



School-community collaboration

What is school-community collaboration about?

The word *community* comes from the Latin *communis* – meaning the quality of fellowship, sharing of social relations or feelings. *Community* is related to democracy and described as a forum in which citizenship can be expressed.

Plato formulated a beautiful ideal about community; he describes the individual members of the community as the fingers on a hand. Plato expresses a very strong sense of community that is perhaps less common in modern society. Nevertheless, most people have experience of receiving and giving social support, e.g. advice, information, practical help, compassion and care. All these are essential elements in the promotion of health within a community. Strengthening community action is a main element in health promotion, as is the involvement of the local community in school activities.

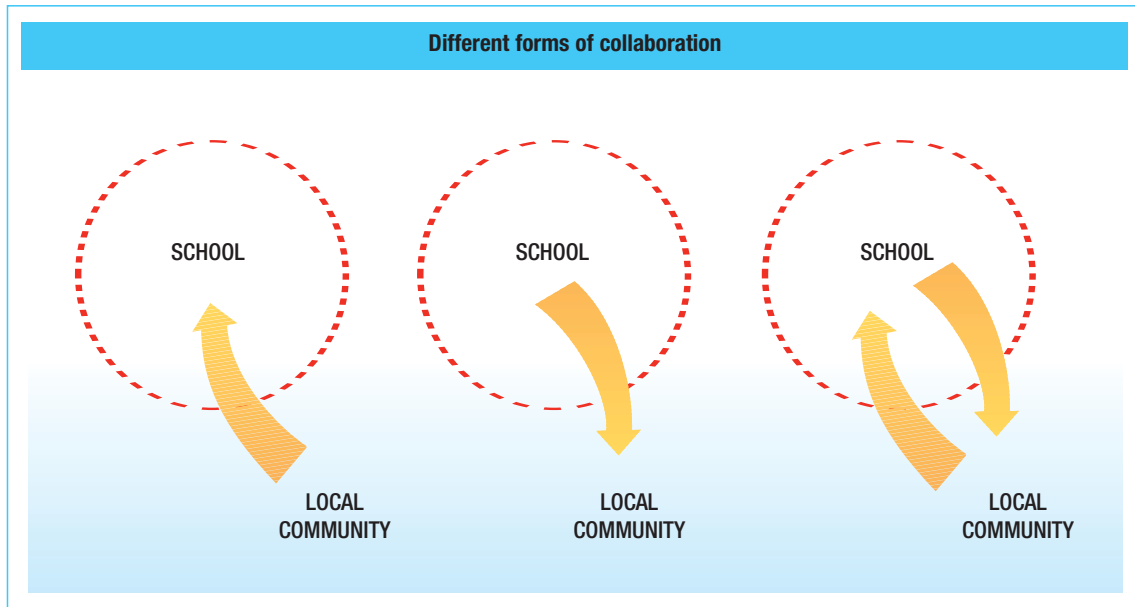
“When one of us hurts his finger, the whole extent of those bodily connections which are gathered up in the soul and unified by its ruling element is made aware and it all shares as a whole in the pain of the suffering part.”

The Republic of Plato, in CORNFORD, 1967: 164.

Collaboration literally means *working together* and presupposes the establishment of social relations between the partners in the collaboration. *Collaboration* is often described in a very positive way, as dialogue, mutuality and equality. But it can also be described by one-way communication, the use of power or a division of labour.

Three different forms of collaboration between school and community are described below.

In the first form of collaboration – **from community to school** – out of school reality is brought into school. Here, the school, a class or a group of pupils invite a health professional, a local sports club officer or a local housing officer from the community to get information and inspiration from outside the school. The influence goes in one direction: from the local community into the school.



In the second form of collaboration – **from school to community** – the pupils go out into the community, gather information, disseminate results from a school health project, or try to influence living conditions and lifestyles that affect health. In this form of collaboration, the influence goes in one direction too: this time, from the school out into the local community.

The third form of collaboration – **a dialogue or two-way collaboration** – is a reciprocal collaboration. It involves the school and the pupils establishing social relations with individuals or groups in the community with a view to working towards a shared aim (e.g. promoting health and wellbeing), either by influencing lifestyles or living conditions. The Shape Up approach suggests this last form of collaboration. Collaboration provides authenticity, that is, the project activities as close as possible to the pupils' everyday life and the reality that is in the pupils' future.

The school-community collaboration can be seen as a prerequisite for the development of citizen participation and democracy. By guiding the pupils to participate in collaboration activities, the school will also develop the pupils' possibilities to participate in democracy.

Thus, the school–community collaboration in Shape Up involves:

- Adult-adult and child/youth-adult interaction
- More than a division of work, tasks and competences
- Building social relations – getting to know each other
- Children, young people and adults, groups with different interests, wishes, potentials and needs, working together
- Sharing an arena for action, a joint vision and a goal to work towards

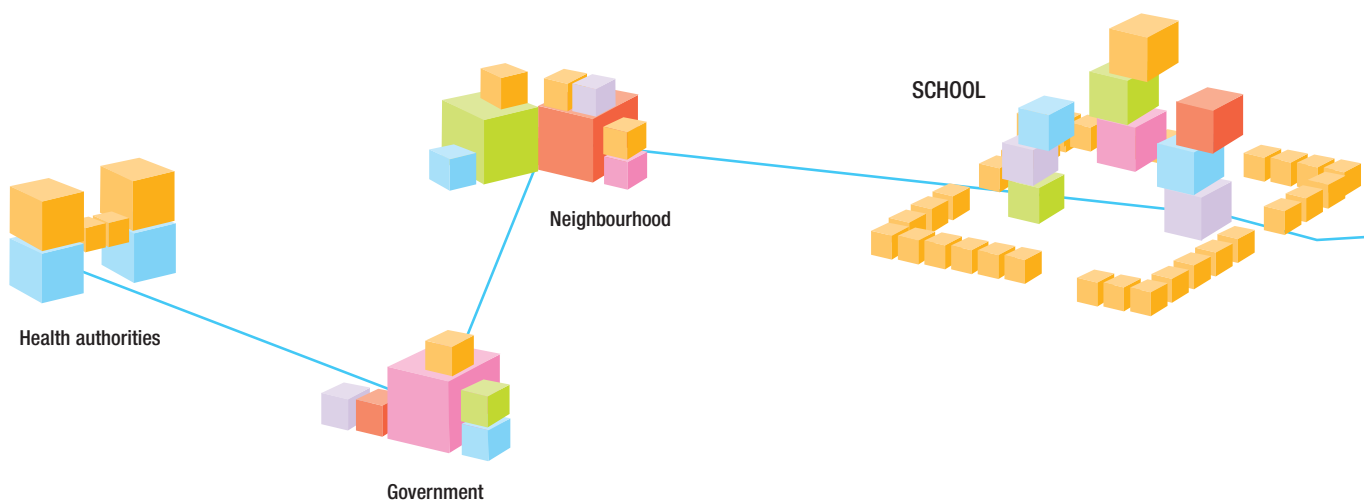
Benefits and outcomes

Both school and community benefit from collaboration:

- The school can draw on the knowledge and experience of the local community, providing practical examples of health work that otherwise would have to be treated only in an abstract and theoretical manner.
- The school provides an obvious setting for resource people to teach health topics, for example, and the school and pupils can help to promote health, both in the school and the local community.
- School/community collaboration provides pupils with opportunities to practice skills of enquiry, value analysis and clarification and problem-solving in everyday situations, all key aspects in the IVAC approach to health promotion and health education.

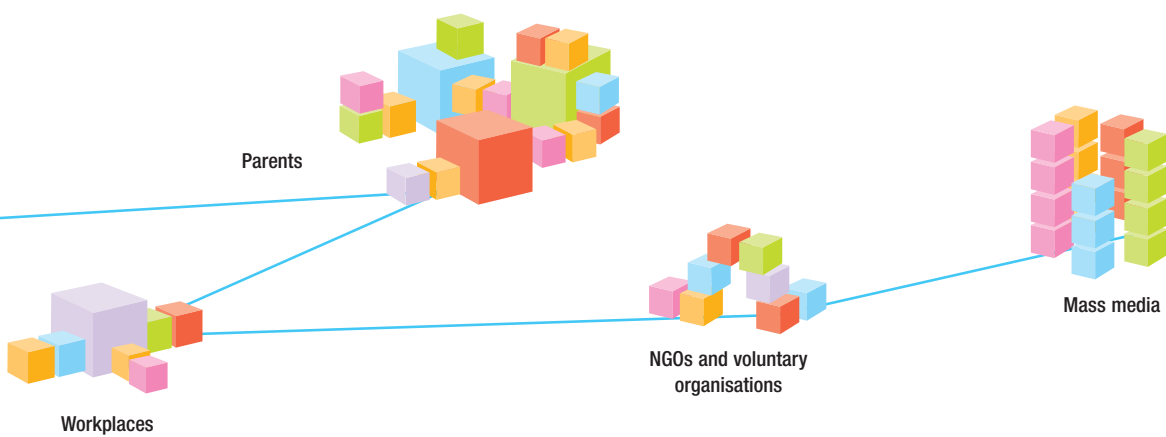
The school-community collaboration is conducive to the following outcomes:

- Children and young people's experiences with interaction, action and social/cultural diversity in the community.
- Children and young people's perception of themselves as social agents who can influence their surroundings through their insight and visions regarding a health issue or problem.
- Sense of membership and belonging, sense of importance for the group, care and responsibility for other people.
- Engagement and motivation in relation to health issues.



Potential partners from the community

- Health authorities: local health promotion services, community health councils, healthy city officers, community nurses, health visitors, school doctors, dentists and nurses.
- Government: social workers, local housing officers, youth workers, local police stations, environmental health officers, sport officers, public relations department, city planning, parks and green areas department, traffic/transport department, etc.
- Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and voluntary organisations: the Heart Foundation, the local Alcoholics Anonymous or Weight Watchers representative, youth groups, community groups, environmental associations.
- Neighbourhood: Community networks of all kinds, e.g. community arts centres, green housing communities, local Agenda 21 centres, community gardens, resource centres, food cooperatives and eco-solidarity movements, multicultural/immigrant associations.
- Mass media: e.g. local newspapers and TV and radio stations, the Internet.
- Parents: parents can be partners in different ways: they can inform pupils on different health topics, they can help to coordinate health actions, such as keeping a family diet diary that keeps track of the family diet, or they can participate in health education projects, such as raising public awareness, helping to implement and assessing health change strategies.
- Workplaces: health and safety officers from the parents' workplace, or you may have a parent at school working with health or environmental issues at work (this partner may be available only through personal contacts).



Tips and advice

Working with school-community collaboration

- **Clarify the roles of children and young people**

The project needs to be discussed thoroughly with the community partners involved so the roles of the pupils and the schools are clarified. If the school and pupils are perceived by the local community partners solely as a means by which certain predefined tasks can be carried out, the conditions for a project building on pupil participation and actions will be difficult. Instead, a perception by the community, in which the school is seen as a constructive dialogue partner, will give the participants room for action and will strengthen the fundamental values underpinning Shape Up.

- **Organise events to discuss the project principles**

Various local workshop or dialogue activities should be organised to involve all local partners in joint processes. For instance, a study circle involving key people from the local community, teachers and parents can be a crucial element in developing a shared understanding of the project and its key principles.

- **Plan major community events**

It is a good idea to plan major events (e.g. Shape Up week) in which all pupils and many key players from the local community are involved at the same time. This gives a great community spirit and will attract the attention of citizens, politicians and the press, and therefore contribute to initiating sustainable changes.

- **Involve the press**

Establish close relationships with the local press from the beginning of the project. Journalists can also be involved in some of the activities.

- **Work in teams**

Work in teacher teams; this gives support, and a space for sharing experiences and reflections with others.

- **Ensure support**

Make sure the school management is involved in planning and approving the school-community collaboration.

- **Select partners carefully**

In the start-up phase, find out which partners could (or should) be interested, which are available, and mind-map and negotiate roles and functions in the collaboration.

- **Prepare local community partners to collaborate with children and young people**

Make sure that the communication is negotiated with the partners in the projects and that, for example, it is alright to receive phone calls, letters or e-mails from pupils.

- **Prepare children and young people to collaborate with partners in the local community**

- Make sure the pupils are well prepared when they contact the partners in the local community; you can give them a letter of introduction from the school, explaining the school project.



Tips and advice

Working with school-community collaboration

- Advise the relevant people in the local community that the pupils will contact them and what the project is about, and prepare a note explaining the project. Ensure that the correspondence bears the school logo and has the school contact details on it.
 - Prepare a note for the parents as well, giving a brief description of the project work (including the fact that the pupils will contact people inside the school or in the local community).
- **Background preparation**
- Ideas for questions and advice for consideration that the teacher or Shape Up facilitator can suggest to pupils before they approach local community partners include:
- Who are you going to contact and how are you going to make agreements about when and where to meet?
 - How are you going to introduce yourself and your project?
 - Agree upon the length of time the meeting will last. This should not be more than 20 minutes but, if pupils are offered 5 minutes, they may have to be prepared to accept that.
 - When you meet with the partners from the local community, prepare exactly what you want to say in advance and state how they can help you. Be ready to provide a detailed explanation about your project work.
 - You can work in pairs or teams. Each team member should have a specific role, e.g. interviewing the person, writing down the feedback, taking notes on action points, etc.