



Asia Education Foundation



# WHAT WORKS 6

Australia-Asia school  
partnerships

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The focus of BRIDGE on building teachers’ cultural knowledge and awareness, intercultural understanding, ICT skills, and capacity to manage partnerships as a whole school change process separates BRIDGE from many other international school partnership programs

*What Works 6* focuses on key features of the Australia–Asia BRIDGE School Partnerships Project (BRIDGE) that facilitate successful transnational school-to-school partnerships. It demonstrates how these features support a range of teaching and learning objectives, highlighting that partnerships built around common goals, shared understandings and a commitment to innovation are most likely to be sustainable.

Managed by the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), BRIDGE is a teacher professional learning program. Through use of international school partnerships as a tool, it aims to build teacher capacity to achieve the following six objectives of BRIDGE, which apply to both teachers and students:

- Developing cultural knowledge/awareness
- Improving Asian language skills
- Developing intercultural understanding
- Developing/enhancing ICT skills
- Establishing sustainable school partnerships
- Building communities of learners.

Since 2008, BRIDGE has partnered 164 Australian schools with schools in Indonesia, South Korea, China and Thailand, facilitated professional learning for 520 teachers, and supported 171 Australian teachers from 120 schools to visit their partner school in Asia.

The focus of BRIDGE on building teachers’ cultural knowledge and awareness, intercultural understanding, ICT skills, and capacity to manage partnerships as a whole school change process separates BRIDGE from many other international school partnership programs, which tend to focus solely on student-to-student connections.

*What Works 6* demonstrates that the BRIDGE model is very effective. Involving teachers from partner schools in more than 80 hours of joint professional learning activities and providing them with access to a shared online platform to support and sustain partnership activity enables the creation of quality learning experiences for students.

The qualitative and quantitative findings of *What Works 6* as well as previous evaluations and reports on the project (Asia Education Foundation [AEF], 2012; Nugroho & Beavis, 2010) indicate that BRIDGE reflects the conditions generally considered optimum for successful school partnerships:

- Systematic support and involvement by all implementers and stakeholders in the school community (including leadership, teachers, students, and parents)
- Balanced and committed collaboration and communication between partner schools
- Persistence in overcoming challenges to achieve sustainability
- Curricular, co-curricular and pedagogical embedding
- Purposeful professional learning

The quantitative analysis for *What Works 6* draws on a large-scale survey of Australian BRIDGE schools (n=99, signifying a 60% response rate). The qualitative analysis involves 10 BRIDGE schools from across Australia, selected to illustrate the key features of BRIDGE as an international school partnerships model (see Figure 2 next page).

Previous research studies have highlighted that it takes time for international school partnerships to develop and for participants to build mutual trust. As a consequence of the BRIDGE model, however, some schools have demonstrated profound intercultural learning outcomes despite being relatively new to the project. This is a strength and value proposition of the BRIDGE model, which enables schools to participate, be catered for and progress at their own pace regardless of prior experience, knowledge and cumulative skills (when analysed against the continuum illustrated in Figure 1 below).

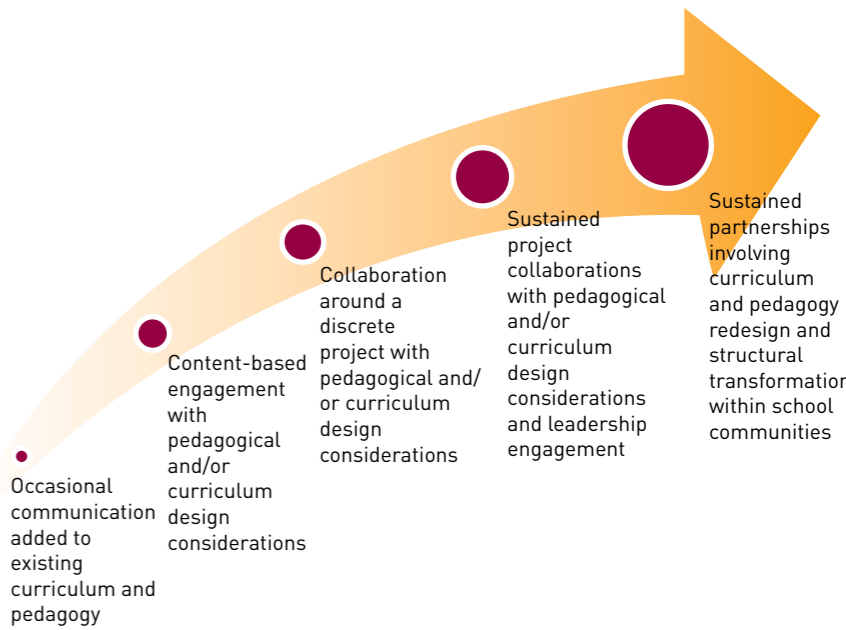


Figure 1: Towards sustainable structures and models of intercultural engagement and interaction for schools: a continuum

Quantitative and qualitative data collected from Australian BRIDGE schools point to four key features of BRIDGE (see Figure 2 below) as a school partnership model designed to achieve the six objectives stated previously. While these four features occur across BRIDGE schools in Australia as well as their overseas partner schools, *What Works 6* focuses on the implementation of BRIDGE in Australian schools. Thus, the quantitative survey data presented in this report draws on Australian BRIDGE schools’ responses only. The survey responses from BRIDGE schools in Asia are, however, not dissimilar to those responses provided by Australian BRIDGE schools.

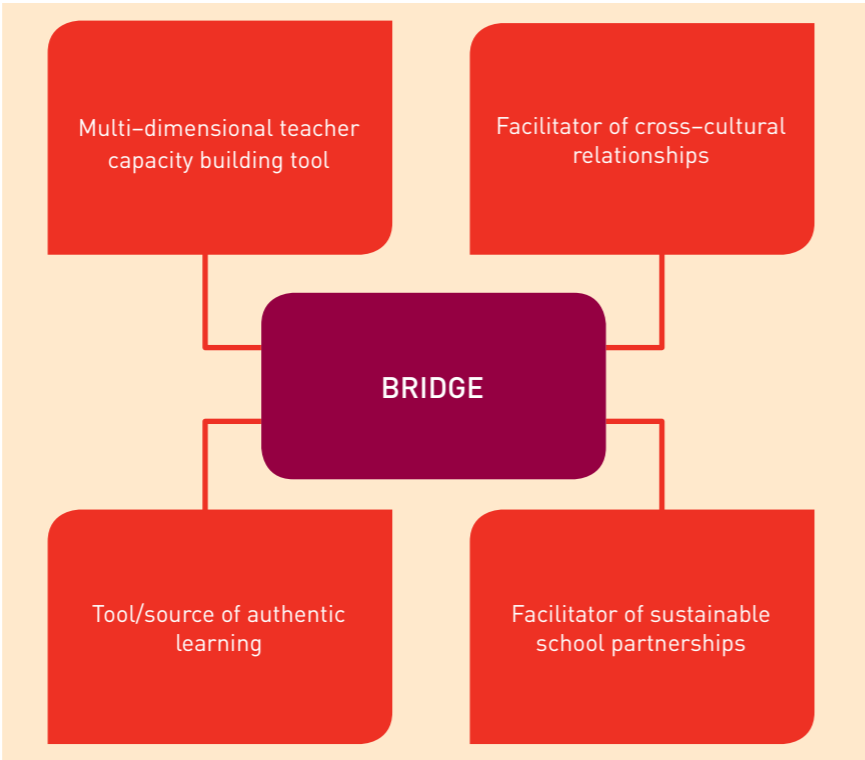


Figure 2: The four key features of BRIDGE as an international school partnerships model

The first key feature of BRIDGE is its effectiveness as a multi-dimensional tool for building teacher capacity. 97% of all BRIDGE teachers in Australia stated that their intercultural understanding has developed as a result of their involvement in BRIDGE, and 95% of them reported that their knowledge and awareness of the partner country has expanded. More than eight in ten Australian BRIDGE teachers also agreed or strongly agreed that BRIDGE has enabled them to improve their second language proficiency (83%) and to develop or enhance their ICT skills (81%). These have been the most immediate effects of BRIDGE and commonly occur shortly after the start of a school partnership. For example, the partnership of St Francis Xavier’s Regional Catholic School in South Australia was established only in 2013, yet it has led to major progress in the BRIDGE teacher’s Chinese proficiency and cultural knowledge, with flow-on effects on her teaching. The strength of BRIDGE as a teacher capacity building tool has several dimensions, as Figure 3 illustrates.

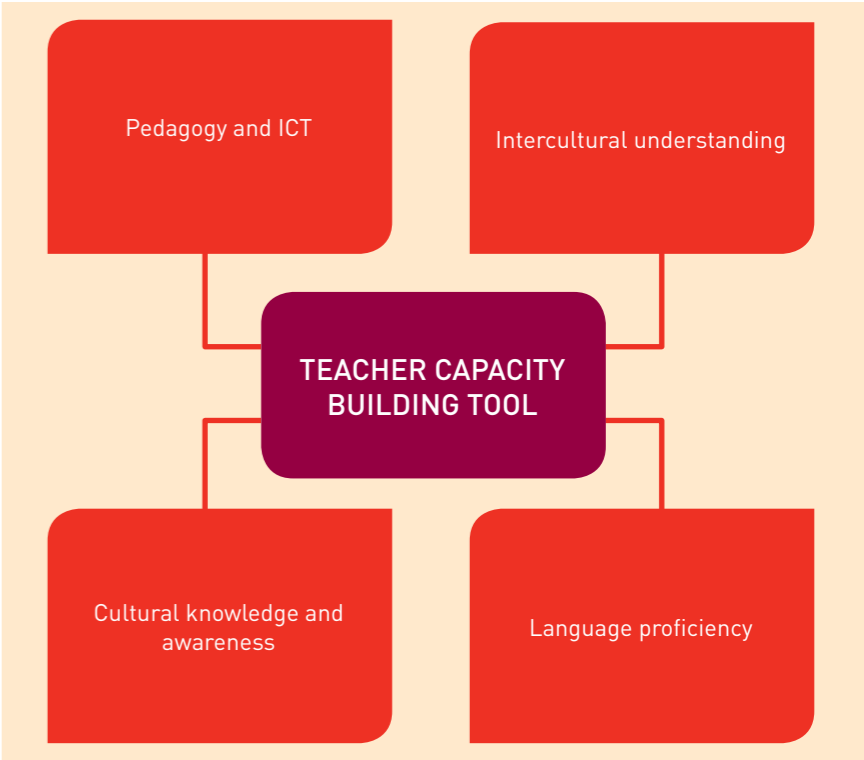


Figure 3: BRIDGE as a multi-dimensional teacher capacity building tool

The second key feature of BRIDGE is that school partnerships offer an array of authentic learning tools and resources that support multiple student learnings. In the context of BRIDGE, ‘authentic learning’ refers to learning from and engaging with primary sources, via synchronous and/or asynchronous means. This applies to cognitive learning processes about Asia, the improvement of students’ language proficiency and ICT skills, and the development of their intercultural understanding (see Figure 4 below). For example, 92% of Australian BRIDGE teachers reported that BRIDGE has enabled their students to expand their knowledge and awareness of the partner country, and 90% of them agreed or strongly agreed that students have further developed their intercultural understanding as a result of BRIDGE.

BRIDGE teachers value authentic learning experiences for their students. Heathmont College in Victoria is one of the BRIDGE schools that have been particularly successful in using the authentic learning opportunities by facilitating student-to-student interactions and cross-cultural collaborative learning activities.

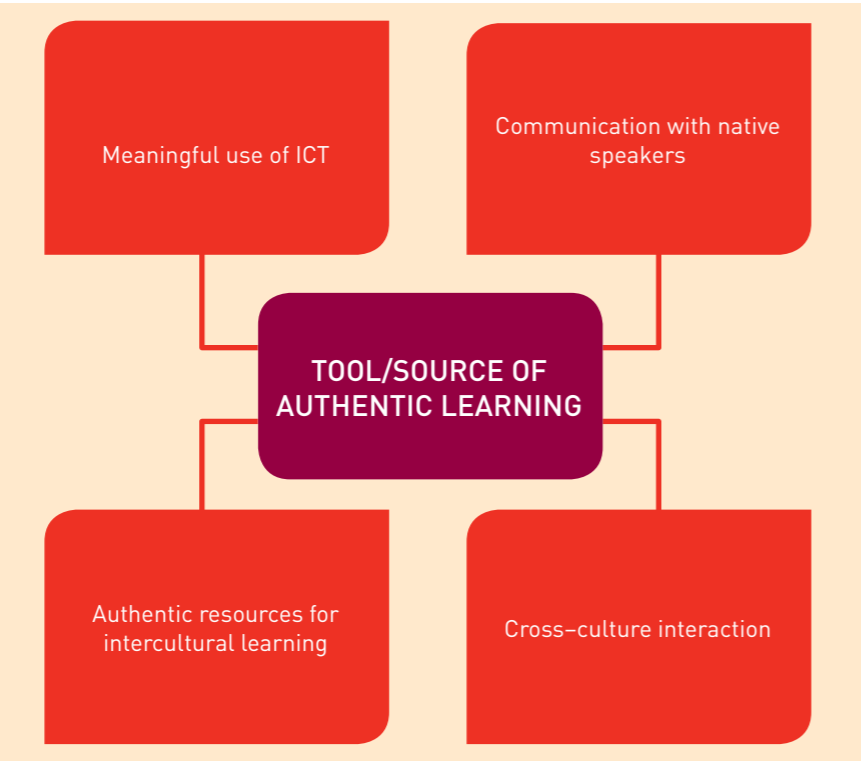


Figure 4: BRIDGE as a tool/source of authentic learning

Many schools have benefited enormously from the opportunities for cross-cultural engagement that BRIDGE offers. 72% of Australian BRIDGE teachers reported that BRIDGE has enabled their school to establish a sustainable school partnership to support such engagement. This reflects the third main feature of BRIDGE. All Australian BRIDGE schools have been in contact with their partner school in Asia. 88% of them maintain contact with their partner school, and 79% indicated that staff had a chance to visit their partner school and make personal connections with their counterparts. Such personal relationships are an effective platform for the reduction of cultural stereotypes, the fostering of intercultural understanding and global mindedness, and building the strength of a partnership across a school. In some BRIDGE schools this applies also to students, who have developed cross-cultural relationships with their peers via social media and/or during overseas visits, with 22% of Australian BRIDGE schools having organised such visits for students. Such face-to-face and/or web-based interactions and personal contacts between both teachers and students help establish and maintain a solid foundation for developing cross-cultural relationships (see Figure 5), as illustrated by Mullumbimby High School in New South Wales.

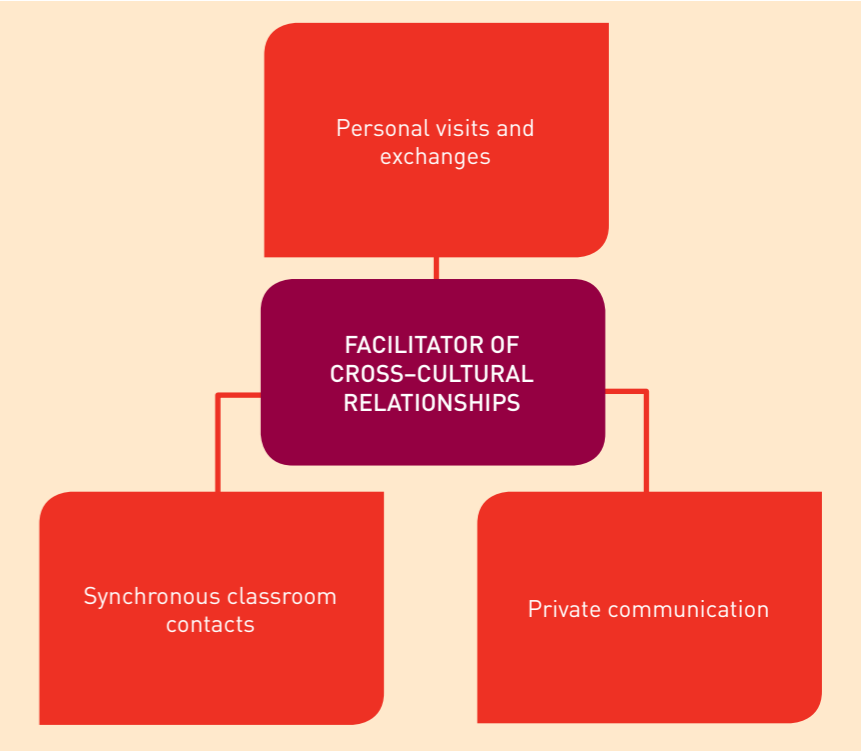


Figure 5: BRIDGE as a facilitator of cross-cultural relationships

The fourth key feature of BRIDGE is its capacity to function as a facilitator of sustainable international school partnerships (see Figure 6 below). 62% of all Australian BRIDGE teachers indicated that steps have been taken to plan for the sustainability of the partnership. As previous research on international school partnerships has highlighted, school leadership support, cross-school collaboration, and the development of communities of learners are key success factors for sustainable school partnerships. The majority of BRIDGE partnerships meet these conditions: 77% of all Australian BRIDGE teachers stated that their partnerships are actively supported by their school leaders; and 57% of them indicated that BRIDGE has enabled the establishment of communities of learners. Moreover, around half of all Australian BRIDGE schools collaborate with their partner schools to plan a schedule of activities (47%) and to carry out joint learning activities (53%).

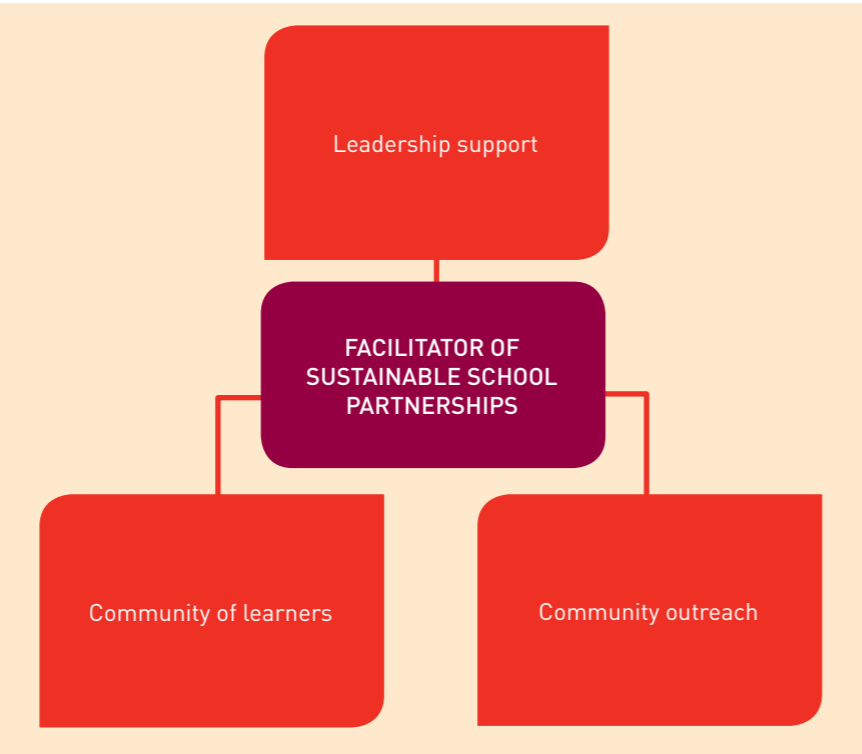


Figure 6: BRIDGE as a facilitator of sustainable school partnerships

These ‘lessons learned’ from BRIDGE link to what AEF understands to be the context of Asia literacy and intercultural understanding in Australian schools:

- Schools are at different starting points for Asia literacy<sup>1</sup> and intercultural understanding<sup>2</sup>, depending on specific needs and contexts.
- Schools move along the continuum of Asia literacy and intercultural understanding and engagement at different rates and in different ways, depending on specific needs and contexts.
- School leadership plays a significant role in any implementation of change or innovation for Asia literacy and intercultural understanding.
- Building whole-of-school community demand for Asia literacy and intercultural understanding is essential for meaningful and sustainable change.
- Schools select and develop Asia-related projects to suit the needs of their students/school community.
- The locus of change differs in schools (whole school; a small number of staff; whole faculty; across curriculum areas; within one curriculum area).
- Schools have varying levels of familiarity with the theory and best practice for supporting the development of Asia literacy and intercultural understanding.

1 In *What Works 6* ‘Asia literacy’ is defined as ‘foundational and in-depth knowledge, skills and understandings of the histories, geographies, societies, arts, literatures and languages of the diverse countries of Asia and their engagement with Australia’ (see AEF, 2011).

2 ‘Intercultural understanding’ is defined as ‘recognising culture and developing respect’, ‘interacting and empathising with others’, and ‘reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility’ (see ACARA, 2014).

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BRIDGE (an acronym for 'Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement') has been recognised nationally and internationally for its innovation in supporting international school partnerships between Australia and Asia. For example:

- Acknowledged as one of Australia's leading educational innovations at the 2012 Biennial National Education Forum
- Recognised as a leading model of School Partnerships in the Australia-Asia Education Partnerships Directions and Opportunities Discussion Paper for CISCO
- Shortlisted in the final 20 projects in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations-BMW Award for Intercultural Innovation 2011, and ranked 16th out of 400 entries from 70 countries.

BRIDGE consists of four country projects, namely:

- Australia-Indonesia BRIDGE (Indonesia BRIDGE), established in 2008
- Australia-Korea BRIDGE (Korea BRIDGE), established in 2009
- Australia-China BRIDGE (China BRIDGE), established in 2011
- Australia-Thailand BRIDGE (Thailand BRIDGE), established in 2013.

Collectively, these projects are referred to as 'BRIDGE projects'. As of December 2013, Indonesia BRIDGE has 96 school partnerships, China BRIDGE has 36, Korea BRIDGE has 24, and Thailand BRIDGE has 8.

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BRIDGE seeks to enable progress in some or all of these six objectives. A school's involvement in BRIDGE can achieve much more than developing teachers' and students' capabilities to engage with Asia. It can enhance their capabilities as global citizens, possessing both the ability and readiness to act and interact positively, respectfully and open-mindedly with others in a globalised world.

Australian governments have recognised the need to strengthen Australia's relationships with the peoples and countries of Asia, and to promote the development of Asia-relevant capabilities through, among other means, education.

Through an analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative illustrations involving 10 Australian BRIDGE schools, *What Works 6* explores how schools have pursued the six key objectives of BRIDGE. While this constitutes the thematic focus of the research, attention is given also to BRIDGE schools' achievements in the broader area of global learning.

The quantitative analysis draws on a large-scale survey of Australian BRIDGE schools (n=99, signifying a 60% response rate). It allows for broad empirical insights into key activities and learnings of BRIDGE schools with reference to the six objectives. The qualitative illustrations provide a more detailed picture of the developments and learnings within selected BRIDGE schools. These demonstrate how the partnerships have been implemented within the classroom and/or across the entire school.

The 10 Australian BRIDGE schools have been selected to reflect the ways in which BRIDGE has been implemented in every-day school life and how school partnerships have started, developed and become sustainable over time. The selection process also took into account a number of other factors, including balanced coverage of different school sectors, jurisdictions and types (primary and secondary), participation in different BRIDGE projects, and duration of involvement in BRIDGE. Analysed against an established theoretical framework based on cross-cultural engagement and interaction (see 'Methodological and conceptual background' below), the illustrations provide insights into the value proposition BRIDGE offers to schools.

## > Education policy context

Australian governments have recognised the need to strengthen Australia's relationships with the peoples and countries of Asia, and to promote the development of Asia-relevant capabilities through, among other means, education. The *Melbourne Declaration* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2008) affirms this need and has since underpinned the development of the Australian Curriculum.

The current Australian Government continues to pursue this path, seeking to promote Australia-Asia engagement and encourage Australian students to engage with Asian cultures and languages. The New Colombo Plan, launched in December 2013, is an example of their policy commitment. Moreover, the Government recently announced its plans to 'revise the teaching of foreign languages in Australian schools with the goal ... that at least 40 per cent of Year 12 students are studying a language other than English within a decade'; importantly, the Government emphasised that there will be 'a focus on Asian languages' (Department of Education, 2014).

In the Australian Curriculum, the development of students’ knowledge and understanding of Asia is expressed in the Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority, which enables students to learn about and recognise the diversity within and between countries of the Asia region. They will develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia, and the rest of the world. Asia literacy provides students with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014).

While this description emphasises students’ cognitive learning about Asia, it goes beyond the accumulation of factual knowledge. Knowledge is not only a goal in itself, but also a precondition that facilitates collaboration and intercultural engagement between Australia and Asia. Largely in line with the academic discourse on intercultural understanding (see, for example, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013; Walton, Priest, & Paradies, 2013), the Australian Curriculum employs the concept of Intercultural understanding as a general capability that encompasses ‘knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions’ (ACARA, 2014). It is based on three organising elements, as Figure 7 illustrates.



Figure 7: Organising elements for Intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2014)

BRIDGE offers possibilities for schools to pursue the interrelated aims of fostering intercultural understanding, gaining Asia-related knowledge, and developing interest and proficiency in Asian languages. Additionally, BRIDGE projects seek to enhance teachers’ and students’ capabilities to use ICT.

The interconnectedness of content-based learning about Asia and developing students’ intercultural understanding (Hassim, 2013b) is broadly recognised by Australian teachers. A large-scale survey among teachers in Australia, carried out in 2012, found that 72% of respondents (n=675) regarded ‘building intercultural understanding’ as the main benefit of teaching and learning about Asia (Halse et al., 2013, p. 63). BRIDGE offers possibilities for schools to pursue the interrelated aims of fostering intercultural understanding, gaining Asia-related knowledge, and developing interest and proficiency in Asian languages. Additionally, BRIDGE projects seek to enhance teachers’ and students’ capabilities to use ICT and, more specifically, social media as real-life teaching and learning tools and a means of authentic communication between Australian schools and their Asian counterparts. This resonates with the ICT general capability within the Australian Curriculum.

*In the Australian Curriculum, students develop ICT capability as they learn to use ICT effectively and appropriately to access, create and communicate information and ideas, solve problems and work collaboratively in all learning areas at school, and in their lives beyond school ...*  
*Information and communication technologies are fast and automated, interactive and multimodal, and they support the rapid communication and representation of knowledge to many audiences and its adaptation in different contexts. They transform the ways that students think and learn and give them greater control over how, where and when they learn*

(ACARA, 2014).

Through facilitating engagement with Asia, BRIDGE contributes to the expanding global movement focused on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as one of the key educational foci for the 21st century (see Hassim, 2013a).

> BRIDGE description

The following table outlines some key information pertaining to each of the four current BRIDGE country projects:

Indonesia BRIDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Established in 2008</li><li>104 school partnerships involving 416 teachers (as of Feb 2014); 127 school partnerships involving 512 teachers (by the end of 2015)</li><li>Supported by Australian Aid and Australia–Indonesia Institute at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), The Myer Foundation, and Australian and Indonesian schools</li><li>Project motivators include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt;&gt; Building awareness of Islam in contemporary Indonesia among Australian school communities</li><li>&gt;&gt; Support Indonesian language study in Australian schools</li><li>&gt;&gt; Building understandings about Australia in Indonesia.</li></ul></li></ul>
Korea BRIDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Established in 2009</li><li>32 school partnerships involving 64 teachers (as of Feb 2014)</li><li>Supported by the Australia–Korea Foundation at DFAT, and Australian and Korean schools</li><li>Project motivators include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt;&gt; Very low knowledge about Korea in Australia and Australia in Korea</li><li>&gt;&gt; Korean language enrolments in Australian schools are low and decreasing.</li></ul></li></ul>
China BRIDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Established in 2011</li><li>36 school partnerships involving 72 teachers (as of Feb 2014)</li><li>Supported by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP), Australia–China Council at DFAT, Catholic Education South Australia, and Australian and Chinese schools</li><li>Project motivators include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt;&gt; Supporting Chinese language uptake in Australian schools</li><li>&gt;&gt; High demand from schools in both countries to establish partnerships.</li></ul></li></ul>
Thailand BRIDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Established in 2012</li><li>16 school partnerships involving 32 teachers (as of Feb 2014)</li><li>Supported by the Australia–Thailand Institute at DFAT, Australian Education International in Thailand, and Australian and Thai schools</li><li>Project motivators include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt;&gt; Raising the profile of Thai culture and society among Australian schools</li><li>&gt;&gt; Providing Thai and Australian schools with transnational school partnerships that support global education programs.</li></ul></li></ul>

Table 1: Key information on the four BRIDGE projects

There are three core components/phases of BRIDGE (see Figure 8):

1. Establishment of school partnerships

AEF partners with education jurisdictions in Australia, China, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand to identify participating schools and teachers, and coordinate the support structures required to establish one-to-one partnerships. Schools are partnered according to level (e.g. primary-to-primary) and consideration is given to matching gender and learning areas (e.g. humanities, languages). Generally, applications for participation are ‘open and competitive’ and based on response to specific selection criteria.

2. Teacher capacity building

BRIDGE includes a multi-faceted teacher capacity building program that helps teachers to develop deeper intercultural understanding, expand knowledge about the culture and society of the partner country, gain new pedagogical and ICT skills, lead whole school change, and where relevant, extend their language proficiency. The program equips teachers to create quality learning experiences and outcomes for students, which encompass web-based and/or face-to-face contact and collaboration with peers in the partner country.

Over a six-to eight-month period, a blended model of face-to-face and online professional learning is made available, comprising:

- Webinars introducing and supporting program participation.
- A 10-day professional learning program in Australia involving:
  - >> Three days of joint professional learning focused on establishing personal relationships, building intercultural understanding, and strengthening the use of ICT in learning and teaching
  - >> A seven-day school and homestay program in the partner Australian school community.
- Facilitated webinar enabling schools to share partnership activity and to support planning for the reciprocal visit.
- A reciprocal, 10-day face-to-face professional learning program in Asia that includes:
  - >> Professional learning on consolidating partnership activity and furthering understanding of each other’s education context
  - >> Seven-day school and homestay program in the partner school community.
- Webinars to enable schools to share best practice and plan future action.

3. Ongoing partnership support

Ongoing support to school partnerships is provided following the reciprocal visit. This includes access to AEF staff to discuss partnership progress and seek support for challenges that teachers may need assistance with. In addition, AEF provides all BRIDGE schools with:

- Regular updates showcasing best practice, targeted curriculum resources, new technologies, and professional learning opportunities, as well as annual one-day workshops held in each Australian capital city aimed at building teacher capacity, collaboration and communities of practice
- A range of curated digital curriculum resources addressing a variety of learning areas and countries that provide teachers with content to build student knowledge and understanding of their partner’s country
- A suite of online collaborative activities addressing a range of themes that encourage peer-to-peer learning and engagement
- A variety of learning sequences supporting country-specific investigations in languages, history, English and geography.

ONLINE PLATFORM SUPPORTING SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

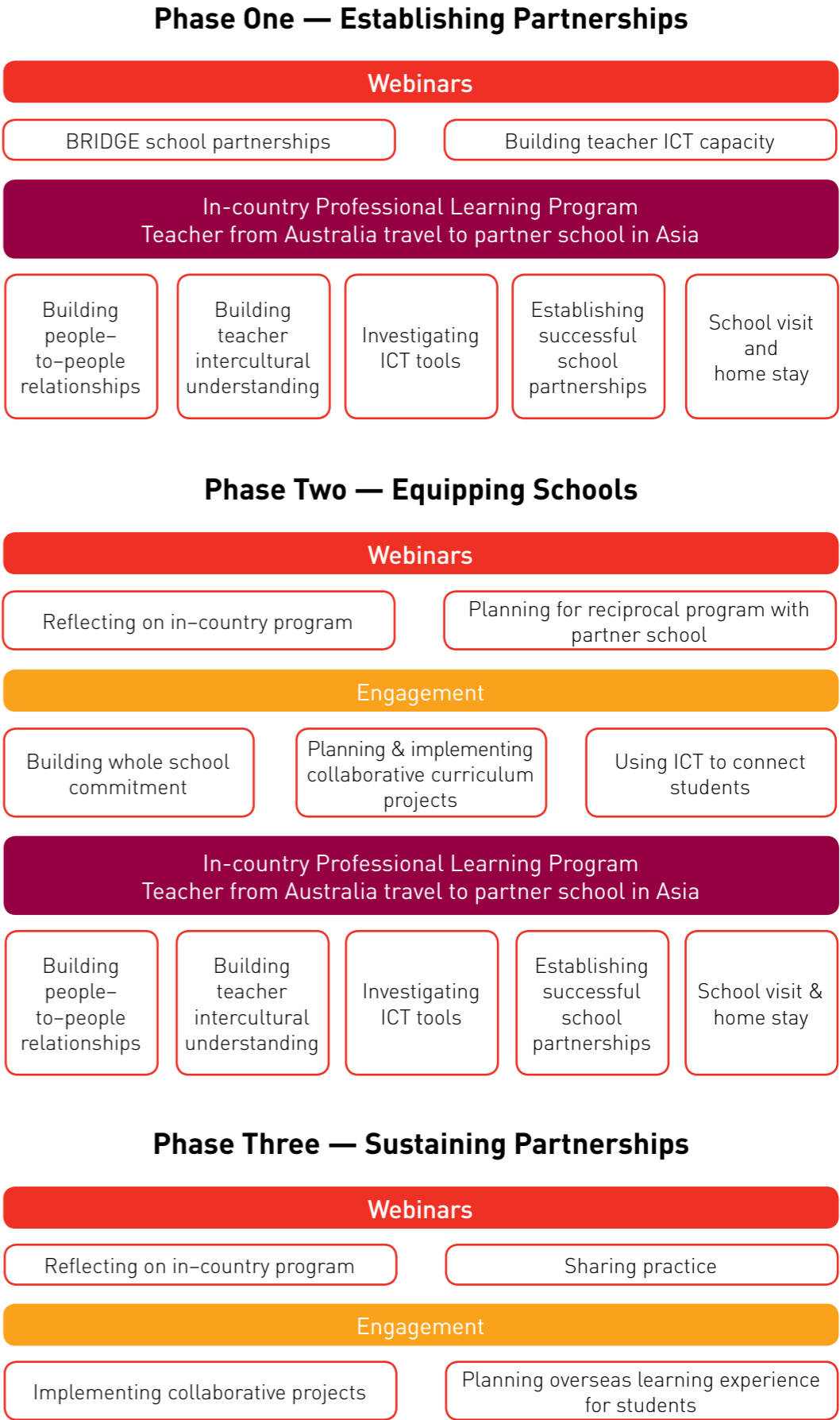


Figure 8: The three phases of BRIDGE

*What Works 6* uses qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate BRIDGE and how it has impacted participating schools. This involves analysis of various sources and documents, such as internal partnership summaries and AEF case studies, schools' BRIDGE Wikispaces, and the results of a series of annual surveys, which have been completed by the majority of BRIDGE teachers every year. (The 2013 response rate for Australian BRIDGE schools was 60%.)

The thematic coverage of the 2013 BRIDGE Annual Survey was expanded substantially, with additional items included for the purpose of generating more detailed insights into the teachers' assessment of their (and their school communities') BRIDGE involvement. This extended and re-designed version of the survey was tailored to inform *What Works 6*. It served, first, as an important source of information for the illustration of selected BRIDGE partnerships (involving 10 Australian BRIDGE schools) and, second, as the empirical basis for a quantitative analysis of BRIDGE.

The survey was designed based on the analytical framework for intercultural engagement and interaction used in this research (see below). It included 39 survey items, covering all six BRIDGE themes, and was completed mostly by the designated BRIDGE teachers within participating schools. Except for questions on the administration of the partnership (e.g. year of commencement) most items required survey participants to express their level of agreement on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=disagree, 4=strongly disagree, or N/A). For some of these items, respondents were asked to provide additional details in a text field, yielding valuable qualitative data.

In addition, the survey included a number of other open questions. Because previous research has demonstrated a broad range of views on the meaning of intercultural understanding (Halse, et al., 2013, p. 69), the survey asked respondents to elaborate on their personal interpretation of intercultural understanding. Participants also completed two Most Significant Change (MSC) statements:

- What has been the most significant change for you as a teacher as a result of BRIDGE? Why do you consider it significant?
- What has been the most significant change for your school as a result of BRIDGE? Why do you consider it significant?

The MSC technique (Davies & Dart, 2005) has proven useful for illustrations of successful practice and for highlighting personal/professional views on the impact of multi-faceted projects like BRIDGE. The technique is used in *What Works 6* on the premise that change is an indicator of success (not change equals success).

Like previous BRIDGE Annual Surveys, the 2013 Survey was coordinated by AEF and administered in October–November via SurveyMonkey®. BRIDGE teachers (one per school) were invited to participate in the survey and, in some cases, were reminded again through personal AEF contact via phone and/or email. Representatives from 99 Australian BRIDGE schools completed the survey. This constitutes a response rate of 60%, which means that the survey data is statistically valid and representative of the entire BRIDGE project (corresponding to a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5).

The survey data was coded (where possible) and analysed both quantitatively (using SPSS and Excel) and qualitatively. The statistical analysis sought to address the following six questions, which reflect the six objectives of BRIDGE:

1. Have BRIDGE projects enabled participating schools to develop *cultural awareness/knowledge* among teachers and students?
2. Have BRIDGE projects enabled teachers and students to develop their *intercultural understanding*?
3. Where applicable, have BRIDGE projects enabled students and teachers to improve their abilities in an *Asian language* (specifically Mandarin or Indonesian)?
4. Have BRIDGE projects enabled teachers and students to utilise/enhance their *ICT skills*?
5. Have BRIDGE projects enabled school leaders, teachers and others in the school community to *establish sustainable school partnerships*?
6. Have BRIDGE projects enabled participating schools to build *communities of learners*, both nationally and internationally?

The statistical analysis examined Australian schools collectively across all four (country-specific) BRIDGE projects to provide an overall picture of BRIDGE.

The qualitative analysis of the open survey questions informed the crafting of the illustrations against an analytical framework (see 'Conceptual and theoretical framework' below). This analytical framework — also used for the quantitative data — draws upon theoretical accounts and empirical work, and is based on the idea of BRIDGE as an innovative school partnerships model. More specifically, it focuses on cross-cultural engagement and interaction between teachers and students, which is a key tenet of BRIDGE.

The body of empirical and theoretical literature on international school partnerships is slim (Edge & Khamsi, 2012), which contrasts with their popularity in many countries.

## > Literature survey: international school partnerships

This literature survey provides a snapshot of the landscape of international school partnerships, nationally and globally, as well as some key research findings in this broad thematic field. The research on such partnerships and their success factors provide important background information for *What Works 6*, informing the development of its theoretical and analytical framework.

The body of empirical and theoretical literature on international school partnerships is slim (Edge & Khamsi, 2012), which contrasts with their popularity in many countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, the British government has provided substantial funding to set up programs like the Global School Partnerships Program, which has led to the establishment of more than 4,500 partnerships (Department for International Development [DFID], 2013).

In addition, the British Council initiated the Connected Classrooms program, which offers £1,500 for each partnership between schools in the UK and other countries. These partnerships aim to offer 'young people the chance to collaborate directly with their international peers, bringing challenging global issues to life and creating meaningful cross-cultural relationships' (British Council, 2013). Within the EU-wide Comenius School Partnerships, 26,000 schools have cooperated across national borders between 2007 and 2010, with an operational annual budget of 100 million Euros (European Commission, 2012).

In Australia, tentative estimates suggest a much lower number and proportion of schools that are engaged in school partnerships (for Victoria, see Colmar Brunton, 2012a). While nationwide figures are entirely lacking, the State Department of Education in NSW, which is — together with Victoria — one of the two states most active in the promotion of school partnerships, counted just over 100 sister school relations between NSW Department schools and Asian schools (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012). Through BRIDGE alone, more than 160 such partnerships have been established across Australia, being one of few Australia-wide projects that enable schools to establish partnerships with overseas schools. BRIDGE schools are free to decide on the specific design and implementation of their individual partnership, but there are some key features that apply to all BRIDGE schools, most importantly, the capacity building program for participating teachers.

The BRIDGE project has been continuously monitored and evaluated by AEF, as well as through commissioned research by external evaluators. This includes the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2010 report on BRIDGE (Nugroho & Beavis, 2010), and the 2012 independent evaluation by David McRae (included in the 2012 Indonesia BRIDGE Annual Report), which is the most recent and comprehensive report on BRIDGE (see AEF, 2012).

The studies highlight the manifold positive effects such institutional partnerships can have on participating individuals ... This typically includes improvements in their foreign language proficiency and the expansion of their cultural knowledge, as well as cognitive awareness of and interest in other cultures.

In June 2010, Australian Aid commissioned ACER to carry out an independent evaluation of the Indonesia BRIDGE Project and its 30 school partnerships at the end of the initial project phase (ending in January 2011). Based on existing BRIDGE background documents, an analysis of BRIDGE online activities, a teacher survey, and teacher interviews, the ACER report (Nugroho & Beavis, 2010) concluded that, '[o]verall, teachers indicated a positive experience to the program' (p. iii).

The evaluation demonstrated that the majority of participating teachers have benefited from cross-cultural exchange and professional learning, with some Australian teachers highlighting their own and their students' 'increased awareness and understanding of the role of religion in contemporary Indonesian culture' (p. 4). Close to 80% of participating teachers in Australia mentioned an either moderate or high increase in their computer skills and in their confidence to use ICT in the classroom, and more than two-thirds have used ICT in the classroom more than before as a result of BRIDGE (p. 27).

The evaluation also discovered that some schools have been successful in establishing strong people-to-people relationships and collaborative linkages between schools, while other schools have not been able to generate such linkages, often as a result of 'communication breakdowns' (p. iii). Three key factors for establishing sustainable school partnerships have been identified by the evaluation: 'The first is a strong — preferably high-level — advocate within a school from the beginning. The second is good infrastructure to support a range of communication and the third is recurring face-to-face interactions and exchange' (p. 6).

The findings of the 2010 ACER evaluation have since been confirmed and reinforced by the 2012 Indonesia BRIDGE Annual Report (AEF, 2012). The 2012 report offers a detailed overview of the activities that have taken place within Indonesia BRIDGE partnerships, and presents the results of a survey among participants as well as 12 detailed case studies, which were developed over three years (four per year).

Similarly, other research studies on international school partnerships both in Australia and overseas support these BRIDGE evaluations. The studies highlight the manifold positive effects such institutional partnerships can have on participating individuals (Bruen, 2013; Colmar Brunton, 2012b; Edge & Khamsi, 2012; McGarry et al., 2011; Sizmur et al., 2011; Association for Empirical Studies, 2007). This typically includes improvements in their foreign language proficiency and the expansion of their cultural knowledge, as well as cognitive awareness of and interest in other cultures.

For example, an evaluation of the British Global Classroom Partnership conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Sizmur, et al., 2011) concluded that primary and secondary school students involved in the project showed a higher level of cognitive awareness of, and more positive attitudes towards, issues of 'diversity, global citizenship, interdependence, human rights and social justice, sustainable development and conflict resolution', and 'the impact of their global learning and the extent to which they felt they could, as individuals, contribute to the global community' (p. 2). Similarly, the research findings on the pan-European Comenius school partnerships suggest that most participating students have improved their language competence, knowledge and interest in other countries and cultures, as well as expanded their level of 'tolerance' towards others (Association for Empirical Studies, 2007).

This resonates with the research findings on the overseas partnerships of five schools in New South Wales and Victoria (McGarry, et al., 2011). These partnerships have contributed, among others, to improving the language skills and personal growth of students in terms of their sense of 'accountability, confidence, flexibility, independence, maturity and responsibility' (p. 59). The findings also discuss the tangible effects of a 'marked increase in the number of students taking another language in the senior years' (p. 64).

In recent years, a number of case studies on individual partnerships in Australia have been compiled by educators and school leaders, also highlighting their positive effects on students' and/or teachers' intercultural competence, foreign language proficiency and ICT skills (see, for example, McKeith, 2008; Norris, 2007; Trummel, 2012).

Some researchers and education experts underscore the potential of school partnerships to foster students' intercultural awareness, understanding or competence. Recent research on the partnerships of nine schools in Victoria — carried out by Colmar Brunton (2012b) and commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) — found 'significant positive effect on the global awareness, attitudes and response of students across both primary and secondary schools'. The report highlights that these partnerships contribute to building and enhancing students' 'intercultural understanding within the school community' and help students develop a better understanding of their own cultures and country.

In Europe, the 'effects of international school co-operation range from strengthening intercultural learning to an effective and direct impact on peace, human rights and environmental education' (Teutsch, 2012, p. 96).

Some researchers and education experts underscore the potential of school partnerships to foster students' intercultural awareness, understanding or competence.

Similarly, research on the British Connecting Classrooms project found that students self-assessed their involvement in the school partnership as having influenced the ways in which they think about their own culture and about 'differences between their own culture and others' (Edge & Khamsi, 2012, p. 465). The students also valued 'how international school partnership participation enhances their own intercultural experience and learning and develops their ability to work across cultures and communicate with partners ... and to appreciate differences' (p. 465).

While all these studies emphasise the potential of international school partnerships as a platform for multi-dimensional and transformative learnings, many of them also pinpoint that partnerships are not equally successful, and that some may fail to achieve set objectives for various reasons. One key factor is time, or lack thereof. Drawing on the European experience, Teutsch (2012) posits that 'school partnerships need time' and that they are the result of a long-term co-operation ... Learning in partnerships is based on mutual trust that can only be established and deepened over the long term. Experiences show that international educational projects need to be planned carefully and with a long-term view in order to lead to good results. (p. 99)

This view is supported by other research. For example, Colmar Brunton (2012b) found that improvements in students' global awareness, attitudes and responses are of 'greatest significance during the third year especially, once relationships had been well established and embedded within the school' (even though short-term benefits are also evident). Similar conclusions were drawn from research on the Global Connections Program, that such international partnerships require time to grow and become deeper, more effective and sustainable (Beadle, 2013, p. 192).

These conclusions are supported by robust empirical evidence provided by other research, such as the evaluation of the British Global Classroom Partnership project (Sizmur, et al., 2011). This quantitative study revealed that improvements in participating students' awareness of, and positive attitudes toward, diversity, global citizenship, interdependence and human rights related issues were particularly significant in the third and final years of the project.

But time is not the only ingredient for success. Several factors typically characterise successful school partnerships.

With respect to partnerships in Victoria, Colmar Brunton (2012b) presents the following list:

- High level of leadership support
- Commitment to the partnership by both schools
- The program being a priority within the school
- Clear goals and objectives agreed upon upfront
- A team approach to supporting the relationship
- Adequate funding and resources
- Ongoing and regular communication
- A focus on planning of activities and collaboration
- The primary communicators on both sides should share a common language.

From an international perspective, a comparable list also applies to the British Connecting Classrooms project (Edge, Higham, & Frayman, 2010, pp. 5–7), namely:

- Commitment to developing a foundation for collaboration
- Strong leadership on different levels
- Valued exchange visits
- Persistence in overcoming communication challenges
- Embedding partnership activities within the curriculum
- Opportunities for professional development
- Active involvement of students
- Engage staff, parents and wider community.

While these findings specifically refer to the Connecting Classrooms partnerships, they resonate with the assessment of other educationalists and experts. Teutsch (2012), for example, highlighted similar enablers that should be taken into account when establishing and operating an international school partnership:

- Systematic support by all actors in the school community
- Solid preparation for student exchange activities
- Didactical arrangements and planning, with joint project work being a core element
- Enabling active participation of all students
- Sustainable embedding of the school partnership in daily school life
- External support and financial assistance (pp. 97–102).

*What Works 6* sets out to examine how selected participating schools across Australia have sought to implement BRIDGE and achieve its objectives.

Overall,

- Systematic support and involvement by all stakeholders in the school community (including leadership, teachers, students, and parents)
- Balanced and committed collaboration and communication between partner schools
- Persistence in overcoming challenges to achieve sustainability
- Curricular, co-curricular and pedagogical embedding
- Purposeful professional learning.

## > Approach and aims of *What Works 6*

*What Works 6* sets out to examine how selected participating schools across Australia have sought to implement BRIDGE and achieve its objectives. AEF has mapped systematically the specific objectives of each BRIDGE project to identify six distinct, but often interconnected (overarching) objectives:

- Developing cultural knowledge/awareness
- Improving Asian language skills
- Developing intercultural understanding
- Developing/enhancing ICT skills
- Establishing sustainable school partnerships
- Building communities of learners

These six objectives can be categorised into two dimensions: 1) personal (students and teachers, both in Australia and overseas) and 2) structural (school communities). The first four objectives are personal and the last two are structural.

In many Australian BRIDGE schools, for example, students engage with their Asian counterparts in curriculum-based activities, using ICT, while further developing their language skills and enhancing their Asia-related knowledge. In the course of these interpersonal and cross-cultural interactions, students may develop deeper relationships, overcome stereotypes, and become more interculturally competent individuals.

While all of these individual learnings occur within the structures of an international school partnership, successful partnerships also rely on some level of competency in the first four objectives. Thus, these themes are both tools and outcomes of BRIDGE, and they contribute to making these partnerships more sustainable and effective.

## > Research questions

The six BRIDGE objectives have guided the formulation of the research questions for *What Works 6*.

1. How have BRIDGE projects enabled participating schools to develop *cultural awareness/knowledge* among teachers and students?
2. How have BRIDGE projects enabled teachers and students to develop their *intercultural understanding*?
3. Where applicable, how have BRIDGE projects enabled students and teachers to improve their abilities in an *Asian language* (specifically Mandarin or Indonesian)?
4. How have BRIDGE projects enabled teachers and students to utilise/enhance their *ICT skills*?
5. How have BRIDGE projects enabled school leaders, teachers and others in the school community to *establish sustainable school partnerships* as a basis for developing ongoing people-to-people links and engagement?
6. How have BRIDGE projects enabled participating schools to build *communities of learners*, both nationally and internationally?

The qualitative illustrations involving 10 Australian BRIDGE schools (see 'Illustrations' below) cover all of the six research questions. The analytical framework for *What Works 6* is based on the idea that school partnerships are more likely to enable transformative intercultural learnings if certain conditions for cross-cultural engagement and interaction are in place. Interpersonal contacts and relationships are the foundation upon which all other BRIDGE objectives are built, and include overseas school visits, homestay programs, cross-cultural communication between students, and curriculum-driven collaboration in the classroom. Referring to the rich theoretical literature, the following section elaborates briefly on the conditions or enablers of successful intergroup interaction.

## > Conceptual and theoretical framework

A key word in the research questions is 'enable'. *What Works 6* focuses on the enablers found within BRIDGE projects that contribute to achieving project objectives. Consequently, the analytical framework is used to examine the enablers for successful intercultural engagement and interaction, which is expected to have positive effects on reaching key BRIDGE objectives, both directly and indirectly.

Walton et al. (2013) found that 'the most significant change in students' ICU [intercultural understanding] occurred through positive personal interactions with people from diverse cultures'.

Walton et al. (2013) found that 'the most significant change in students' ICU [intercultural understanding] occurred through positive personal interactions with people from diverse cultures' (p. 186). This notion of interpersonal and cross-cultural engagement as an important means to promote intercultural understanding is linked closely to the well-established 'contact hypothesis' (see Allport, 1954).

While Allport's seminal work — and subsequent studies relating to his work — investigated more specifically prejudice reduction through intergroup contacts, the empirical findings and theoretical accounts are applicable also to broader questions of fostering intercultural understanding and positive intergroup relations (Walton, et al., 2013). For example, positive intergroup contacts can 'enhance empathy ... and [the] adoption of the outgroup's perspective' and '[o]ne begins to sense how outgroup members feel and can view the world' (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011, p. 277).

This line of argument supports the relevance of the intergroup engagement model to intercultural understanding. For instance, 'interacting' and 'emphasising' constitute key organising elements of the Intercultural understanding general capability within the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2014).

However, bringing people from different cultural backgrounds together does not automatically counter negative stereotypes and enhance their intercultural understanding, even though this notion continues to persist amongst many educational practitioners (Pettigrew, 1998; Peucker, 2011). Some scholars have highlighted the risk of reinforcing stereotypes if the intercultural contact situations are not adequately arranged (Farley, 2005). In other words, intergroup contact interventions have a much higher chance of being effective when they are carefully planned and arranged on the basis of the available empirical and theoretical knowledge (Aboud et al., 2012).

There is an abundance of research that has sought to uncover the ideal framework conditions for effective intergroup contacts. The most important conditions initially identified by Allport (1954) have since been confirmed and further developed by scholars and educationalists (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, et al., 2011). These include:

- Equal status between representatives of both groups within the contact situation
- Jointly pursuing common goals as an 'interdependent effort' (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 67)
- Cross-group collaboration instead of intergroup competition
- 'Institutional support' by authorities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 766).

A meta-study of contact hypothesis research confirms by and large the significance of these conditions (Pettigrew, 1998) and reveals another important situational factor, namely intergroup contacts 'require time for cross-group friendships to develop' (p. 76) and need 'friendship potential' (p. 80). 'Friendship potential' is particularly relevant in the context of international partnerships (see Beadle, 2013, p. 192).

Another meta-study found that while Allport's four conditions are 'effect-enhancing success factors' for intergroup contact situations, they are not absolutely essential. Instead, they are best seen as facilitators or enablers 'that enhance the tendency for positive contact outcomes to emerge' (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 766). Positive changes are still possible even if some of these conditions are not present, as long as the contact situation is characterised by a 'tendency for familiarity to breed liking' and to overcome personal uncertainty and perceptions of mutual threat (p. 766). This resonates with the research finding that intercultural understanding can be 'developed by making personal connections with individuals of different cultural groups in a supportive environment, and in ways that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives' (Walton, et al., 2013, p. 185).

These empirically tested principles of positive intergroup contacts are relevant for the analysis of international school partnerships that focus on developing intercultural understanding through cross-cultural engagement. Given the focus of BRIDGE on individual learnings of teachers (first and foremost) and students, *What Works 6* also considers recent research findings on the educational dimensions of international school partnerships and overseas exchange programs. For example:

- The importance of incorporating partnership activities into the curriculum (Edge, et al., 2010)
- The active involvement of students and learner agency (Edge, et al., 2010)
- The importance of educational arrangement and students' preparation of participants' intercultural contacts in overseas exchange programs (Moloney & Genua-Petrovic, 2012; Root & Ngampornchai, 2012).

Adequate preparation for intercultural learning experiences is a must. Deardorff (2011) argues:

*A fundamental aspect ... is adequate preparation of students in intercultural learning so that they are better able to articulate the learning that occurs, beyond declaring that 'it changed my life'. This adequate preparation means helping students with an understanding of intercultural competence frameworks, vocabulary, and concepts so that they can apply them to the learning that occurs before, during, and after the experience. (p. 71)*

The importance of adequate pedagogical and curriculum embedding of intercultural engagement has been included in the analytical framework for *What Works 6*, together with the enablers of positive intergroup contacts discussed previously (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). One aspect of this framework is visualised in Figure 9 as the *key enablers of successful intercultural engagement and interaction*.

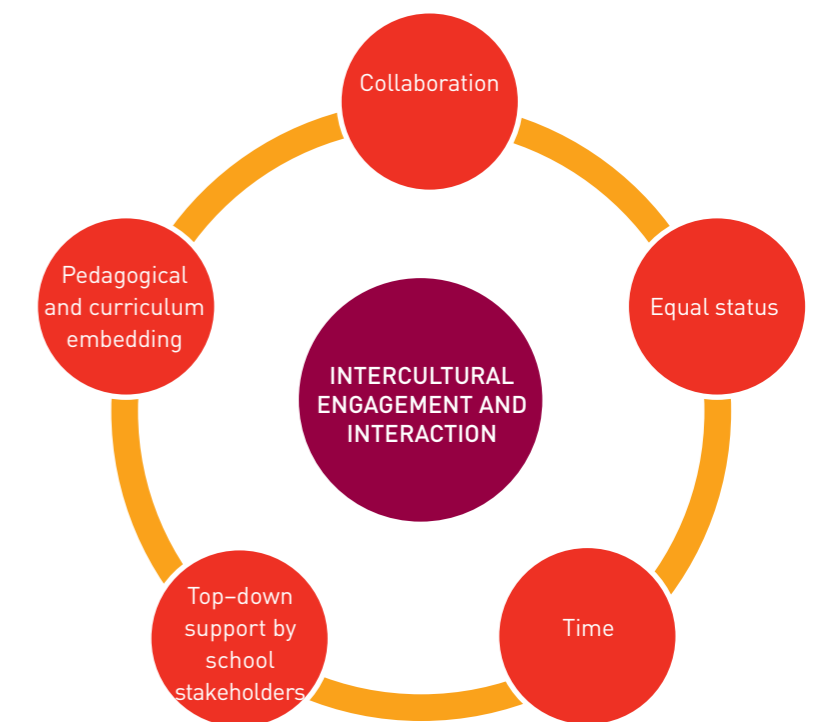


Figure 9: Key enablers of successful intercultural engagement and interaction

- **Collaboration:** jointly working towards a common goal and achieving the goal is an 'interdependent effort' (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 67)
- **Equal status:** participants 'expect and perceive equal status in the situation' (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 66); no domination of one group over another during contact
- **Time/procedural character of engagement:** more than only occasional superficial encounters; 'friendship potential' (Beadle, 2013, p. 192; Pettigrew, 1998, p. 80)
- **Top-down support by school stakeholders:** Engagement is actively encouraged and supported by teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders of the school community (e.g. parents); 'whole school approach' (Walton, et al., 2013, p. 189)
- **Pedagogical and curriculum embedding:** interaction activities embedded in a 'critical framework to think through differences' (Walton, et al., 2013, p. 186); and encouraging and enabling self-reflexivity and critical awareness of stereotypes (Pettigrew, 1998).

There is a broad array of ways in which intercultural engagement and interaction can be put into practice, as BRIDGE partnerships have collectively illustrated.

There is a broad array of ways in which intercultural engagement and interaction can be put into practice, as BRIDGE partnerships have collectively illustrated. Figure 10 visualises a *continuum* for schools that demonstrates movement towards sustainable structures and models of intercultural contact. Its focus is not on refining the personal nature of the contact (e.g. better intercultural understanding) but on developing structures and models to enable meaningful intercultural engagement and interaction.

The continuum can be applied to categorise a school’s progress at a given point in time. It has been used in What Works 6 as an analytical tool in various ways. First, it informed the design of the 2013 BRIDGE Annual Survey. Second, it was an important reference point in the process of selecting BRIDGE schools for the illustrations. Where applicable, it has been used also for the analysis of individual school activities, as presented in the illustrations.

It is important to highlight that the development of a school partnership needs time, which should be considered when applying this continuum. The continuum is based generally on three separate but often interconnected factors:

1. Intensity of engagement (from occasional communication to extensive joint–project collaboration)
2. Nature of pedagogical/curricular support structures (including preparation, feedback and reflexion periods)
3. The involvement of, and structural transformation processes within, the school community.

The continuum applies to various dimensions of BRIDGE, most importantly the central element of teacher–to–teacher and student–to–student intercultural engagement. An additional descriptive dimension relates to the location of the engagement, which might occur through ICT, face–to–face encounters, or a combination of both.

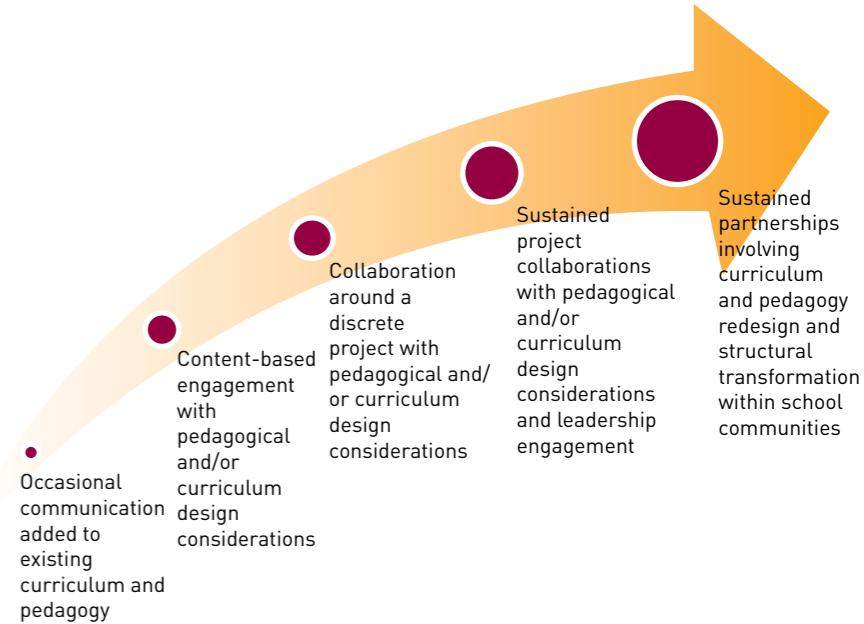


Figure 10: Towards sustainable structures and models of intercultural engagement and interaction for schools: a continuum

This continuum is indicative but provides still a useful frame of reference for schools. Nonetheless, some schools might take more time than others to move along the continuum, some might be conceptually advanced despite their recent introduction to BRIDGE, and others might skip some steps.

Within the various forms of intercultural engagement and interaction, teachers and students participating in BRIDGE projects are generally expected to utilise and further enhance their language skills and/or ICT competence. *What Works 6* pays attention to these additional learning goals, which are inextricably linked to intercultural interactions, whether face–to–face or ICT–based.

In addition, BRIDGE project objectives are pursued within the structural context of school partnerships, which provides the conceptual underpinnings for *What Works 6*. Meaningful intercultural interactions amongst teachers and students with their overseas counterparts should be facilitated through sustainable partnership structures. And, at the same time, these structures can emerge only through successful and positive personal interactions. Participating teachers may become lead teachers, who share systematically their newly acquired knowledge and enhanced intercultural understanding to contribute to the development of ‘communities of learners’ within and across school communities, in partnership with supportive school leaders and peers (Rapoport, 2011).

10 Australian BRIDGE schools were selected to illustrate both the variety of BRIDGE partnerships as well as their potential to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities, including intercultural understanding, amongst teachers and students. The continuum of intercultural engagement and sustainable partnerships was used as an analytical tool to guide the selection process.

Initially, around 60 Australian BRIDGE schools were identified based on a preliminary assessment of their project engagement, creativity and progress. Next, a short-list of 15 schools was compiled, reflecting a diversity of jurisdictions, school levels, duration of involvement in BRIDGE, and participation in different BRIDGE projects. In an attempt to illustrate schools that had not been showcased in previous AEF *What Works* publications, the short-list was refined further to obtain the final list of 10 schools.

Given the nature of this selection process, the 10 schools should not be regarded as the top-10 BRIDGE schools — the list is neither ranked nor hierarchical. Instead, they demonstrate the broad diversity of BRIDGE schools and the manifold ways in which BRIDGE has been implemented.

School	Jurisdiction	School sector	Level	Project	Year
Southern Christian College	TAS	Independent	Secondary	Indonesia	2009
Tranby College	WA	Independent	K-12	Indonesia	2009
Mullumbimby High School	NSW	Government	Secondary	Indonesia	2009
Kormilda College	NT	Independent	K-12	Indonesia	2009
Heathmont College	VIC	Government	Secondary	Indonesia	2012
Wooranna Park Primary School	VIC	Government	Primary	Korea	2013
St Martins Lutheran College	SA	Independent	Secondary	China	2011
St Francis Xavier's Regional Catholic School	SA	Catholic	Primary	China	2013
Cressy District High School	TAS	Government	Secondary	Thailand	2013
John Paul College	QLD	Independent	K-12	Thailand	2013

Table 6: List of Australian BRIDGE schools used in *What Works 6* illustrations

Each of these schools has implemented BRIDGE differently, choosing to focus on particular features more than others. This variation is due also to the duration of their involvement in BRIDGE and other school-specific and/or partnership-specific circumstances.

While some schools have only recently embarked on their partnership journey and made initial steps towards establishing deeper interpersonal engagement, others have achieved already a high degree of structural collaboration and sustainable relationships. Analysis of these 10 BRIDGE partnerships has led to a four-fold categorisation that reflects the key features of the BRIDGE model (see Figure 11).

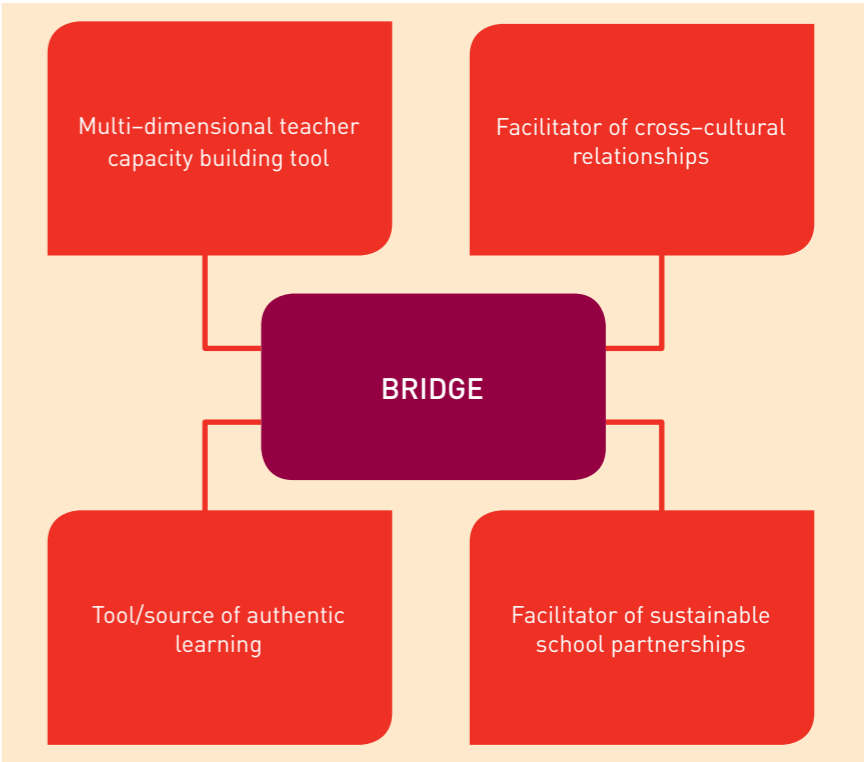


Figure 11: The four key features of BRIDGE as an international school partnerships model

In practice, these four features are often intertwined. The following illustrations, however, do not seek to describe exhaustively each chosen BRIDGE partnership. Instead, they highlight particular features of BRIDGE in specific schools and demonstrate the broad range of possible approaches to developing BRIDGE school partnerships.

Through (usually reciprocated) in-country visits and teacher capacity building programs, teachers develop their intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge and awareness, pedagogy and ICT skills, and, where relevant, target language proficiency.

Researchers and educationalists have emphasised that good teaching requires teachers who engage regularly in high quality and effective professional learning. The 2012 Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders states ‘that purposeful professional learning for teachers and school leaders is one of the most effective strategies for improving student outcomes in our schools’ (AITSL, 2012, p. 6). The AITSL Charter makes it very clear that professional learning for teachers is regarded primarily as a means to an end because ‘improving student outcomes is the ultimate goal of all teachers and school leaders, and of the professional learning they undertake’ (p. 4). Similarly, but with a focus on languages education, Lo Bianco and Yvette Slaughter (2009) argued that ‘good teaching is the single most important controllable variable in successful language learning’ (p. 28). The primary beneficiaries of BRIDGE are teachers themselves. Through (usually reciprocated) in-country visits and teacher capacity building programs, teachers develop their intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge and awareness, pedagogy and ICT skills, and, where relevant, target language proficiency. These activities seek to contribute subsequently to students’ transformative learning processes and sustained school partnerships.

What can be described as the first positive outcome of the school’s involvement in BRIDGE is that the BRIDGE teacher has observed already major progress in her Chinese language proficiency and cultural knowledge, which has had flow-on effects on her teaching.

Partner school visits (including cultural immersion, school visit and homestay) and professional learning sessions are always held at the beginning of a school’s BRIDGE involvement, so this is the first and most immediate encounter. Thus, BRIDGE as a teacher capacity building tool contributes to the development of teachers’ ‘professional capital’ (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012) and the achievement of specific BRIDGE objectives. Empirical research on international school partnerships has identified professional learning opportunities as an important ingredient for the success and sustainability of such partnerships (Edge, et al., 2010). BRIDGE as a whole is a professional learning program through which teachers in partner schools develop personal relationships across cultures that provide the platform for building sustainable partnerships. The quantitative data analysis of the 2013 Annual BRIDGE Survey demonstrates that BRIDGE has been highly successful as professional learning for teachers. The vast majority of Australian BRIDGE teachers stated that their knowledge and skills have improved through their involvement in BRIDGE. For example, over 97% of all BRIDGE teachers in Australia (n=99) agreed, including 58% who strongly agreed, that BRIDGE has enabled them to deepen their intercultural understanding, and 95% stated they have broadened their knowledge of the history, geography, literature, art and culture of the partner country. Moreover, most Australian BRIDGE teachers reported that they have experienced improvements in their second language proficiency (83%) and ICT skills (81%). The following illustrations take a closer look at the development of teachers’ ‘professional capital’ (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012), which has occurred across almost all BRIDGE partnerships. They show how selected schools, and more precisely BRIDGE teachers, have built their personal and professional capacity through participation in the project.

> **St Francis Xavier’s Regional Catholic School**  
St Francis Xavier’s Regional Catholic School in South Australia started its involvement in China BRIDGE in 2013, entering into a school partnership with Yiyuan Experimental Primary School. What can be described as the first positive outcome of the school’s involvement in BRIDGE is that the BRIDGE teacher has observed already major progress in her Chinese language proficiency and cultural knowledge, which has had flow-on effects on her teaching. Asked about the most significant change for her through participation in BRIDGE, Roma Chiera–Garnelli answered:

*The improvement in my cultural understanding and language knowledge and skills has been the most significant change for me as a teacher. It has improved my teaching and learning outcomes for the students, and it has given me also an authentic resource that I can use to help my students to improve their inter-language and intercultural knowledge.*

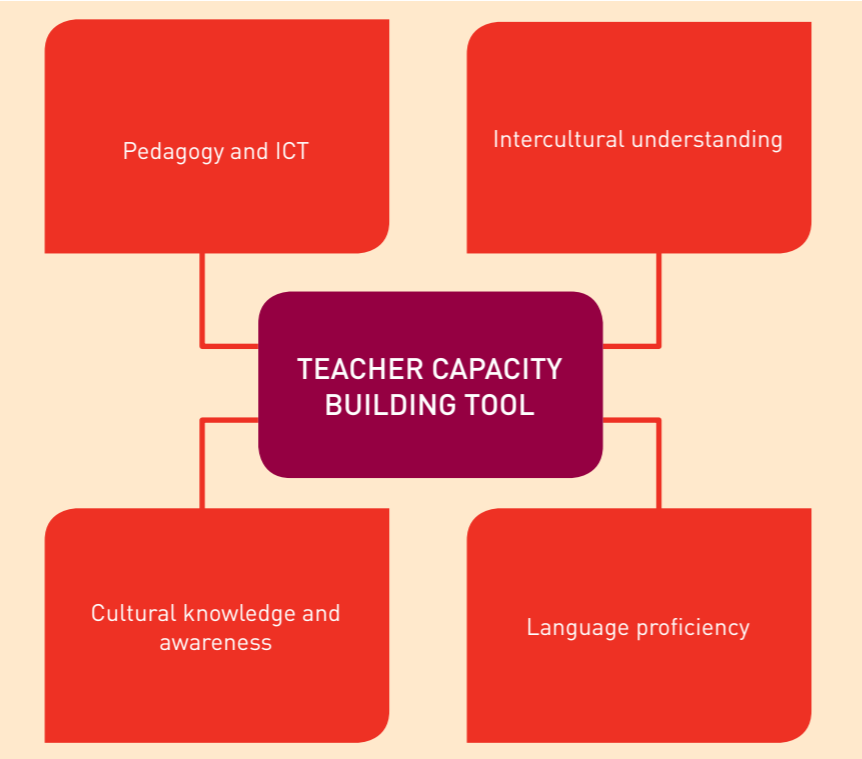


Figure 12: BRIDGE as a multi-dimensional teacher capacity building tool

Roma participated in BRIDGE professional learning and visited her partner school in 2013. She stated that her own sense of intercultural understanding has improved markedly through her involvement in BRIDGE. For her, intercultural understanding means that one becomes aware of the ‘cultural lens’ through which people may interpret the world and express their own selves, which might be different from one’s own perspective.

Roma stated that ‘there is no right or wrong’, however, and one learns to respect the other perspective ‘even if you don’t agree with it’. According to previous empirical research, this constitutes an advanced level of intercultural understanding, which impacts on a teacher’s ability to develop students’ intercultural understanding. These studies ‘pointed to a need for supporting the development of teachers’ personal and professional intercultural capabilities, in order to foster intercultural development in their students’ (Walton, et al., 2013, p. 185).

In addition, BRIDGE has helped Roma expand her knowledge and awareness of China’s history, geography, literature, arts and cultures, and she has been able to incorporate this deepened knowledge into her classroom teaching.

While the BRIDGE partnership at St Francis Xavier’s is still in its infancy, steps have been taken to ensure its ongoing operation and growth. Currently, the school is discussing ways to enable and encourage communication between students and develop joint learning activities.

This resonates with the general research findings that international school partnerships need time to evolve and grow stronger (Beadle, 2013; Teutsch, 2012).

> John Paul College

Like St Francis Xavier’s, John Paul College in Queensland started its BRIDGE partnership in 2013, with Kantharalak Wittaya High School in Sisaket, Thailand. The BRIDGE teacher, Rhiannen Gimpel, highlighted the impact BRIDGE has had already on her skills and knowledge across all BRIDGE objectives. Asked about the most significant change for her, she referred to the benefits for her ‘own personal teaching pedagogy and practice’ and her increased enthusiasm, resilience and dedication to the BRIDGE project. Such a high level of personal commitment is a major success factor, if not precondition, for the development of school partnerships, as teachers are more willing to address problems that usually occur in the process of building a sustainable partnership between schools (Edge, et al., 2010).

The experience has encouraged me to reflect on my own teaching approach and practices, and expand further on these as I am exposed to different teaching methodologies and approaches of my partner BRIDGE teacher.

Rhiannen Gimpel, BRIDGE teacher at John Paul College

*The experience has encouraged me to reflect on my own teaching approach and practices, and expand further on these as I am exposed to different teaching methodologies and approaches of my partner BRIDGE teacher. The experience has also encouraged me to be more resilient, enthusiastic and dedicated, during the process of getting the program up and running. The most beneficial part of the program for me was being given the opportunity to compare and learn about different, new and emerging technologies that I have been able to use and incorporate into all of my classrooms that range in year level and subject content.*

*Rhiannen Gimpel, BRIDGE teacher at John Paul College*

Other than herself and her students, Rhiannen’s fellow staff members also have expanded their knowledge about Thailand, gaining a deeper understanding of Thai culture through her presentation at a whole school meeting upon her return from Thailand. This can be regarded as a first step towards the development of a community of learners within a school.

> Tranby College

Tranby College in Western Australia entered into an Indonesia BRIDGE partnership with SMAN 5 Surabaya in 2009. A number of exchange visits and study tours (for both teachers and students) have taken place since then, and the BRIDGE teachers continue to be in regular contact with their Indonesian counterparts.

This well-established partnership has led to the development of cross-cultural relationships (see illustration in Feature 13). One reason for this success story is the expanded ICT skills of the BRIDGE teacher, Vicki Richardson, and the use of ICT at Tranby as a result of the partnership. At the commencement of the project, Vicki, described her computer skills as ‘normal, average’ and they have since improved considerably.

In 2013, Vicki described the use of ICT in the classroom as the most significant change for her, elaborating: ‘It was not a tool that I used, primarily through lack of knowledge. Working on the partnership site definitely increased my confidence with ICT use.’ In addition, Vicki has developed her knowledge and awareness of Indonesian history, geography, literature, arts and cultures, building this new knowledge into her classroom teaching.

BRIDGE school partnerships offer many opportunities for teachers to access and use authentic learning tools in the classroom. This curricular and pedagogical embedding ranges from basic (asynchronous) use of primary resources on Wikispaces to project collaborations between students in both schools. It may emphasise also particular areas of BRIDGE, such as ICT use, language skills and cultural knowledge, and can foster cross-cultural interaction and relationships.

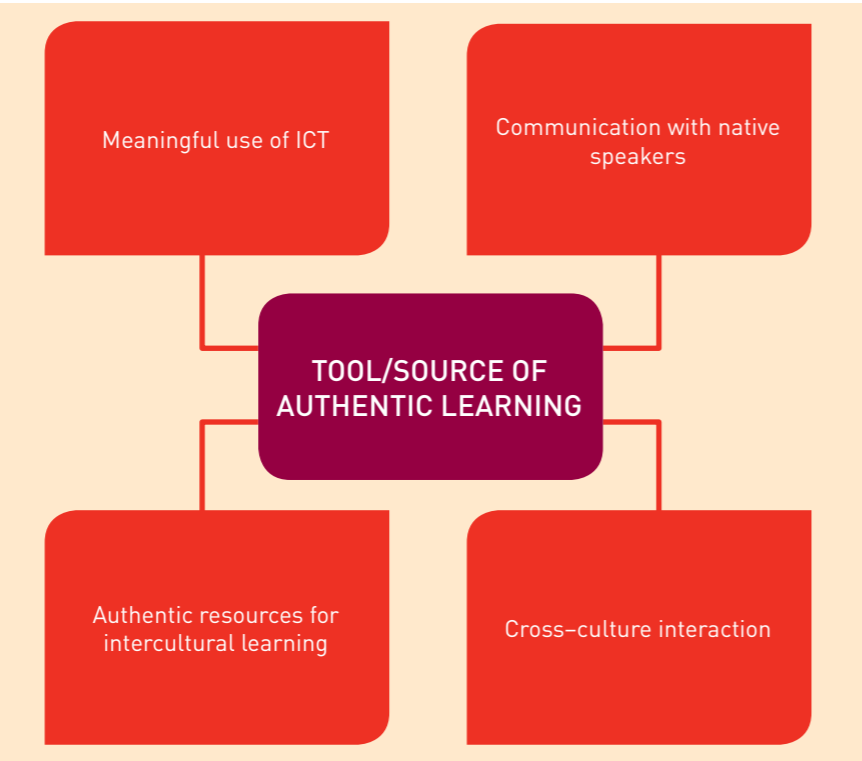


Figure 13: BRIDGE as a tool/source of authentic learning

Teaching languages and supporting intercultural learning is characterised commonly by the challenge of generating meaningful learning experiences. To be meaningful, subject content needs to have a real-world connection, and students need to become aware of this connection through active engagement (Bennett, Harper, & Hedberg, 2002; Grabinger & Dunlap, 1995). One recognised pedagogical approach is the use of authentic (i.e. primary) materials, tools and environments that demonstrate the relevance of students’ learning and are seamlessly integrated into ‘real-life’ situations (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012).

BRIDGE partnerships have helped teachers develop a range of authentic learning experiences, resources and tools. BRIDGE schools have welcomed these educational opportunities and utilised them in different ways.

BRIDGE partnerships have helped teachers develop a range of authentic learning experiences, resources and tools (including assessment). BRIDGE schools have welcomed these educational opportunities and utilised them in different ways. Students have, for example, created information packages on certain aspects of their society and uploaded them onto joint online platforms (e.g. Wikispaces). Teachers and students at the partner school then use this content as a curriculum resource. This asynchronous approach is common in BRIDGE partnerships. Another, more immediate, approach is facilitating direct cross-cultural interactions between students, such as via email and other asynchronous means, or using online tools and face-to-face meetings for synchronous interaction (e.g. via Skype).

This array of educational opportunities reflects the potential of BRIDGE partnerships to generate and support student learning in the classroom. When used optimally, they can foster both cognitive and affective intercultural learnings, as well as language acquisition. As outlined in the analytical framework, personal collaboration and jointly working towards common goals constitutes a key enabler for developing positive intergroup relations and reducing mutual stereotypes (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998).

The opportunities for developing intercultural understanding and supporting language learning also provide a platform for students’ meaningful use of ICT as an integrated learning and assessment tool. This resonates with the general capability of ICT capability in the Australian Curriculum (see AEF, 2013) and represents another key objective of BRIDGE.

In summary, BRIDGE as a tool or source of authentic learning refers to the following three objectives of BRIDGE:

- Learning the relevant Asian language in a meaningful context that involves interaction with native speakers
- Students using ICT to engage in meaningful, often self-directed, learning and assessment (see AEF, 2013)
- Acquiring and deepening cultural knowledge and awareness through direct or indirect interaction and cooperation with the partner school, which also may develop students’ intercultural understanding.

Results from the BRIDGE 2013 Annual Survey show that many students have benefitted from their school’s BRIDGE partnership. 90% of Australian BRIDGE teachers agreed or strongly agreed that BRIDGE has enabled students at their school to further develop their intercultural understanding. 92% reported that BRIDGE has enabled students at their school to broaden their knowledge and awareness of the history, geography, literature, art and culture of the partner country.

BRIDGE teachers in both schools have created and uploaded digital content on Korea and Australia for student use, and posted on the schools' BRIDGE Wikispaces with attached web links and related activities.

Moreover, 68% of them indicated that BRIDGE has enabled their students to develop their second language skills, and 67% reported that their students' ICT skills have improved as a result of BRIDGE.

52% of Australian BRIDGE teachers confirmed that students from their school are in contact with students in their partner school. Most of these direct student-to-student contacts have occurred on a monthly or quarterly basis in the past 12 months, though 15% of students across Australian BRIDGE schools are in more regular contact (weekly or fortnightly). Such contacts are a particularly powerful facilitator of inter-language and intercultural learning processes. They also offer a platform for the development of cross-cultural relationships and provide opportunities to practice and improve one's second language skills in interaction with native speakers.

The following illustrations demonstrate how selected BRIDGE partnerships have benefitted from direct or indirect cross-cultural interactions with their partner school.

> **Wooranna Park Primary School**

**Wooranna Park Primary School** in Victoria started its BRIDGE partnership with Kangnae Elementary School in Korea, in 2013. Teachers at the school use BRIDGE activities as authentic tools for their students' language and cultural learning, expanding their language program in the process.

The Korean language program at Wooranna Park was initiated only 6 months prior to the launch of the BRIDGE partnership, in response to personal requests from a couple of students. The school's Assistant Principal and BRIDGE teacher, Janet Whittle, stated: 'The Korean program started because of student interest, but it was only two students until we joined the BRIDGE project, when it expanded enough for me to need to study Korean seriously.' Following the reciprocated teacher visits and professional learning sessions, both schools have corresponded regularly and support each other in activities to foster language learning and intercultural understanding.

BRIDGE teachers in both schools have created and uploaded digital content on Korea and Australia for student use, and posted on the schools' BRIDGE Wikispaces with attached web links and related activities. The schools also use Vokis and other digital platforms (e.g. Edmodo and YouTube). For language learning, students at both schools assist each other to learn new vocabulary (e.g. by having their peers correct them). In addition, videoconference sessions have been held every fortnight during which the Korean BRIDGE teacher at Kangnae (as native-speaker) offered short language lessons for Wooranna Park students.

Direct interaction between students of both partner schools, however, has been limited. Students at Wooranna Park have sent letters to their Korean counterparts and 'are keen to Skype with the language students at Kangnae' (Janet Whittle). Nevertheless, the Korean language program at Wooranna Park has grown as a result of the school's involvement in BRIDGE, with enrolments increasing from two to 12 students. According to Janet, students are eager to study Korean and even 'use lunchtimes to study Korean just for fun'. Encouraged by this success story, the school recently entered into a second BRIDGE partnership, this time with a Thai sister school. Janet noted that this development has further 'increased the discussions about the need for Asia literacy across the school'.

Even though Wooranna Park is relatively new to BRIDGE, it is already quite advanced along the continuum. The school partnership has moved beyond occasional communication and utilises content-based learning and cross-cultural engagement in the classroom. It has taken also first steps towards discrete project collaboration (cross-school vocabulary acquisition and peer assessment).

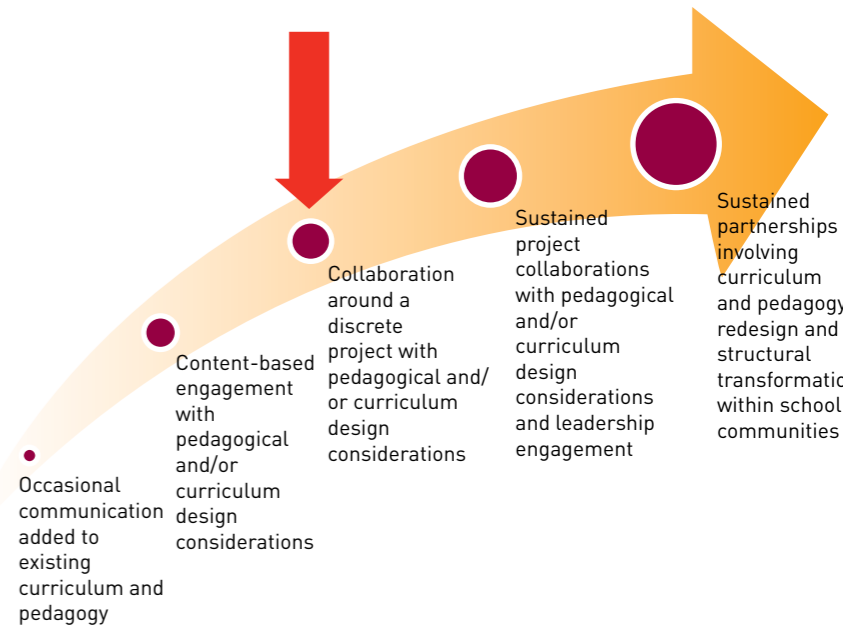


Figure 14: The Wooranna Park Korea BRIDGE partnership on the continuum

BRIDGE has taught me how to embed another culture into my teaching rather than just talking about another culture. It has shown me how easy it is to use ICT to collaborate directly with teachers and students all around the world.

Karin Weustenfeld, BRIDGE teacher at Cressy High School

### > Cressy District High School

While the Wooranna Park BRIDGE partnership — like many other BRIDGE partnerships — has focused on language learning, several partnerships operate almost entirely in English, placing greater emphasis on other BRIDGE objectives such as ICT skills, cultural knowledge and awareness, and intercultural understanding. Cressy District High School in Tasmania is one of these schools. It entered into a BRIDGE school partnership with Pathumthep Witthayakarn (PTK) School in Thailand in 2013, and has since implemented a range of authentic cross-cultural learning activities.

Prior to her overseas study visit to Thailand, the BRIDGE teacher at Cressy, Karin Weustenfeld, and the Thai BRIDGE teacher had been in regular contact. They had prepared the foundation for the schools' BRIDGE wikipages and completed 'research activities on each other's country with students'. An Edmodo group was set up, which 'was filled with questions from [Cressy District] students, eagerly waiting answers from [the] students in Thailand'. Subsequently, as students continued to create resources to share, the BRIDGE Wikispace now contains a range of student-and teacher-generated learning tools and materials, including a digital knowledge hunt. Using this tool Cressy students learn about various aspects of Thailand, including geography, culture, everyday life, and entertainment.

Karin emphasised that her ICT skills have improved markedly through her participation in BRIDGE professional learning and her subsequent use of social media in the classroom. She highlighted the importance of these new ICT experiences, pointing out that her participation in BRIDGE 'basically means rethinking how I view and teach intercultural studies in my classroom'. Using authentic resources and real-life contexts in her teaching about Thailand, Karin has transformed both personally and professionally. She explained:

*BRIDGE has taught me how to embed another culture into my teaching rather than just talking about another culture. It has shown me how easy it is to use ICT to collaborate directly with teachers and students all around the world. This means what I bring back to the classroom is authentic and engaging. It has expanded my use of ICT and has shown how I can use it to demonstrate the students' understanding in a topic studied in class. It has allowed me to create a global classroom.*

Karin's transformation has had positive implications for the whole school, due to her efforts to share new insights, enthusiasm and skills with fellow staff. She elaborated:

*Because of BRIDGE we were able to connect directly to another school in Thailand, who also was keen to connect with us. The teacher exchange allowed us to share resources and information about each other's cultures. It allowed other teachers at my school to see how easy and wonderful it is to create a global classroom wherever you are using authentic resources.*

BRIDGE teachers and students at both schools have stayed in touch and continued to interact with each other using asynchronous media tools (mainly Wikispaces and Edmodo). One noteworthy way in which students engaged in real-life cross-cultural cooperation was the contribution of Thai students to the Cressy yearbook. The Thai students co-authored yearbook articles with Cressy's media students, using the online software Fusion Yearbooks. The schools are planning to further strengthen this collaboration. Karin elaborates: 'After lengthy discussions with a PTK ICT teacher, we hope that the Thai students will be able to contribute their own pages to our yearbook. Maybe even in the future we can create a combined school magazine about both our cultures.'

Moreover, the two schools are planning to implement 'Flat Traveller' activities to promote further cross-cultural interaction and authentic learning, without travelling physically to the other country. The activities require students to create a character (usually made of paper) that is sent overseas, where it is treated by a partner student as an actual traveller. The Flat Traveller has pictures taken with landmarks, undertakes cultural activities, and has a journal written about his/her experiences at home and at school before being sent back to the original student.

Although her students have not engaged in synchronous face-to-face interactions, Karin strongly agreed that her students' cultural knowledge, ICT skills and intercultural understanding have developed as a result of the authentic learning that has occurred through the BRIDGE partnership. (She defined intercultural understanding as 'not just teaching students about another country/culture, but learning with another culture. It is being aware and excited about cultural differences and seeing how these cultures can support or complement our own culture'.)

The BRIDGE project between Cressy and its Thai partner school has made good progress on its path to create a sustainable school partnership for cross-cultural engagement. While most activities fit within ‘content-based engagement with pedagogical and/or curriculum design considerations’, the partnership has progressed to include more project-based forms of collaboration (e.g. the yearbook collaboration).

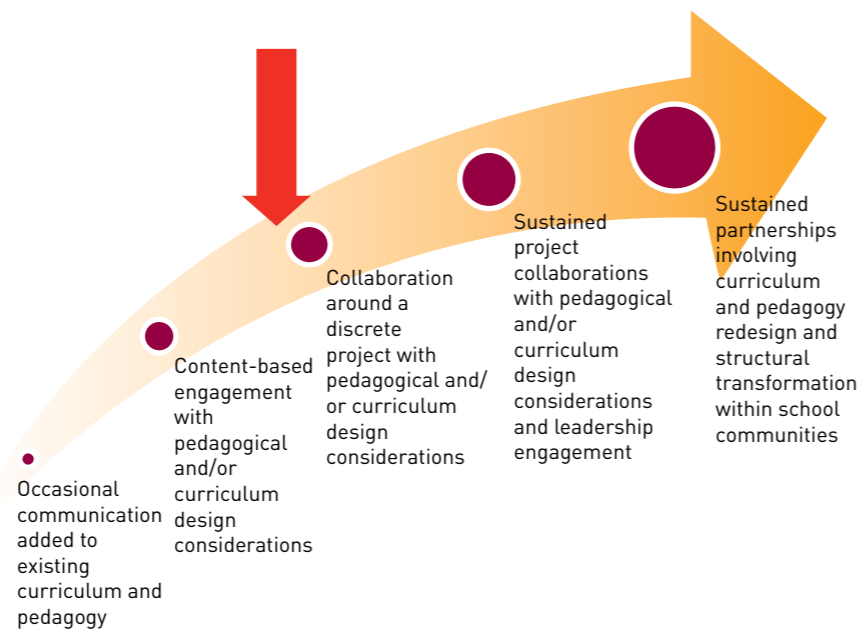


Figure 15: The Cressy Thai BRIDGE partnership on the continuum

> John Paul College

Similarly, John Paul College in Queensland (illustrated previously in Feature 1) has implemented asynchronous joint learning activities successfully in cooperation with its Thai BRIDGE partner school. Key to this success is the use of authentic learning resources and their connection to real-life collaboration with the partner school.

As funding constraints did not allow the schools to facilitate reciprocal student exchanges, the two BRIDGE partner teachers, Rhiannen at John Paul and Pam at Kantharalak Wittaya, developed resources and learning tools for their students. Rhiannen, for example, took her students on a virtual trip through Thailand, by blogging about her experiences during her overseas study tour and creating a digital story based on a *Race around Bangkok* activity. After the reciprocated teacher visits, both teachers set up digital knowledge hunts, created online videos and undertook projects focused on cuisine ‘to bring their classes together’.

Cross-cultural communication, as a basis for self-directed learning, occurs primarily through asynchronous online tools such as Travelbugs and Wikispace.

*[Students] are actively involved in their own learning and the learning of the students at their partner school by recording videos about all of the different topics of their chosen country and uploading them onto the Wikispace so the partner school can access them, download them, and learn from them.*

*Rhiannen Gimpel, BRIDGE teacher at John Paul College*

The most comprehensive learning activity within this BRIDGE partnership has been a Year 9 assessment task at John Paul, through which students researched Australian (including Indigenous) and Thai food cultures to create their own ‘Twisted Tucker’ recipe. This task required students to use ICT as active and self-directed learners, investigating aspects of Thailand’s society, culture and geography. As a result, the learning content was embedded in a real-life context. Students at both schools used, among other sources, online information provided by fellow students at their partner school.

*We were both involved in a joint learning activity that was based around a Year 9 assessment task that involved both schools researching their own country and designing online learning spaces that taught each partner school specific information about culture, food, sport, dance and religion, using new and emerging technologies.*

*Rhiannen Gimpel, BRIDGE teacher at John Paul College*

Despite the lack of personal cross-cultural interactions between students, this BRIDGE partnership is relatively advanced given that it commenced in 2013.

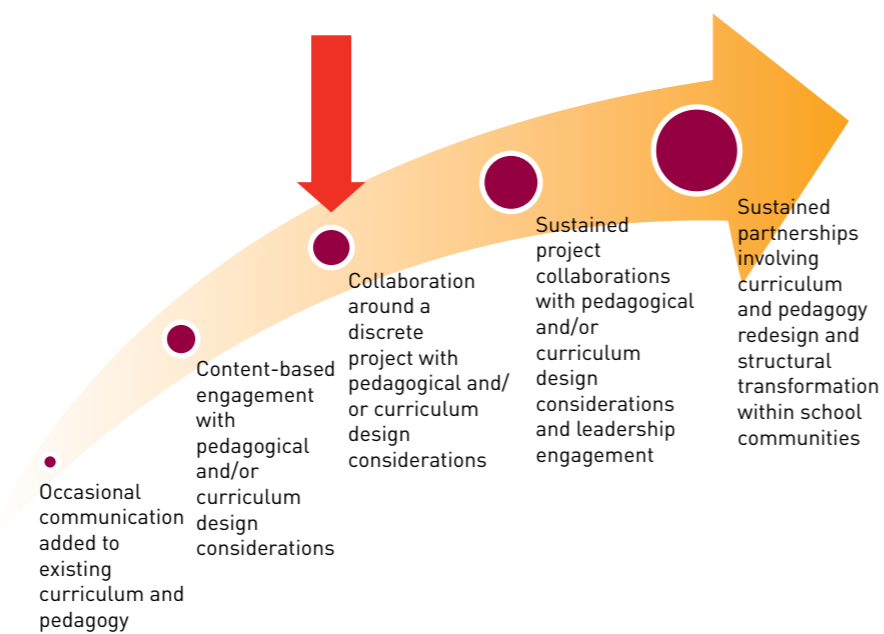


Figure 16: The John Paul Thai BRIDGE partnership on the continuum

> Heathmont College

Heathmont College in Victoria has benefited from its involvement in BRIDGE specifically through the use of authentic (online) resources and interactive collaboration with native speakers in Indonesia. Heathmont started its partnership with SMP Negeri 1 Karangmojo, a junior high school in Java, in 2012.

One of the motives for Heathmont was to strengthen its existing Indonesian program. The BRIDGE teacher at Heathmont, Prema Devathas, described the key advantages of the partnership, emphasising the authenticity of cross-cultural collaborative learning opportunities:

*This BRIDGE project caters for authentic user-friendly language learning. We can move on from being over dependent on set and sometimes obsolete textbook tasks to current and authentic language collaboration with the communities of the target language, here being Indonesia. Teachers can use these new and emerging technologies to engage and challenge student learning. With these resources, learning can be more authentic, creative, innovative, and collaborative.*

At Heathmont, BRIDGE learning activities are incorporated not only in the Indonesian language classes, but also across learning areas.

While teachers at both partner schools have participated in reciprocated overseas study tours and visits, students are yet to have similar opportunities even though they have been in fortnightly online contact. Student interaction encompasses both personal chats through Skype and Facebook, as well as content-based collaborative tasks and joint learning activities. Both forms of interpersonal student engagement are realised through asynchronous (e.g. Wikispace, Edmodo, email) and synchronous (mainly Skype) tools.

Joint Skype sessions, for example, have been held several times a term with 'a defined topic, prepared vocabulary and focused conversation'. One Skype session was even held publicly at Federation Square in Melbourne's CBD in front of a very large audience as a part of the Victorian Information Technology Teachers' Association (now called Digital Learning and Teaching Victoria) Conference in August 2012.

At Heathmont, BRIDGE learning activities are incorporated not only in the Indonesian language classes, but also across learning areas, 'such as mathematics where students instigated activities that highlight similarities and differences between Indonesia, Australia and other countries using ratio and population density' (BRIDGE partnership summary).

There have been several content-based cross-cultural collaboration projects that require intensive teamwork between students at Heathmont and SMP Negeri 1 Karangmojo. In Term 1 of 2013, for example, Year 7 students in both schools had to do a Scavenger Hunt assignment: Students partnered one-on-one and worked on a set of 60 questions on Indonesian and Australian language and cultures. According to the assignment instructions on the schools' joint BRIDGE Wikispace, 'students are encouraged to collaborate and seek answers together. Work is to be submitted onto partnered pages using MS Word, PowerPoint, video clips or any other preferred manner. In the next session, students will be partnered via Skype to continue with further activities.'

Similar collaborative activities have been carried out in other classes. Students from both schools, for instance, have jointly investigated the fauna of the partner country, sharing information about their own country and its wildlife. In another activity, students worked on a Travelbugs collaborative activity and produced a recipe book and cooking show in cooperation with their Indonesian peers.

At Heathmont, ICT has been used as a tool to facilitate authentic connections and collaboration between people, contributing to higher levels of student enthusiasm and language learning outcomes.

Prema highlighted the importance of ICT as a particularly suitable tool to cater for today's 'technology-based learning styles of our students'. She suggests that these new technologies are a better alternative to standard textbooks:

*Based on anecdotal evidence, textbook exercises and activities today are seen to be superficial, uninteresting and irrelevant to student interests. Meanwhile, technologies have many advantages and these can be used globally to create and share information, and collaborate with others.*

At Heathmont, ICT has been used as a tool to facilitate authentic connections and collaboration between people, contributing to higher levels of student enthusiasm and language learning outcomes (BRIDGE partnership summary). At the same time, students not only use ICT, but also learn how to use it in a responsible and safe manner. Prema explained that clear guidelines on the use of the internet were developed prior to the BRIDGE project, and BRIDGE teachers and students had to attend a short session on cyber safety and proper use of social networking, where student accountability, e-safety issues and online behaviour expectations were discussed. References to cyber safety have also been incorporated in certain BRIDGE activities, such as those on Travelbugs. For example, by creating an avatar, the 'activity reinforces the concept that children should not use personal images online'.

Teachers at Heathmont have emphasised also the benefits of students interacting synchronously with Indonesian native speakers. The students' exposure 'to the realities of other cultures and languages [has promoted the development of] their language proficiency and understanding' and broadened their worldview. These learning outcomes provide a viable platform for the development of deep intercultural understanding. Many of these curriculum-oriented (and mostly self-directed) learning tasks are based on cross-cultural teamwork between students in both schools, corresponding to the key enablers for positive intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, et al., 2011).

The relationship between students of both partner schools is characterised by their 'equal status', jointly working as cross-cultural teams to achieve common goals (Pettigrew, 1998). Moreover, these forms of collaboration receive 'institutional support' by authorities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), in this case teachers and school leaders. The instructions for the assignments suggest that teachers aimed for sound curriculum and pedagogical embedding of intercultural learning tasks. And, even though students are yet to meet in person, which is being organised for 2015, their ongoing cross-cultural interaction has 'friendship potential' (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 80) and thus offers great opportunities for the development of students' intercultural understanding.

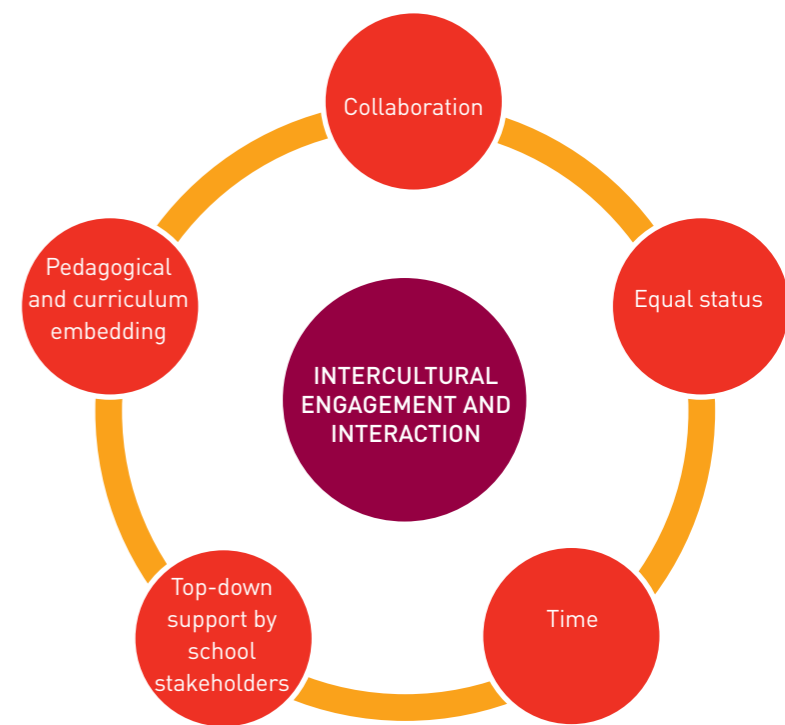


Figure 17: The Heathmont Indonesia BRIDGE partnership satisfies all key enablers for successful intercultural engagement and interaction

Consequently, the BRIDGE partnership at Heathmont sits at the most advanced levels of the continuum, with a demonstrated commitment to the future sustainability of the school partnership.

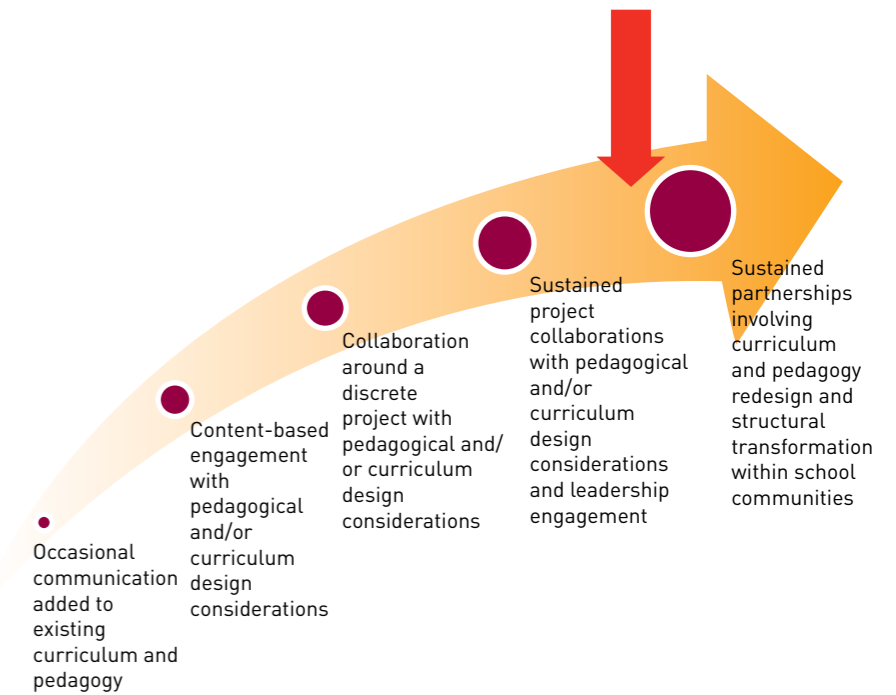


Figure 18: The Heathmont Indonesia BRIDGE partnership on the continuum

Schools in this category tend to emphasise cross-cultural interactions among teachers and among students of partner schools. These face-to-face and/or web-based interactions usually have high 'friendship potential'.

Schools in this category tend to emphasise cross-cultural interactions among teachers and among students of partner schools. These face-to-face and/or web-based interactions usually have high 'friendship potential' (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 80), and personal contacts during overseas visits help to establish and/or maintain peer relationships. Often these emerging relationships are maintained through private communication among students and may be supplemented by curriculum-based cooperation in the classroom. Such personal relationships are an important indicator and enabler for the development of intercultural understanding.

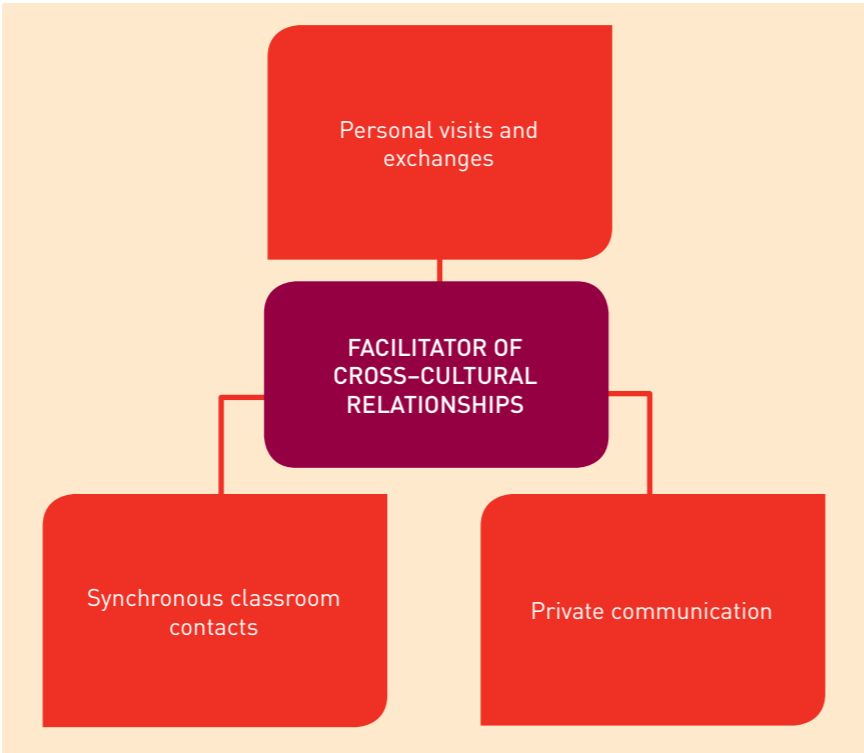


Figure 19: BRIDGE as a facilitator of cross-cultural relationships

The survey findings show that the vast majority of Australian BRIDGE teachers (88%) reported that they are in contact with their partner school; most of them have been either in quarterly or monthly contact during the past 12 months (although 25% have had more regular contact). 79% of Australian BRIDGE teachers confirmed that staff members have visited their partner school overseas, where they also met and got to know their BRIDGE partner teachers.

As student overseas visits to partner schools are not an inherent component of BRIDGE, such visits are much less common among students. Nevertheless, 22% of Australian BRIDGE schools have arranged for their students to undertake these visits, enabling them to develop personal relationships with their counterparts. In the 2013 Annual BRIDGE Survey, teachers also were asked if BRIDGE had enabled their school to establish a sustainable school partnership for intercultural contact and engagement. 72% of all Australian BRIDGE teachers agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, which underscores the potential of BRIDGE to serve as a facilitator of cross-cultural relationships. The following illustrations demonstrate how this has unfolded in practice.

> **Southern Christian College**

The **Southern Christian College** in Tasmania started its BRIDGE partnership with SMA Muhammadiyah 1 (based in Denpasar, Indonesia) in 2009. Its primary goal was to strengthen its longstanding Indonesian program, which is compulsory for all F-10 students. The Principal at Southern Christian, Alan Lawson, explained the school's interest in Indonesia BRIDGE: 'What was exciting about the BRIDGE project is exactly what [the name] implies: It gave us real connections to the country.' What started with reciprocated teacher visits in 2009 has since developed, according to Alan, into a 'lived', 'wonderfully engaging', and 'active' relationship between the two partner schools, involving teachers, school leaders, students, and parents.

Alan recalled the impact of the first visit by the Indonesian teacher to his school: 'So we met this Indonesian teacher, a real teacher from a real school, helping us to develop real connections and understanding, and that took us to a whole new level.'

Since then the partnership has grown both in institutional and personal terms, with cross-cultural connections and evolving friendships being a major driving force. In 2010, BRIDGE enabled the College to organise a student exchange to Indonesia, which has since become an annual activity in the school's calendar.

*With each visit ... the time spent with our BRIDGE partner school and building relationships between students has been incredibly positive ... The encouraging aspect is that those relationships continue through both formal and informal (student-to-student) links. Some students who have graduated are still maintaining links.*

*Alan Lawson, Principal, Southern Christian College*

What we’re finding is that our students are increasingly internationally-minded. They are aware of the broader context of our region and they take this understanding home to their families and communities.

Alan Lawson, Principal at Southern Christian College

Each year different staff members and students travel to Indonesia to visit the partner school, where they attend classes, engage with their Indonesian colleagues and peers in cultural exchange, and visit local tourist spots. As of late 2013, around half of the teachers at Southern Christian have participated in these visits.

The face-to-face contacts among students during the overseas visits are complemented by interaction through social media. Initially, Wikispace played an important role in facilitating these long-distance contacts (in addition to email and SMS), but has since been superseded by Skype. While explicit curriculum-based joint learning activities are the exception, the synchronous Skype interactions are important for the development and maintenance of personal student relationships and friendships. The Deputy Principal and Head of Southern Christian’s language program, Scott Ambrose, who is also the BRIDGE teacher, emphasised the importance of these Skype-based interactions:

*We developed a Skype relationship, which has the benefit of being much more immediate; students can talk face-to-face. For those of our students who have been to Indonesia, they get the opportunity to see friends and re-connect with them. So it’s nice to see their relationships continue across Skype. And the students’ faces light up when they see [their] friends, both there and here.*

These Skype sessions as well as the in-country experiences have impacted positively on students’ language proficiency as well as their ‘confidence and interest’ in Indonesian, as Scott noted.

For Southern Christian, BRIDGE also has enabled the development of students’ and teachers’ intercultural understanding as a result of the cross-cultural engagement and friendships. Applying Scott’s view on the meaning of intercultural understanding, his students have acquired the skills and understanding that enable them ‘to operate within and between cultures’ with ‘an openness to experiencing and valuing cultures other than [their] own’. Alan, the Principal at Southern Christian, refers to the global dimension of this, when he states: ‘What we’re finding is that our students are increasingly internationally-minded. They are aware of the broader context of our region and they take this understanding home to their families and communities.’

Moreover, the cross-cultural relationships, established and fostered between partner schools, have contributed enormously to the development of a sustainable partnership.

Long-term friendships developed between students that continue to develop after they have left high school. This often results in my students becoming more interested in Indonesia and studying Indonesian at university.

Linda Keyte, BRIDGE teacher at Mullumbimby High School

> Mullumbimby High School

Similar to Southern Christian’s partnership, cross-cultural relationships and effective language and cultural learnings have been a key marker of the Indonesia BRIDGE partnership between Mullumbimby High School in New South Wales and SMAN 5 Mataram in Lombok, launched in 2009. In late 2013, Linda Keyte, BRIDGE teacher at Mullumbimby, described the most significant change for her school as follows: ‘Long-term friendships developed between students that continue to develop after they have left high school. This often results in my students becoming more interested in Indonesia and studying Indonesian at university.’

The foundation for cross-cultural relationships between students at both schools started to evolve with students’ online interaction. The schools set up a BRIDGE partnership Wikispace, which has been used regularly to facilitate communication between students and occasionally for curriculum-based activities and assessment. This has been complemented by occasional videoconferencing via Skype, which at one occasion was attended by the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Greg Moriarty, and the Australia-Indonesia Institute Board.

While these online interactions have been important in establishing the partnership, most learning activities have revolved around the reciprocated student and teacher visits in 2011 and 2012. Further exchange activities are being planned for 2014. These mutual visits generally involve intensive in-country experiences for teachers and students, both in Indonesia and Australia.

According to Mullumbimby’s Principal, Ian Graham, the school has benefitted substantially from its BRIDGE involvement. He stated that ‘although the school had been teaching Indonesian language for many years, the BRIDGE project added a deeper dimension to the study’. He alluded to the capacity of BRIDGE to foster global learning and positive intergroup relations beyond the classroom:

*School education needs to equip our young people to resolve global issues and in particular, break down stereotypes ... To do this we need to work with our closest neighbours, speak each other’s languages, and understand our similarities and differences. BRIDGE aims to go beyond the classroom into communities and families, developing long-lasting connections.*

Linda stated that her and her students’ language and ICT skills, as well as their knowledge and awareness of Indonesia’s history, geography, literature, arts and cultures, have expanded as a result of BRIDGE. Moreover, she agreed that her and her students’ intercultural understanding has grown deeper. (Linda defines intercultural understanding as ‘understanding of our own culture and how it compares, contrasts and interacts with other cultures’.)

A key success factor of the school partnership has been the personal commitment and enthusiasm of the BRIDGE teachers at Tranby and SMA Negeri 5, as well as the relationships they have developed.

### > Tranby College

Tranby College in Western Australia started its Indonesia BRIDGE partnership with SMA Negeri 5 in Surabaya, in 2009. One of the main motivators for Tranby was the hope that the school partnership would facilitate visits and reciprocated exchanges by staff and students.

After the professional learning session in 2009, the two schools have organised regular country visits that involve numerous students and teachers. Prior to its engagement with BRIDGE, Tranby had undertaken overseas study trips to Indonesia for almost a decade. Each year, since 2010, 30 Indonesian students have visited Tranby College, staying with host families and participating in various in-school and out-of-school activities.

Tranby students and teachers (including Vicki Richardson, BRIDGE teacher at Tranby) have reciprocated these overseas visits, participating in a range of school and cultural activities. During the first three years of this exchange program (2010-2012) around 42 students and 11 teachers (in various learning areas) from Tranby have participated.

The cross-cultural exchanges between large numbers of students from both partner schools have resulted in deeper cultural knowledge about each other's country, increased motivation for language learning, strengthened language skills, and the fostering of cross-cultural relationships. These student-to-student relationships have been sustained and further developed through very regular online communication via SMS, email and Facebook. This interaction has been supplemented by some joint learning activities, which are, however, less central to the partnership than the in-country experiences and associated learning processes. The key platform for 'back-home' classroom learning activities is the schools' joint Wikispace, with some level of collaboration still maintained on the site.

A key success factor of the school partnership has been the personal commitment and enthusiasm of the BRIDGE teachers at Tranby and SMA Negeri 5, as well as the relationships they have developed. Vicki elaborated that 'the vitality of the program ... is a function of the quality of the personal relationships that have been established' and that the school partnership is sustainable as a result.

According to Vicki, BRIDGE has had both a structural and personal impact on her school. For example, student enrolments in the Indonesian program (Years 9–11) have increased enormously. On a more personal level, the cross-cultural friendships have helped to extend the participants' language learning, cultural knowledge and intercultural understanding, which Vicki described as the ability to 'live without confusion in a foreign country' and to 'learn about our own culture and ourselves objectively'.

Moreover, Vicki viewed an increased understanding of Islam amongst both staff and students as the most significant change for her school, leading to a reduction of prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. It is also noteworthy — and indicative of the students' enthusiasm and commitment — that three students from Tranby travelled to their partner school (for between 1-6 months) after their Year 12 graduation in order to support students in Surabaya with their English language learning as volunteers.

This interpersonal engagement resonates with research findings on intergroup relations. The previously identified conditions of positive intergroup contacts (e.g. collaboration and common goals) should not be treated as absolute preconditions, but as enablers for the development of intercultural understanding and the reduction of stereotypes (Pettigrew, 1998). These intergroup interactions, however, do need to offer people the chance to get to know each other on a personal level and look beyond the cultural surface (see Pettigrew, 1998; Walton, et al., 2013). Moreover, cross-cultural contacts need time to flourish and develop into friendships, and must be characterised by a 'tendency for familiarity to breed liking' (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 766).

### > Kormilda College

Kormilda College in the Northern Territory also illustrates how BRIDGE has enabled students and teachers to foster close interpersonal relationships with their partner school and, in doing so, encouraged intercultural and language learning. Both the Principal at Kormilda and the language/BRIDGE teacher, Kathryn Luscher, were interested in BRIDGE because of the opportunity it offers to facilitate 'more consistent contact with native speakers of Indonesian [which] would help maintain and develop ... students' language skills'.

In 2009, Kormilda started its Indonesia BRIDGE partnership, initially with a school in Lombok. However, due to technical and communication difficulties, this partnership failed to make progress and students' engagement began to falter. With Kathryn's resilience and commitment, Kormilda, with AEF's assistance, was able to establish a partnership with SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya (Java) in 2010. Since that time, Kormilda's partnership has thrived, with reciprocated intensive exchange programs being the core partnership component. These intensive encounters established the foundation for a sustainable school partnership and the development of personal relationships.

Kormilda hosted the first visit of 25 students and 3 teachers from its partner school in October 2011. The visitors lived with Kormilda families and attended classes with their host student every day. A series of visits has taken place since then.

This trip was incredibly rewarding and educational. I have made many new friends and stepped out of my comfort zone to become a more confident and culturally aware person.  
Year 12 student at Kormilda College

Students and teachers from the Indonesian partner school have visited Kormilda every year (in 2011, 2012, and 2013) and in 2013 Kormilda sent some of its students and teachers to Surabaya. These visits have influenced the vitality and value of the school partnership considerably, laying the foundation for cross-cultural friendships between students and (at times) parents, who have since been in regular contact through social media. These exchanges serve also an educational purpose, as they offer valuable opportunities for students and teachers to develop their intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge, and language skills.

In reflecting on one of the visits from Indonesian students and teachers to Kormilda, Kathryn noted: ‘Overall, it was a very positive and inspiring experience with all involved, forming lasting friendships and increasing their intercultural understanding, and in doing so developing greater awareness of the way our two societies and cultures think.’

Students at Kormilda also value their partner school visits similarly. A Year 12 student who participated in the 2013 trip to Indonesia reflected (Kormilda College, 2013):

*This trip was incredibly rewarding and educational. I have made many new friends and stepped out of my comfort zone to become a more confident and culturally aware person. I have also learnt so much about Indonesian people, culture and language ... I also really enjoyed learning about Indonesian culture and seeing it in practice, for example, when we visited the largest mosque in Surabaya. As well as this, my language skills have improved significantly.*

Kormilda students and teachers also participate in classroom videoconferences via Skype, which are held every few weeks. These Skype sessions are organised by the two partner BRIDGE teachers, offering opportunities for synchronous contact and content-based discussions on curriculum-related issues (e.g. Indonesian music, Independence Day, Ramadan). Students at the Indonesian school use the joint Wikispace, completing learning activities and generating content that provides authentic language learning resources for Kormilda students.

The impact of the exchange visits has unfolded on both a personal and structural (school) level at Kormilda. Kathryn indicated that BRIDGE has helped lift the profile of the Indonesian language program, which has attracted a continuously high number of students. On a more personal level, students and teachers have improved their Indonesian language proficiency, expanded their cultural knowledge and awareness about Indonesia, and developed deeper intercultural understanding.

Assisting students to become globally and interculturally competent is emphasised at Kormilda. An article on the BRIDGE partnership in the school’s 2012 magazine, Tangini, underscores this: ‘Key words used by Kormilda students to describe how they have grown and developed as individuals from this experience: responsibility, communication, friendship, understanding, tolerance, patience, open-mindedness, awareness, confidence, and appreciation’ (Kormilda College, 2012, p. 59).

Similar to Tranby’s school partnership, Kormilda has managed to use BRIDGE to foster intercultural engagement and cross-cultural friendships without necessarily meeting all of Allport’s (1954) success factors. The key to success in Kormilda’s partnership is the close personal friendships that have developed during the regular exchange visits. This suggests that explicit collaborative tasks may not be required for developing intercultural understanding provided students have other opportunities to become friends.

All of these activities are characterised by the endeavour to involve more people within the school community and beyond, to support the development of a sustainable school partnership and to reduce the burden of responsibility on a lone BRIDGE teacher.

Leadership, both school leader and teacher-led, is an important element for the development of sustainable school partnerships. Some schools have been particularly successful in creating communities of learners, thus contributing to the successful implementation of partnership activities. Other schools have undertaken activities involving the whole school and/or wider community. All of these activities are characterised by the endeavour to involve more people within the school community and beyond, to support the development of a sustainable school partnership and to reduce the burden of responsibility on a lone BRIDGE teacher.

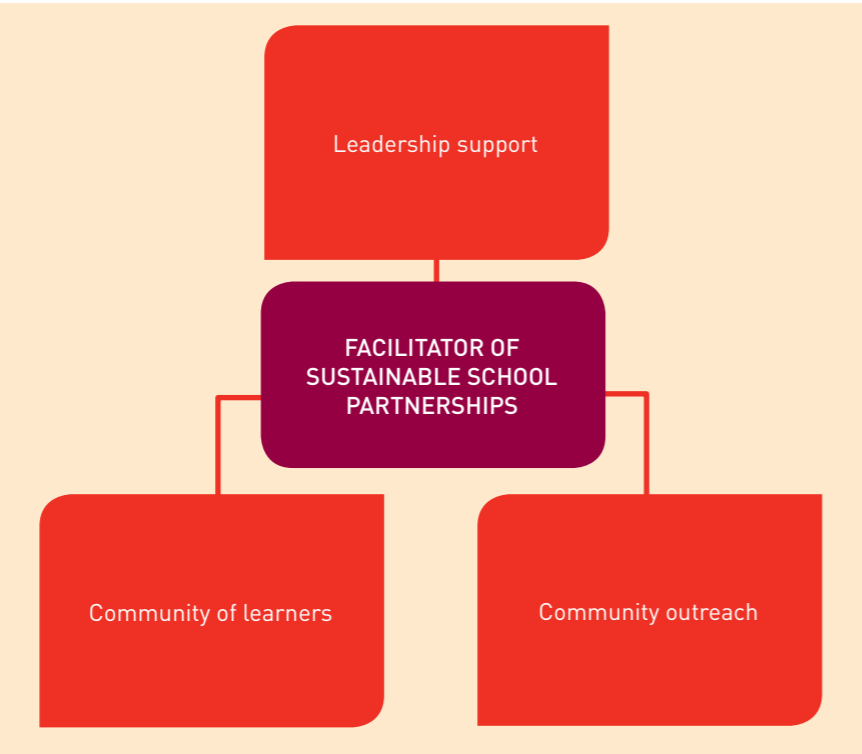


Figure 20: BRIDGE as a facilitator of sustainable school partnerships

The survey findings confirm that BRIDGE often functions as a facilitator of sustainable school partnerships. For example, a majority of Australian BRIDGE teachers (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that steps have been taken to plan for the sustainability of their partnership. Around half of all Australian respondents also confirmed that their partner schools have been involved in different types of direct collaboration activities, which is generally considered a key factor for successful school partnerships (Edge, et al., 2010, p. 13).

Some partnerships have led also to positive structural developments in school language programs.

For example, 47% of Australian BRIDGE teachers agreed that their school collaborates with the partner school to plan a schedule of activities, and 53% indicated that they have collaborated with their partner school to carry out joint learning activities. Such forms of cross-school collaboration may result in BRIDGE partner schools building communities of learners. 57% of Australian BRIDGE schools agreed or strongly agreed that BRIDGE has enabled them and their respective partner schools to build such communities, which contribute to the school partnership’s sustainability. Previous research has highlighted the importance of school leadership support for sustainable international school partnerships (Colmar Brunton, 2012b; Edge, et al., 2010). The majority of Australian BRIDGE teachers reported such support, with 77% agreeing or strongly agreeing that school leaders actively support the partnerships. Some partnerships have led also to positive structural developments in school language programs. Such changes, which go beyond the explicit objectives of BRIDGE, also contribute to the sustainable impact of BRIDGE. 17% of Australian BRIDGE schools have expanded their language offerings as a result of the BRIDGE partnership. Moreover, 21% have recorded increased enrolments in their respective language programs since their involvement in BRIDGE, and 71% indicated improved student engagement in language classes. The following illustrations demonstrate how selected BRIDGE schools have undertaken measures to ensure the sustainability of their respective school partnerships.

- > **St Martins Lutheran College**  
St Martins Lutheran College in South Australia joined China BRIDGE in 2011, starting its partnership with Shouguang Century School in Shandong. The BRIDGE teachers of both schools have participated in professional learning seminars and overseas study/exchange visits. Students and teachers from St Martins have visited their partner school, and the reciprocated visit took place in late 2013. Students have been involved actively in videoconferencing and have used online learning tools and social media to communicate (e.g. WeChat, QQ). Some students have also engaged in an online pen pal relationship. While these are important features of St Martins’ involvement in BRIDGE, the partnership also is indicative of how BRIDGE schools have made concerted efforts to ensure the sustainability of their partnerships by obtaining leadership support and working towards establishing a community of learners. Both St Martins and Shouguang have received strong leadership support and commitment, including that of the two Principals.

St Martins' involvement in BRIDGE has had tactile implications for the school. For example, the number of Year 10 students enrolled in Chinese has increased from around one or two to 11.

The schools signed a Memorandum of Understanding — common to many BRIDGE partnerships — during the Australian Principal's visit to Shandong. The Shouguang Principal reciprocated the visit in January 2013, when a formal partnership agreement between the two schools was signed.

In addition, the Chinese language and BRIDGE teacher at St Martins, Mingxia Wei, who recently won the Council of Education Associations of South Australia (CEASA) Early Career Teacher Award for her innovative teaching, has sought to share her experiences more broadly through a community of learners. She has delivered a number of workshops to other teachers of Chinese, made a presentation on the BRIDGE partner school at a staff meeting, and spread information about BRIDGE by sending a newsletter to a Chinese online network.

St Martins' involvement in BRIDGE has had tactile implications for the school. For example, the number of Year 10 students enrolled in Chinese has increased from around one or two to 11. When asked about the most significant change that BRIDGE has brought for the school, Mingxia responded: 'Support from BRIDGE has motivated the school and the community to further develop the relationship with partner schools in China by investing in the Chinese program and school visits.' These structural achievements reflect the schools' efforts to ensure a sustainable future for the partnership.

Moreover, on a personal level, BRIDGE helped Mingxia overcome a structural problem that many Chinese language teachers face in rural and regional contexts: feelings of isolation in their job as a teacher (Orton, 2008). She considered this as the most significant change for her as a teacher as a result of BRIDGE, redressing the lack of help and support she used to experience, commenting: 'BRIDGE helped me out of the woods! I mean it!'

### > St Francis Xavier's Regional Catholic School

Like St Martins, St Francis Xavier's Regional Catholic School in South Australia illustrates the establishment of sustainable partnership structures by involving various school community stakeholders in their implementation of BRIDGE. St Francis Xavier's has participated in BRIDGE since 2013, when it formed a partnership with Yiyuan Experimental Primary School in China. Both schools have taken several targeted measures to ensure the partnership's sustainability, which include leadership commitment, financial support, and the involvement of other staff.

The partnership and, more specifically, the teacher exchange program, receive full support from school leaders.

Shared responsibility for the operation of BRIDGE within a school is a crucial step towards sustainability.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Principals of both schools 'to ensure the continuation of the program into the future', as Roma, the BRIDGE teacher at St Francis Xavier's, explained. Moreover, the St Francis Xavier's school board has approved financial support for teacher visits to the Chinese partner school over the next three years, and in-principle support to continue the partnership has been obtained from parents. These activities reflect the general administrative support that has been identified as a key success factor for the sustainability of overseas teacher exchange programs (Rapoport, 2011). The financial concessions made by the school board are significant, given that most BRIDGE projects (except for Indonesia BRIDGE) do not provide direct monetary support for participating schools.

Shared responsibility for the operation of BRIDGE within a school is a crucial step towards sustainability. Roma mentioned a 'committee of teachers, which include leadership' who discuss how to organise BRIDGE activities and further develop the school partnership (e.g. how to encourage student-to-student communication). Research has highlighted the importance of an internal school teacher team for the sustainability and institutionalisation of teacher exchange programs (Rapoport, 2011). Moreover, Roma has run a professional learning session with staff, sharing her experiences from her travels to the partner school in China. She added: 'I also have shared photos and videos of my experiences as well as given them some ideas on how to include China into their lessons as part of the Asia and Australia's engagement with Australia cross-curriculum priority.'

In addition, these endeavours to involve other staff members in the partnership have supported enhanced intercultural understanding amongst teachers as well as greater recognition of the school's language program, which Roma has described as the most significant change for her school as a result of BRIDGE.

### > Southern Christian College

The Indonesia BRIDGE partnership (est. 2009) between **Southern Christian College** in Tasmania and SMA Muhammadiyah 1 has been described earlier as a successful example of how schools have used BRIDGE to foster cross-cultural engagement and relationships. The school leadership at Southern Christian has implemented various measures to sustain these activities, which resonate with the three success factors for the sustainability of teacher exchange programs: 1) 'personal responsibility' of the teachers involved; 2) 'administrative support'; and 3) 'building a team' of like-minded teachers (Rapoport, 2011, pp. 4–6).

Southern Christian has been particularly successful in involving a large number of teachers in the BRIDGE partnership. As of late 2013, almost half of the staff members at Southern Christian have visited the partner school.

This partnership enjoys full support from the school leaders at both schools. For example, school leaders at Southern Christian, including the Principal, have participated in overseas study tours to Indonesia and have visited their partner school.

They also promote BRIDGE amongst staff and provide ongoing financial allocations to support overseas visits. Through this commitment from leadership, Southern Christian has been particularly successful in involving a large number of teachers in the BRIDGE partnership. As of late 2013, almost half of the staff members at Southern Christian have visited the partner school at least once and created teacher links. Scott, BRIDGE teacher at Southern Christian, highlighted that the number of teachers 'with a direct experience of Indonesia and its language' has increased significantly.

This increase has been made possible through the school's dedicated budget allocation and the teachers' personal (and also financial) commitment. While the overseas visits of two teachers were funded externally — one by the Myer Foundation and the other by NALSSP via the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies (ACICIS) — the other visits have been paid for by the participating teachers. Scott added that 'Southern Christian College aims to send a new teacher to Indonesia each year and the College is now funding half of their travel'.

Moreover, the BRIDGE teacher's commitment to sharing his experiences with colleagues has played an important role for the development of a community of learners. Scott explained that he has run 'language professional learning sessions for all staff, sharing ... the values of international mindedness with staff, and encouraging discussions about the annual trips and the students' engagement in these'.

### > Heathmont College

As described previously, the partnership between Heathmont College (Victoria) and SMP Negeri 1 Karangmojo in Java (est. 2012) demonstrates how schools have benefited from the authentic teaching and learning opportunities provided through BRIDGE. This partnership also illustrates successful ways of sustaining partner school relationships through internal (school) support and by creating communities of practice beyond the school.

School leaders at both schools support BRIDGE actively, and Prema Devathas, BRIDGE teacher at Heathmont, considered this a basic precondition for the successful operation of BRIDGE and other language programs. Similar to other BRIDGE partnerships, this support has led to the signing of a formal partnership agreement in December 2012.

Heathmont College has gone a step further in strengthening the BRIDGE partnership and its Indonesian language program by reaching out beyond its own school community.

This agreement underscores the commitment of Heathmont and its senior leaders to advancing the BRIDGE partnership with SMPN 1 and specifies key project activities for the future.

Heathmont College has gone a step further in strengthening the BRIDGE partnership and its Indonesian language program by reaching out beyond its own school community. Prema has been engaged in two activities that involve the establishment of a community of practice. First, she has taken on the 'privilege', as she called it, to mentor two beginning Indonesian teachers at Highview College. This involves regular and mutually beneficial sessions, mainly via email, wiki and Skype, during which she shares her experiences as an Indonesian (and BRIDGE) teacher, to 'harness and channel' the beginning teachers' energy and help them achieve their own goals to advance Highview's Indonesian program.

Second, Prema convenes a local cluster school program, which involves, in addition to Heathmont, four primary schools. The aim of this cluster is to improve Indonesian language transition between primary school and secondary school. Prema explained: 'All the Principals have come on board and here we are developing a continuous curriculum across level 4 and 5 [in order to] support a seamless transition between primary and secondary school.'

Teachers of all five schools work together and discuss practical details of implementation. This school cluster collaboration not only contributes to the feasibility and sustainability of the Indonesian program at Heathmont, but also has positive implications, on a personal level, for both the primary and secondary school students. Prema explained: 'The primary school students get a taste of what secondary Indonesian is all about, and my students have a platform to use their learning and their expertise.'

This school cluster collaboration also led to an Asian Intercultural Day at Heathmont in September 2013. Over 100 students and language teachers from five primary schools participated in a range of intercultural activities, some of which related to BRIDGE. The Day was organised by teachers from the participating schools, assisted by Years 7 and 8 Heathmont students of Indonesian. A Skype session was held with the BRIDGE partner school, whose students participated in a live Q&A session and performed traditional Indonesian dances.

BRIDGE has become an integrated element of Heathmont's Indonesian program, and school leadership has undertaken various activities aimed at sustaining and expanding both its Indonesian program and the BRIDGE partnership. The systematic collaboration with local primary schools is one way of creating communities of practice, which contributes to the overall reach, impact and sustainability of BRIDGE.

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