



Schalkau, Thuringia, Germany

Community School “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe” Schalkau

How to teach community spirit



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
Community
Collaboration

FUNDAÇÃO
Lemann



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-----------|----------|-------------------------------|
| 02 | — | Introduction |
| 03 | — | School Profile |
| 04 | — | Context and Challenge |
| 07 | — | Expertise and Approach |
| 10 | — | Outcomes and Results |
| 12 | — | Key Steps |
| 15 | — | Advice and Guidance |



The background image shows two students working on a wooden structure, possibly a balcony or a raised garden bed. A girl in a blue puffer jacket is standing on the structure, and a boy in a blue jacket with a 'TRA' logo is standing on a ladder next to it. The structure is made of dark wood and has a wooden floor. The background is a light-colored wall with horizontal lines.

Introduction

Community School “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe” Schalkau in Thuringia, Germany, teaches its students that the best way to truly learn is by working with the community – their belief is that school is a collaboration with many crucial partners including local companies, kindergartens, institutions, retirement homes, the police, and local authorities. Focused on vocational training, the school’s motto is: “Together we are strong”.



Profile:



Country:
Germany



Region:
Schalkau, Thuringia



School type:
Public school



Location area:
Rural



Student population:
501 to 1000



Prize Category:
Community Collaboration

“Students learn that communication and cooperation are very important, that they get different kinds of experiences that can help them in so many ways.”

**– Heike Bröder,
English and
Economic teacher,
Community School
“Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe”
Schalkau**



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Community School “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe” Schalkau, where the school could not implement any of its programmes, collaborations, or maintain its contacts. Sometimes, not all project participants were able to take part due to COVID infections or quarantines. Moreover, some planned actions/projects had to be cancelled, for example, the “Night of Professions” in January 2022 or the tree planting project in November 2021.

Still, the school continued to raise its students’ awareness and interest in teamwork and problem-solving, not only at school but in their daily lives as well, especially while they had to be home-schooled

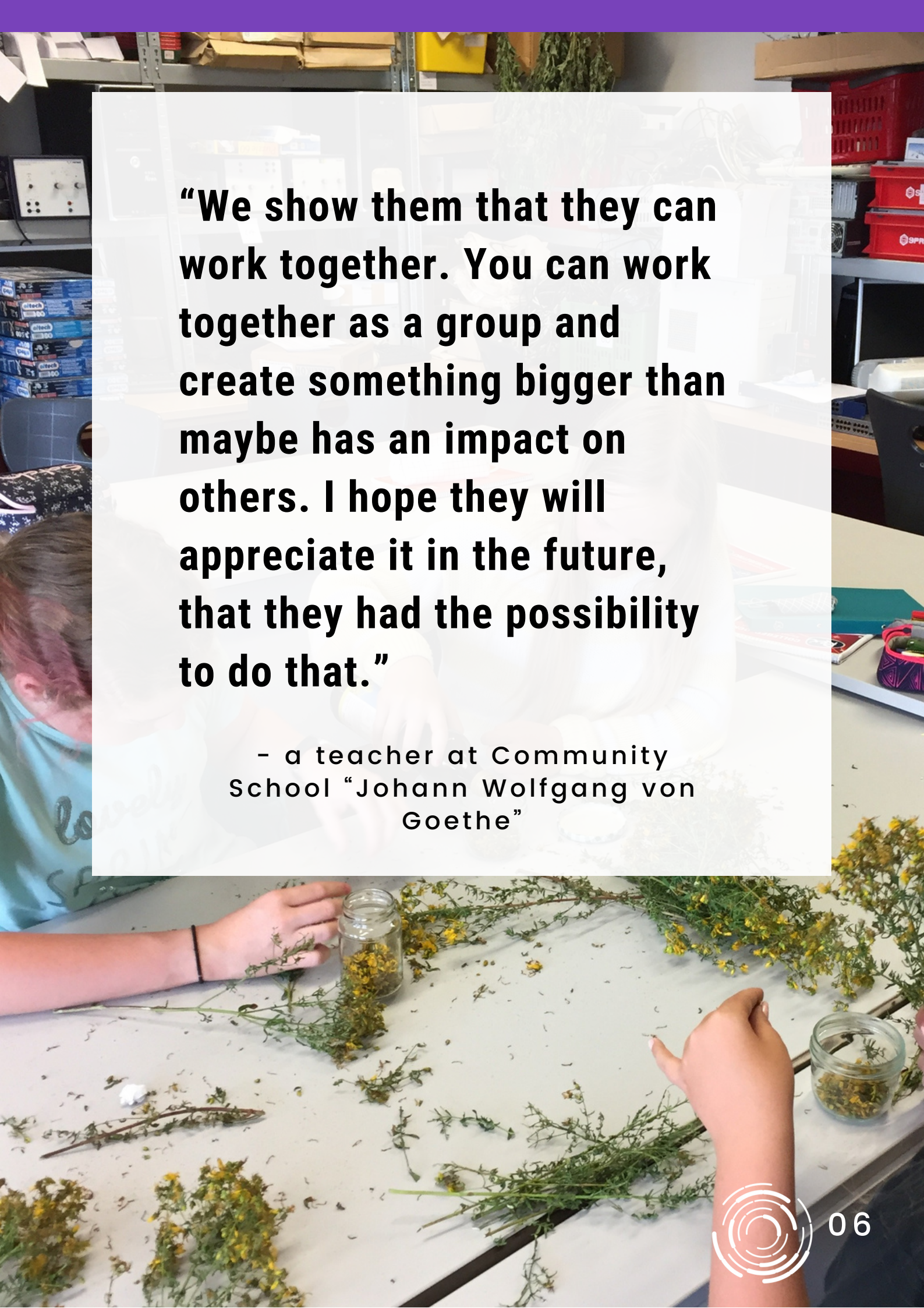
due to the pandemic.

However, when the faculty had to start thinking of new remote tasks, projects, and ways of learning, they were initially daunted by the scale of what they had to do. “It was like a fire that spreads,” said one teacher.

The school infrastructure was another challenge: in 2021, one of the buildings burned down, reducing the number of classrooms and workshops. In particular, the building was often used for meetings and as a project workspace.







“We show them that they can work together. You can work together as a group and create something bigger than maybe has an impact on others. I hope they will appreciate it in the future, that they had the possibility to do that.”

- a teacher at Community School “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe”



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

To overcome the pandemic-related issues, the school devised a number of workarounds to keep its students active within the community even if they couldn't be physically present. After the success of one of its initiatives, the school developed more programmes that would encourage students to have positive experiences with community members. "We started small but then it got more and more festivals and people involved," said Heike Bröder, an English and Economic teacher at Community School. "But it started from the teachers and the staff."

As a result of these initiatives, the students took more pride in working with outsiders and contributing to community goals, which led to the school developing more projects to familiarise students with everyday challenges they might encounter during their education. One of the school's core values is "learning together from each other", and so the school encouraged students to think collaboratively to tackle these challenges.

One of the school's initiatives saw students build playhouses, market stalls, and outdoor seating for the local Christmas market. Students made banners and small wooden toys and sold beverages like mulled wine at the market. All age groups were involved, each taking charge of different aspects of the school's stall at the Christmas market. The market stalls were then reused for several other events throughout the year.

Student-led groups work with IW JUNIOR GmbH Cologne, organised by the German Economic Institute, came into being so the pupils can gain new experience and knowledge in the field of collaborations and networking.

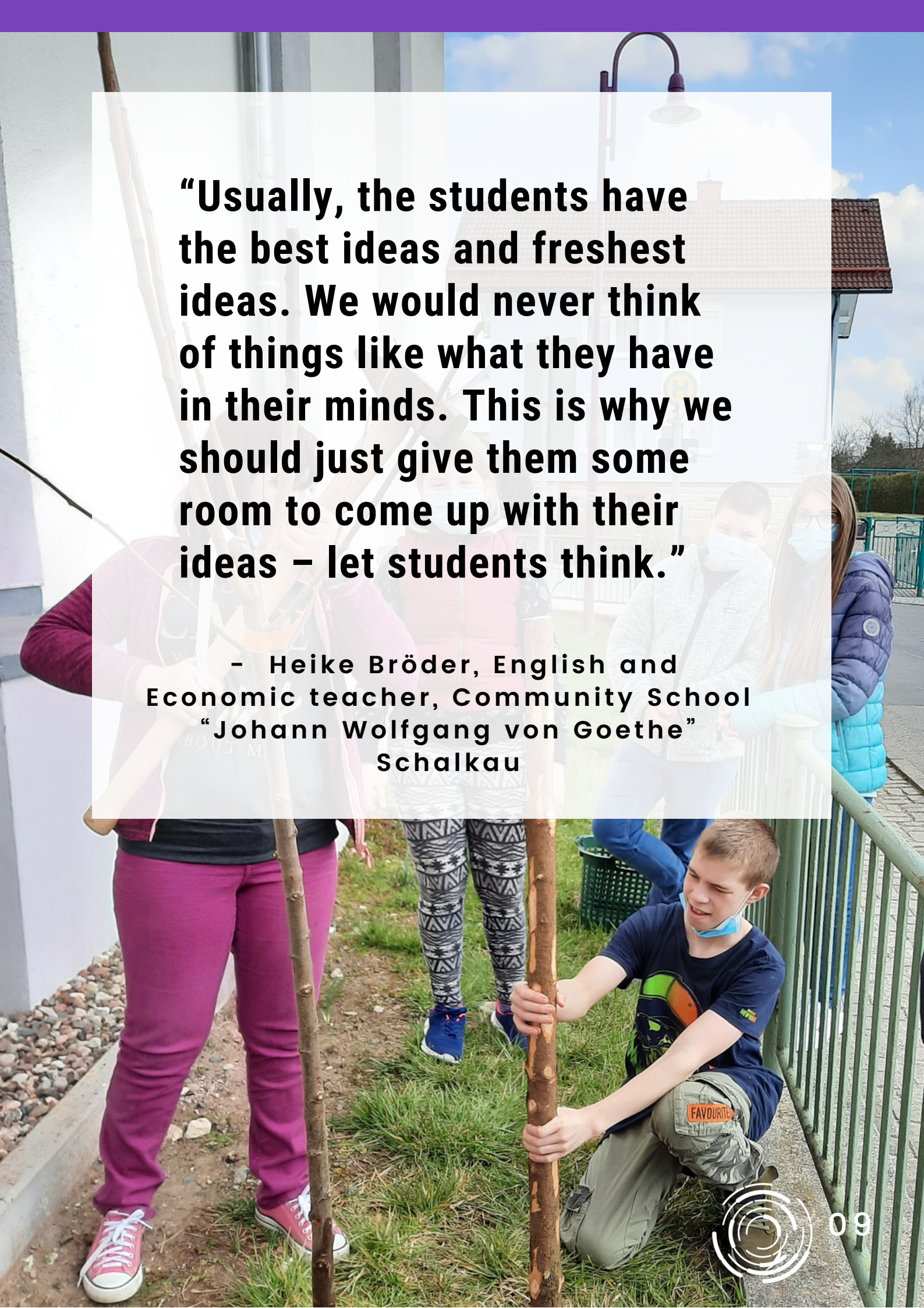


The school also provides support to its students by encouraging them to learn through experience and gain knowledge about the wider community through engagement with local partners e.g staff of the police, forestry department, health care organisations, local associations etc.

In addition, the school allows students the freedom to get involved in more creative community work that often intersects with national holidays.

Annually, all-year groups search for new sponsorships from community leaders and businesses in order to better understand history, traditions and handicraft techniques. Students also make their own initiatives. One form 8 class restored a local green space not too far from the school grounds. They mowed the grass, swept away the litter and prepped the space for sports activities and made it into a welcoming space for the community to enjoy again. Students in older grades pursued similar initiatives, cleaning up areas that are often covered with rubbish and other debris; the school also asked students to design ways to make outside communal areas cleaner and implemented some of those ideas to great success. The school also organises a job fair called the “Night of Professions”, with regional companies to inform students, parents, job seekers and interested people in the region. Usually, it takes place in January; however, due to COVID this year's “Night of Professions” took place on 6th October. It was for all people who are interested in jobs, internships, practical experience and great success. Besides, some students present their internship experience and their companies at the “Night of Professions”.



The background image shows a group of students outdoors. In the foreground, a boy in a blue t-shirt and camouflage pants is kneeling on the grass, holding a long wooden stick vertically. To his left, a girl in a maroon shirt and pink pants is also holding a similar stick. Other students are visible in the background, some wearing face masks. The scene is set in a grassy area next to a building with a white wall and a green metal fence. A street lamp is visible in the upper right corner.

“Usually, the students have the best ideas and freshest ideas. We would never think of things like what they have in their minds. This is why we should just give them some room to come up with their ideas – let students think.”

**- Heike Bröder, English and Economic teacher, Community School
“Johann Wolfgang von Goethe”
Schalkau**



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Students are given tasks via school cloud around the topics “from old into new”, by creating art for lonely people or elderly people, for example, form 5 and 6 had to write down ideas for “from old into new” and create new products out of used materials; forms 5 and 6 painted winter pictures and made Easter collages 2020/2021 (to make a present for the school’s cooperating retirement homes).

Furthermore, the School used the following methods in order to enable students to work from home properly: set up an intranet working with a school cloud handing out computing technology to pupils after verification of their liability insurance. Goethe School established contacts with retirement homes in times of Corona lockdown. Students of forms 5, and 6 drew winter or Christmas pictures and wrote Christmas cards. The best drawings were framed. The cards were written in German and the drawings were made

in Art and/ or during the homeschooling period.

Students in forms 7 and 8 produced Christmas decorations in their technology lessons. Several boxes were packed with Christmas drawings, Christmas cards& wishes, and decorations – all made by students. These were given to different local retirement homes for Christmas 2020. The elderly people were very happy when the gifts reached them. They said, “Thank you.” via email. The staff of the retirement homes sent us photos of seniors with presents.

In addition to digital lessons in home-schooling in a variety of ways (video conferences, upload of learning videos, use of various communication platforms, constant personal contact through phone calls and emails) extraordinary measures were also taken after the partial resumption



office-to-face teaching. For example, teaching small groups at the students' places of residence outside of school. As a result, Goethe School managed to take over a large part of the processes for regular lessons after the pandemic (no school bell anymore, changed the rhythm of the school day to optimize school processes and improved adaptation to local conditions). Because of its response to the pandemic, a number of innovations were created to help break new ground and allow the school to proceed with its annual projects that acted as a core part of its brand identity.



Key Steps



TREE PLANTING PROJECT

Goethe School implemented several planting tree projects throughout the years. First, the project “Each class plants a tree,” which included forms 1-10 started in 2020/21. The students responsible for its tree, act as caretakers for the particular they are in charge of looking after. Second, students at our Community School supported with the help of their teachers and some parents a project of planting trees in cooperation with the regional forestry department.

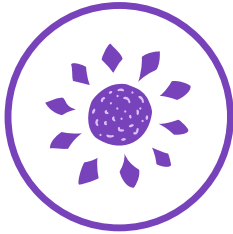


INTERNSHIPS

A number of internships for students of forms 8, 9, and 10 are done once a year, students choose their companies for a duration of 7-14 days. Through the annual 7-day or 14-day internships in grades 8 through 10, a network with numerous regional companies was established, which is constantly being improved.



All those companies are also invited to take part in the annual job fair “Night of Professions” where they can present their job offers to the interested.



SUNFLOWER PROJECT

During the homeschooling time in the winter of 2021 the Community School did the “sunflower project” where all students (forms 3-10) got sunflower seeds and had to grow sunflowers out of them at home (with the help of their parents/ families). The project took several weeks’ time. The students got written instructions and had to take care of the sunflower seeds (watering, the right temperature, sunlight, etc). In this way, the students were responsible for the growth of their own sunflowers. At the end of the project, the learners had to create a “product” that is connected to the sunflower.



COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY

The implementation of sustainability and collaboration are closely connected with the work of student groups that work with IW JUNIOR GmbH Cologne/ JA Europe.



Students would focus on sustainability in their products and services, for example, using waste wood to create new wooden products such as seats, benches, houses for kids to play etc.



NATURE CAMPAIGNS

Twice a year Community School “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe” Schalkau runs and supports campaigns of counting birds, insects and bugs. These counting projects are conducted in collaboration with NABU, Germany's largest nature conservation NGO. The primary sections of the school at three locations perform these counting projects in winter and spring/summer. The young learners (forms 1-4) get instructions on which birds, insects, or bugs they should be looking for.



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Total involvement of all students in sustainable agriculture: use and transformation of the school gardens: build an insect hotel; plant and harvest herbs for making healthy tea for our students; different gardening jobs; cross-class learning; grow small tomato plants in the classroom (form 5,6), later plant them in the school garden or the school area; use vegetables grown in the school gardens to prepare healthy meals or breakfasts.



Advice and Guidance

Listen to your students, and what their interests and talents are – use that information to design projects that will capture their attention and nurture their creativity. They tend to have the best ideas and should let students shape the direction of the projects the school is interested in implementing. There also needs to be a level of trust involved between faculty and students in order for this kind of expertise to work as it is often student-led. The school also encourages other institutions to not be afraid of failure and that the final product does not have to be of the highest quality as long as it helps bring students and the wider community together.

More information



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<https://goetheschule.edupage.org/>

Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: [watch here](#)

