from partners.

HOW TO ENHANCE LEARNING WITH PARTNERS

1st Action: Encourage and support teachers to participate in (expert) networks.

Suggestion: Reflect on values (and fun!) of learning from others for professional growth and school improvement. Acknowledge challenges.

2nd Action: Discuss with teachers what goals the school aims to achieve in collaboration with different partners and what their role, as well as your own role, is in this.

Suggestion: Reflect with teachers on goals the school aims to achieve and to what extent they are shared with different partners. Provide teachers with feedback on how to communicate these goals with parents and other partners.

3rd Action: Discuss with teachers how to ensure equality, mutual respect, depth, and knowledge sharing/utilization in collaboration

Suggestion: Collectively explore teacher's expertise regarding specific goals the school aims to achieve and reflect on challenges they face while developing trust and mutual respect. Support teachers to ask for feedback in their networks for their own learning.



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