



An Investigation into the Impact of the International Exchange Partnership between Reepham Primary School (UK) and Sakado Azuma Kindergarten (Japan) on our Children's Global Competence.

A Reflection On, and Celebration Of an International Partnership in its Tenth Year.

Catherine Ogle, Reepham Primary School, UK.



Reepham Primary School – background & context.

- Reepham Town's population is just under 3000, with around 1200 households.
- Our school has 210 children aged 4-11yrs.
- Deprivation is well below national average in all domains.
- Reepham's population is 99.2% white. Our school's ethnic breakdown is 98.1% White British
- Poor public transport makes it difficult for some people to leave Reepham, even for work.



The International Partnership with Sakado Azuma Kindergarten (Japan).

In the beginning...

Our initial aims of being part of this partnership were:

- To broaden the horizons of our children at Reepham Primary, building awareness of the lives of children who live elsewhere in the world.
- To provide our children with an opportunity to learn about another culture which contrasts to our own.
- To introduce the idea of being part of a global community, working on projects together and building friendships.
- To learn about the pedagogy in Japan, and improve our teaching.

The Evolvement of the Partnership

As the partnership has evolved over the years, it has consisted of two main elements:

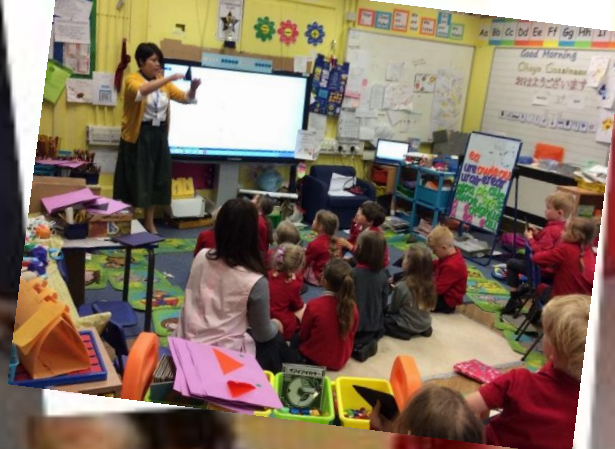
1. Exchange of cards and gifts at important cultural times (along with explanations about cultural significance).
2. Visits from teachers to the partner school. These visits have been to:
 - a. teach workshops about different aspects of our cultures directly to the children
 - b. increase our teachers' knowledge and understanding of the Japanese/English culture.



The Workshops

Workshops taught by visiting teachers. Each workshop has been designed to:

- a. Introduce the children to an important **element of Japanese culture**, thus building their knowledge of everyday life and traditions which are different to the UK.
- b. Encompass a **practical activity** which is something that the children's Japanese counterparts would also do/ have already done within their usual school/classroom experience, thus allowing them to build up an understanding **of similarity and shared experience** with the Japanese children.
- c. Be **taught directly by Japanese teachers**, (with some translation into English) with the support of the children's usual teachers, thus exposing the children to the use of another language (between the Japanese teachers), and building the skills of using non-verbal communication to overcome the language barrier.

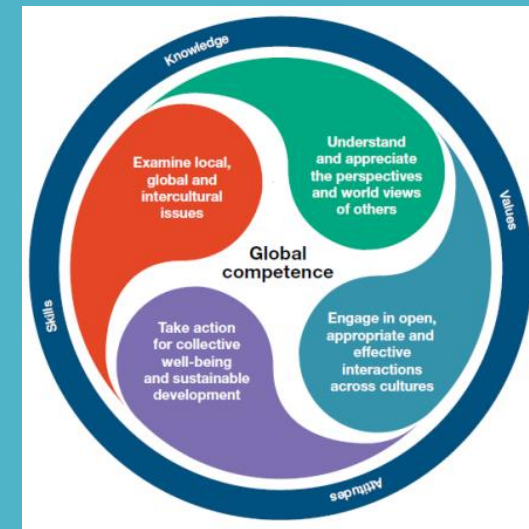


The Aims of the Study:

Using the elements and building blocks of Global Competence defined and introduced by OECD and PISA this year, the study aimed to reflect on, and evaluate the effectiveness of our partnership activities.

I focused on researching the impact of the activities on:

Knowledge, **Values**, **Attitudes** and **Skills**



In order to support the children's ability to have:

1. The capacity to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views;
2. The ability to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds or gender;

The Sample & Method

- Children – 185 children aged from 4-11yrs were involved in whole class or small group discussions about their experiences of our partnership activities. These discussions were led by teachers and included very specific questions to consider.
- Parents – a selection of 35 parents were canvassed for opinions; 21 responded. They were given the 2 relevant dimensions of the PISA definition of Global Competence, and asked to comment on whether they felt our international link activities had had any impact, and in what way.
- Teachers - 10 teachers and TAs took part in a group discussion.

How have the activities undertaken in our partnership with Sakado Azuma Kindergarten impacted on our children's knowledge about Japan and Japanese culture?

- Children

“They have really big sleeves” (Reception class child, referring to the traditional kimono worn by an unmarried woman).

“Japanese writing is completely different, there are different kinds of letters and words called Kanji” (Yr6 child)

“They are an island nation like us” (Yr6 child)

- Parents

“My girls have really enjoyed the interaction with the Japanese school and recall drinking Japanese tea whilst understanding what is in their tea cups, making and eating sushi, learning how the Japanese write and doing origami. This has certainly given them an understanding of Japanese culture and a different way of life” (Parent of children in Yr3 & Yr4)

- Teachers commented on how they felt that building this knowledge had helped our children to understand their own culture and identity more thoroughly, by making them question how these different aspects of Japanese culture were similar and different to our own.

How have our partnership activities impacted on our children's **attitudes** of openness and respect for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds?

Children were able to comment on the need for tolerance and respect for other cultures, and recognise that by working with our Japanese partners they were learning important cultural information to help them understand the world better.

“If you don’t know about other cultures you might offend them” (Yr3 child)

Parents agreed. For example:

“It was such an insight to hear Emily talking so sensitively about a different religion/current news/stereotypes and give her own opinions as to how other people’s views and beliefs from different cultures should be respected... the links with the school in Japan have enabled children like Emily to really gain a better world view and insight in to how others live.” (Yr4 parent).

Do our partnership activities equip our children with the skills to understand the world and take action?

None of the comments received from children or parents demonstrated any impact of the partnership on these specific skills. Some teachers, however, felt there was a relationship.

“My class took action to raise money for Water Aid after we studied Africa – I know that’s not directly related to the Japanese activities, but I really think that they feel that sense of being part of a global community who can impact the world and that’s largely BECAUSE of the Japanese link.” (Yr5 teacher).

How have the activities undertaken in our partnership with Sakado Azuma Kindergarten impacted on our children's **capacity to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural background?**

Children:

"They helped us make the origami Christmas trees – they were fun" (YrR child)

"We learnt to write our names in Japanese!" (Yr2 child)

Parents:

"One of the activities my daughter particularly enjoyed was writing to a specific pupil and receiving a postcard in return written in Japanese with a photograph. She considers this child 'her friend in Japan'". (Yr3 parent)

"for her to experience meeting people face to face and enjoying their company and way of life is uplifting". (Yr4 parent)

Teachers:

"The kids have a laugh with them (the Japanese teachers) as well – it's not just working out what's expected of them, it's having a giggle while they do it too, especially with Etsuko as she's so expressive and funny without speaking and the kids respond well to that." (Yr5 teacher)

How have the activities undertaken in our partnership with Sakado Azuma Kindergarten impacted on our children's **capacity to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural background?**

The relationship that has built between the English and Japanese teachers has also provided the children with a model of how friendships can transcend the barriers of language, ethnicity, religion and culture. This relationship has developed over the 10 years, and we now consider Etsuko and Shizuka personal friends. The teachers felt that in the classroom and around school, this friendship is clear for the children to see and feel, and that this provides the children with a model they can copy and accept as normal and right.

“Our children can easily see the friendships between us are genuine and not just ‘for the classroom’ – this adds to their experience and understanding that we can all have friends from around the world.” (Yr2 teacher).

How does our partnership with Sakado Azuma Kindergarten impact on our children's capacity to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views?

“My daughter accepts that all countries have different perspectives on life through food, drink, weather, language, religion and social background.” (Yr 3 parent)

“She was able to put herself into someone else's shoes and speak about what she thought was important.” (Yr4 parent)

“The link with the Japanese school certainly instils the view that we are all part of the same world, and although we may have different experiences in different parts of the world, we also have many similarities and this encourages a view of us together as one global community. It also promotes respect for cultural differences.” (Yr5 parent)

Evaluation

The evidence in the comments from the children, the parents and the teachers certainly shows that the children's awareness and knowledge of the Japanese culture has been developed through the exchange activities. The whole school community have an understanding of life in Japan, and a positive attitude to learning more about it.

The most effective elements of this exchange seem to be that:

- The children's understanding builds from **ongoing experiences and annual visits, starting in Early Years** but continuing with consistency until the children leave for High School. This means that the learning is not simply a one off tokenistic experience, but the development of deeper knowledge and understanding over the course of their seven years with us.
- The **relationship of positivity and friendship** which grows year on year for every child and every teacher. This means that the children's experience of learning about the differences across the world goes hand in hand with them experiencing positive, fun, helpful relationships with people of different ethnicity and who speak a different language.

Fundamentally, in the context of Early Childhood, we have found that our children build a positive awareness of a different culture, learning directly from teachers who are of a different ethnicity and speak a different language. This is the foundation for their 'Global Competence'.

We are excited about continuing to develop our partnership into the future.



