

Collaborative Professionalism

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مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في التعليم

An Initiative of Qatar Foundation



Andy Hargreaves
Michael T. O'Connor

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Andy Hargreaves
Michael T. O'Connor

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Foreword

Debates about education reform usually include some variation on the refrain: **Nothing will happen without good teachers.** But often the discussion around teaching is displaced by the allure of technology as the new driver of change. This trend is fed by an overly utilitarian view of education as solely a process for imparting useful knowledge and skills, and the modish idea that information and communications technology can largely replace teachers. Education, however, is always more than this. Its purpose is also to bring values, to inspire, and to socialize. Crucially, good teaching must be at the heart of the enterprise for these enduring relational activities.

Schools may be full of good teachers, but unfortunately, too many have been accustomed to working alone, in silos, with little feedback and meaningful interaction with others. In this research, Andy Hargreaves and Michael T. O'Connor present distinct, close-up portraits of communities in which teachers emerge from isolation for deeper dives into candid, thoughtful dialogue. In building communities of focused 'collaborative professionalism', these teachers form a collective responsibility that ultimately supports young people in becoming the change makers they seek to be.

The authors use these portraits as models of collaborative professionalism—as contrasted with mere professional collaboration—for building strong and effective teaching and learning. They make a strong case for communities of expertise and service where collegial solidarity permeates cultures of teaching, and strives to connect student learning with big ideas of social transformation.

One of the featured portraits is of the Escuela Nueva model, which WISE has supported in the recognition of its co-founder, Vicky Colbert, as a WISE Prize for Education Laureate. With its rigorous, student-centered focus, Escuela Nueva has thrived in rural Colombia without the top-down, standardized and narrow sets of learning conventionally prescribed by government for poor communities. The research pushes deeply into the questions raised in the portraits, reflecting the wealth of nuance in teacher interaction. It elaborates the narrative with well-considered guidelines for supporting collaborative professional culture, and includes keen observation on what works and what does not.

Among the strengths of this research is the open invitation to re-imagine and envision what is possible. What if our teachers worked on curated crowd-sourcing of educational practice? Wouldn't that be so much more powerful than performance-related pay as an approach to professional growth and development? Technology could be used to create a giant, open-source community of teachers and educators outside schools and unlock the creative skills and initiative of its teachers, simply by tapping into the desire of people to contribute, collaborate and be recognized for it.

Stavros N. Yiannouka
CEO
WISE

Executive Summary

From Professional Collaboration to Collaborative Professionalism

Collaboration is the new chorus line for innovation and improvement. The OECD strongly promotes it, many teacher unions are behind it, and more and more governments are seeing the point of it. The evidence that, in general, professional collaboration benefits students and teachers alike has become almost irrefutable. Professional collaboration boosts student achievement, increases teacher retention, and enhances the implementation of innovation and change. The big questions are no longer about whether teachers should collaborate. No profession can serve people effectively if its members do not share and exchange knowledge about their expertise or about the clients, patients, or students they have in common. The big questions, rather, are about how and how well teachers and other educators collaborate. Not all kinds of collaboration are desirable or effective, and not all are appropriate for the people who practice it or for the task at hand.

Our report makes the case for collaborative professionalism as a deeper and more rigorous form of professional collaboration. Professional collaboration refers to how people collaborate within a profession. That collaboration may be strong or weak, effective or ineffective, emerging or mature, and undertaken one way or another. Collaborative professionalism is about how people collaborate more professionally and also how they work as a profession in a more collaborative way. Professional collaboration is descriptive — it delineates how people work together in a profession. Collaborative professionalism is normative — it is about creating stronger and better professional practice together.

The professional aspect of collaboration is about exercising good judgment, being committed to improvement, sharing and deepening expertise, and getting neither too close to nor too distant from the people the profession serves. The collaborative aspect of professionalism refers to how members of their profession labor or work rather than merely talk and reflect together. In a capsule definition:

Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success. It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep, and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. The joint work of collaborative professionalism is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care for and have solidarity with each other as fellow-professionals as they pursue their challenging work together, and where they collaborate professionally in ways that are responsive to and inclusive of the cultures of their students, themselves, the community, and the society.

We make the case for collaborative professionalism through describing its evolution in research, policy, and practice, and then illustrate its nature through portrayals of international models of deliberately designed professional collaboration in five countries. This evidence leads us to set out ten tenets of collaborative professionalism designs. We also outline four contextual and cultural factors (what we call the four Bs) that are indispensable when attempting to initiate and implement these collaborative designs in schools or systems elsewhere.

Developing Collaborative Professionalism

There are five evolutionary stages through which understandings of, and approaches to, professional collaboration have passed over the last half-century. After a long period in which the culture of teaching was one of individualism and where professional collaboration was largely absent, the five succeeding stages have been ones of:

1. **Emergence** — professional collaboration is an alternative to individualism where research demonstrates its positive impact on student learning and achievement.
2. **Doubt** — some forms of professional collaboration are too weak in their overreliance on talk rather than action. Others (known as contrived collegiality) are too forced when they are used to implement top-down mandates.
3. **Design** — specific models of professional collaboration are created in the form of professional learning communities, data teams, collaborative action research, and so on.
4. **Opposition** — promoters of competition as a way to evaluate performance and deal with failure among teachers and schools claim that professional collaboration initiatives have little or no impact.
5. **Transformation** — professional collaboration transitions to deeper forms of collaborative professionalism.

Designing Collaborative Professionalism

How do schools, professional organizations, and school systems deliberately design ways in which teachers can work together? Once evidence accumulated about the benefits of collaborative activity, different designs for collaborative work began to surface.

We went in search of different collaborative designs that were widely known in different parts of the world. We chose sites on four continents to ensure that diverse contexts and cultures were represented. We selected different designs of professional collaboration based on the message systems of schooling that they mainly addressed — curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, the whole school and its organization, and the relationship to the whole society.

Additionally, the collaboration had to involve groups of three or more educators who were participating within or beyond one specific school building. We also restricted our study to collaboration among education professionals, rather than ones that engaged other partners such as businesses or universities. After visiting seven sites, we chose five systems that were sufficiently developed in having persisted for at least four years.

- **Open Class/Lesson Study:** a Hong Kong secondary school, part of a network of 20, that has designed and developed its own version of Japanese lesson study where educators give each other feedback on collaboratively planned lessons.
- **Collaborative Curriculum Planning Networks:** a four-year old evolving network of 27 districts across four states in the US Pacific Northwest that engages teachers in “job-alike” groups for collaborative planning of curriculum units.
- **Cooperative Learning and Working:** a school in Norway that uses cooperative learning principles among its teachers as well as its students.
- **Collaborative Pedagogical Transformation:** highlighting the award-winning Escuela Nueva network of 25,000 schools that bases teacher collaboration on student collaboration and transformative pedagogy in rural Colombia to promote peace, wellbeing, and democracy
- **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** one of the most remote school districts in Ontario, Canada, that serves large proportions of aboriginal students, and that embraces teacher-led PLCs.

The Ten Tenets of Collaborative Professionalism

Analysis of the case studies points to ten tenets of collaborative professionalism that distinguish it from earlier versions of professional collaboration.

1. Collective Autonomy

In collective autonomy, educators have more independence from top-down bureaucratic authority, but less independence from each other. Teachers are given or take authority.

2. Collective Efficacy

Collective-efficacy is about the belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what.

3. Collaborative Inquiry

In collaborative inquiry, teachers routinely explore problems, issues, or differences of practice together in order to improve or transform what they are doing. At its best, collaborative inquiry is embedded in the very nature of teaching itself. Teachers inquire into problems before rushing into solving them.

4. Collective Responsibility

Collective responsibility is about people's mutual obligation to help each other and to serve the students they have in common. Collective responsibility is about our students, rather than just my students. It is about our schools in our community, not just my school on my own piece of land.

5. Collective Initiative

In collaborative professionalism, there are fewer initiatives, but there is more initiative. Teachers step forward, and the system encourages it. Collaborative professionalism is about communities of strong individuals who are committed to helping and learning from each other.

6. Mutual Dialogue

Collaborative professionalism and professional collaboration both involve teachers talking. What distinguishes collaborative professionalism is that talk is also about doing the work. Difficult conversations can be had and are actively instigated. Feedback is honest. There is genuine dialogue about valued differences of opinion about ideas, curriculum materials, or a student's challenging behavior. This dialogue is often facilitated, and its participants are sometimes protected by protocols that insist on clarification and listening before any disagreement is brought forth.

7. Joint Work

To collaborate is to labor or work together. Joint work exists in team teaching, collaborative planning, collaborative action research, providing structured feedback, undertaking peer reviews, discussing examples of student work, and so forth. Joint work involves actions and sometimes products or artifacts, like a lesson, curriculum, or feedback report, and is often facilitated by structures, tools, and protocols.

8. Common Meaning and Purpose

Collaborative professionalism aspires to, articulates, and advances a common purpose that is greater than test scores or even academic achievement on its own. Collaborative professionalism addresses and engages with the goals of education that enable and encourage young people to grow and flourish as whole human beings who can live lives and find work that has meaning and purpose for themselves and for society.

9. Collaborating with Students

In the deepest forms of collaborative professionalism, students are actively engaged with their teachers in constructing change together. In this respect, student voice is the ultimate end-point of student engagement.

10. Big Picture Thinking for All

In collaborative professionalism, everyone gets the big picture. They see it, live it and create it together.

The Culture and Context of Collaborative Professionalism

Whenever a new method, practice, or protocol surfaces in education, there is a common tendency to spread it too far and too fast, with little thought as to what else may be needed for the particular model or design to be effective. When we are considering adapting collaborative designs from elsewhere, there are four Bs of collaborative professionalism that can help us understand and also activate the contexts and cultures that precede, succeed and surround it.

- What came before the model existed?
- What other kinds of collaboration exist betwixt or alongside it in the school and in the distinctive culture of the whole society?
- What connections does any specific design have to collaborative ideas and actions beyond the school, elsewhere, in overseas schools, international research, or online interaction?
- What support does the system provide beside the specific collaborative design in government grants, official allocations of time for collaboration bargained by teachers' unions, or in wider professional networks?

Moving Towards Collaborative Professionalism

In the past twenty years, schools and systems have become more knowledgeable about how to shift from cultures of individualism to cultures of collaboration. But they have often pushed for the wrong kinds of collaboration in the wrong way. The next great shift will be in the movement from professional collaboration to collaborative professionalism. In collaborative professionalism, we want not only more collaboration, but also more professionalism involving good data and good judgment, more candid and respectful professional dialogue, more thoughtful feedback, more collective responsibility for each other's results, and more courageous engagement with bolder visions of education that will help young people to become change makers in their own and other people's lives.

Making it Happen

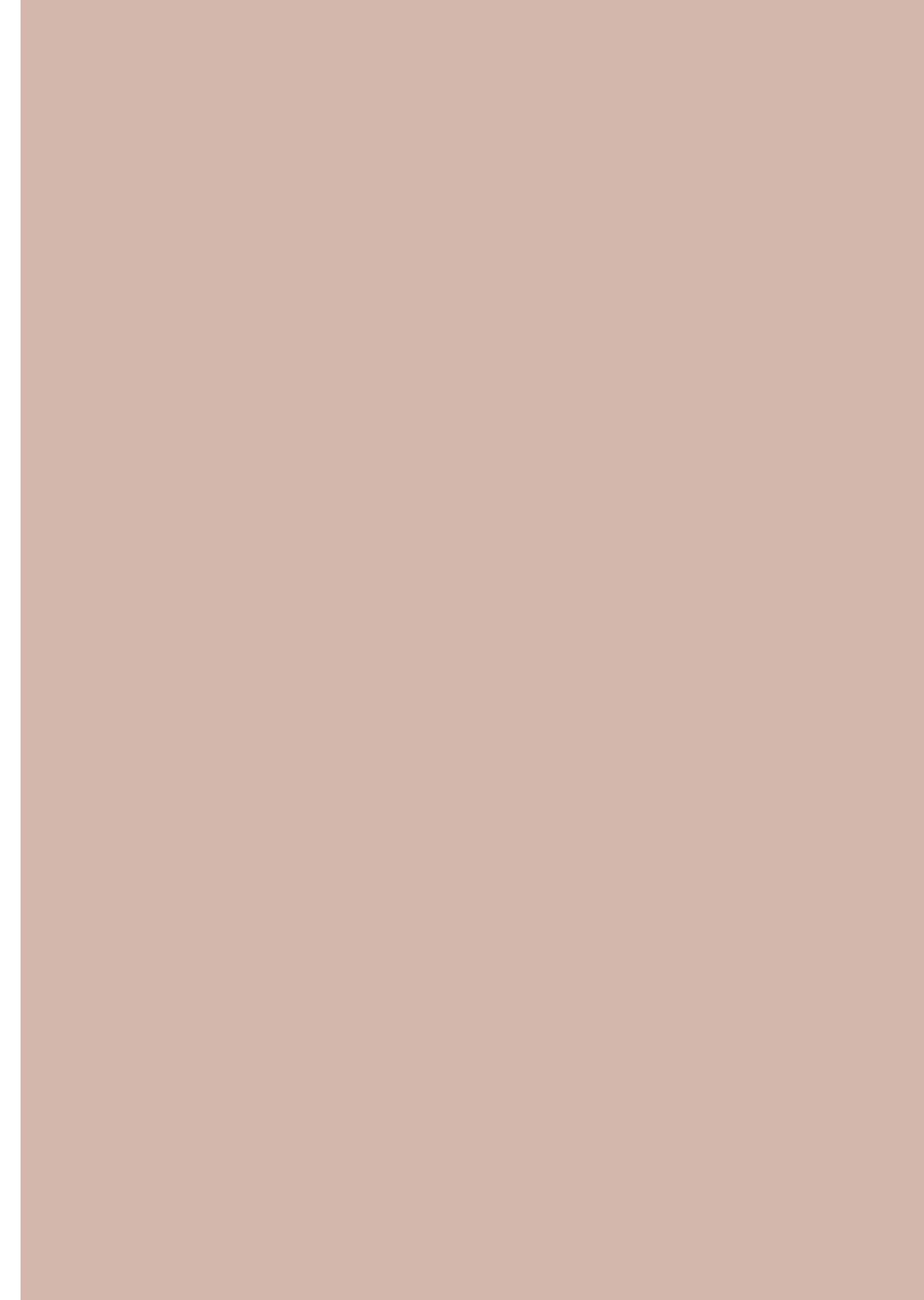
Last, we look at what practitioners, leaders, and policymakers can specifically do to make collaborative professionalism happen through determining what should be stopped, what should continue, and what should be started for the first time. We recommend that educators

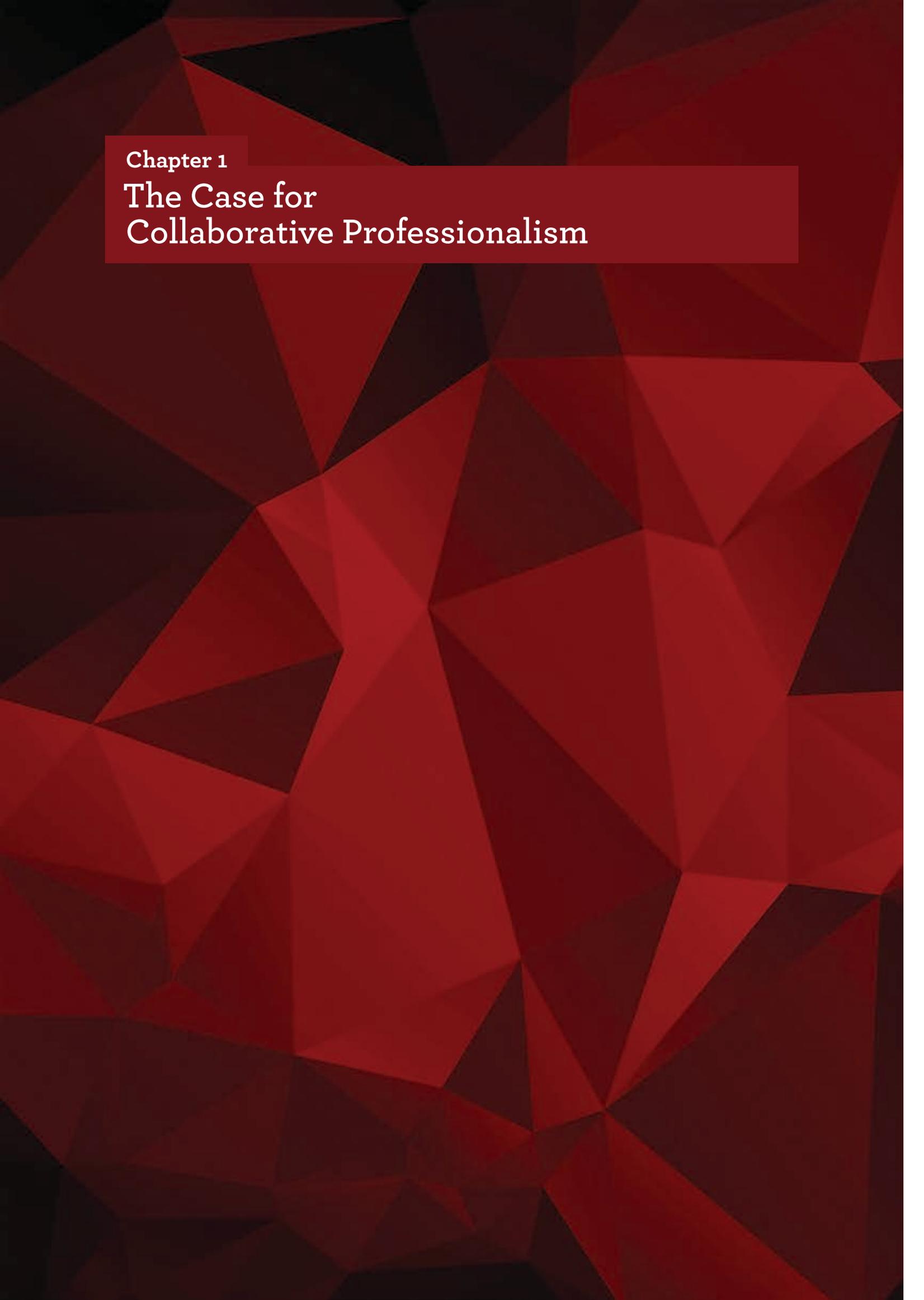
- Stop investing too much in data teams at the expense of broader collaborative inquiry;
- Stop importing unmodified alien designs from other countries and cultures;
- End high rates of educator turnover that destroy cohesive cultures;
- Keep evolving the complexity of collaborative professionalism beyond conversation or meetings to deeper forms of dialogue, feedback and inquiry;
- Continue soliciting critical feedback from peers inside and outside one's own community;
- Turn students into change-makers with their teachers;
- Adduce the added value of digital technology by carefully determining where and when it has a positive impact on collaborative professionalism;
- Build more collaboration across schools and systems including and especially in broader environments of competition.

In the past quarter century, teaching has made great strides in building more professional collaboration. It is now time for this to progress into collaborative professionalism, rooted in inquiry, responsive to feedback, and always up for a good argument. Are you a collaborative professional? Are you ready for this kind of challenge?

List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

- CMO:** Charter Management Organization
CI: Collaborative Inquiry
ELA: English Language Arts
EQAO: Education Quality and Accountability Office of Ontario
KP: Keewatin-Patricia School District
NW RISE: Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement Network
PD: Professional Development
PLC: Professional Learning Community
SRL: Self-regulated Learning
SEA: State Education Agency
TNTP: The New Teacher Project
TIMSS: Trends in International Maths and Science Study
US: United States
UK: United Kingdom





Chapter 1

The Case for Collaborative Professionalism

“Many hands make light work.”

“A trouble shared is a trouble halved.”

“No man is an island, entire of itself.”

Countless idioms testify to the value of teamwork and collaboration. Of course, there are also sayings to the contrary.

“If you want a job doing, do it yourself.”

“Too many cooks spoil the broth.”

“Misery loves company”.

Collaboration, community, and teamwork promise many benefits. These include greater efficiency, better results, moral consolation, enhanced motivation, commitment to change, worker retention, diversity of perspective, and tenacity in the face of obstacles or disappointments. A culture that works together also holds out the prospect of longer-term impact that is not dependent on one or two talented individuals who may leave as quickly as they arrived. At the same time, collaboration can lead to groupthink, evasion of personal responsibility, and the suppression of critical judgment. Teams can be used to implement the will of tyrants. Communities can become claustrophobic or communistic. Few people, anywhere, clamor for more meetings.

Every so often, in education, the positive potential of collaboration comes into prominence. It may be seen as a way to rebuild motivation in, and improve recruitment to, a profession that has become dispirited by the excesses of accountability. It might be needed to achieve sophisticated learning goals such as creativity and critical thinking that, unlike simple test score improvements, cannot be secured with prescription and compliance. It can be a way to galvanize massive collective effort to bring about equity and opportunity for marginalized groups by turning around and transforming their schools and communities. We live in a time when there is a great convergence between these things.

Collaboration is the new chorus line for innovation and improvement. The OECD strongly promotes it,¹ many teacher unions are behind it,² and more and more governments are seeing the point of it.³ The evidence that, in general, professional collaboration benefits students and teachers alike has become almost irrefutable.⁴ The big questions now are no longer about whether teachers *should* collaborate. No profession can serve people effectively if its members do not share and exchange knowledge about their expertise or about the clients, patients, or students they have in common. The big questions, rather, are about *how* and *how well* teachers and other educators collaborate. Not all kinds of collaboration are desirable or effective, and not all are appropriate for the people who practice it, or for the task at hand.

We need to know more about the different ways that educators can and do collaborate, about how effective these various approaches are, and about how appropriate they are for the cultures that are adopting them and the purposes for which they are being employed. We need to know it so that the teaching profession can become both more collaborative, and also more professional in order to have the best possible impact on all students and the future society.

In this report, we will encounter teachers who have built cooperation with each other by modeling it on the cooperative learning they have introduced to their students. We will see how teachers not only endure, but expect and encourage other teachers to come into their classrooms and give them critical feedback on their practice. We will come across teachers who have collaborated with each other across thousands of miles in rural America through finding ways for their students to collaborate with one another. We will experience how teachers seized the running of professional learning communities from their principals. And we will discover how thousands of teachers in Latin America worked together with their students and each other to build peace and democracy after decades of drug wars in their country.

This is a report about teacher collaboration. But it is not just about the clichés of how teachers talk, share and learn from each other and just need more time and support to do it. Nor is it about how teachers are put into teams to solve carefully specified problems through analysis of data in 40 days, 90 days or a year. Our report is about the hard but fulfilling work of collaboration that pervades cultures of teaching, and connects the daily issues of students' learning and development to big questions of social transformation through learning and teaching that has meaning and purpose.

1. Professional Collaboration and Collaborative Professionalism

Professional collaboration refers to how people collaborate within a profession. That collaboration may be strong or weak, effective or ineffective, emerging or mature, and undertaken one way or another.⁵ *Collaborative professionalism* is about how people collaborate more professionally and also how they work as a profession in a more collaborative way. *Professional collaboration* is descriptive—it delineates how people work together in a profession. *Collaborative professionalism* is normative—it is about creating stronger and better professional practice together.

Professions used to be defined as occupations whose members had specialist expertise, a monopoly on the service they provided, and autonomy of judgment. Professions were regarded in terms of what separated professionals from each other. Professions also placed their members above the clients they served through what could often be mystifying language or seemingly obscure knowledge⁶. If professionals collaborated at all, many people felt, it

was to “close ranks” against those who criticized them or challenged their judgment. In the words of the English playwright, George Bernard Shaw, professions were “conspiracies against the laity.”⁷ The internet has made that privileged and protected position almost impossible to sustain.

The *professional* aspect of collaboration is about exercising good judgment, being committed to improvement, sharing and deepening expertise, and getting neither too close to nor too distant from the people the profession serves.⁸ The *collaborative* aspect of professionalism refers to how members of their profession labor or work rather than merely talk and reflect together. Collaborative professionalism is a paradoxical juxtaposition of the two ideas of professions and labor. Historically, professions have been defined in terms of their autonomy. Unions, by contrast, have been defined by their solidarity. Whether teachers are professionals or laborers has been a long-running debate in education—not least, among teachers themselves.⁹ The point of collaborative professionalism is that the collaborative aspect is not directed only to defending pay and working conditions—though these also matter a lot—but also to working hard, or laboring together with everyone’s collective might, on behalf of all the students in a school, a district or a nation.

One of the first definitions of collaborative professionalism emerged in Ontario, Canada where one of us serves as an education advisor to Premier Kathleen Wynne. In 2014, the Government of Ontario set out new goals for education that included broadly defined excellence, greater equity and inclusion, and enhanced wellbeing¹⁰. The new priorities called on all the collective skills and capacities that teachers and other professionals could muster. In elementary schools, teachers who were unconfident in math would need to work closely with those who had greater expertise. Classroom teachers would need to work alongside those with special education assignments. Addressing the risks to child wellbeing called for teachers to collaborate with mental health professionals. The educational system was coming out of a period of austerity, and relationships among all the partners in the system had to be rebuilt.

In response to these changes, the Ministry of Education and its partners set out “a vision for collaborative professionalism that improves student achievement and well-being.”¹¹ It defined collaborative professionalism as professionals at all levels:

*Working together, sharing knowledge, skills and experience to improve student achievement, and the well-being of both students and staff. Collaborative Professionalism values the voices of all and reflects an approach in support of our shared responsibility to provide equitable access to learning for all. All staff are valued and have a shared responsibility as they contribute to collaborative learning cultures.*¹²

Not everyone was comfortable with this strategy of collaborative professionalism. Administrators feared they might lose their authority. Teachers were concerned it would be a way for principals to make them work on unwanted priorities together against their will. Through a lot of discussion and building of trust, most of these fears were dispelled.

The idea and strategy of collaborative professionalism were supported by thought-leaders in Ontario education. Carol Campbell argued that complex learning outcomes required “an ecosystem of formal and informal leaders and learners...being enabled and equipped to learn together, to share their knowledge, to de-privatize practices, to innovate and to co-create improvements in professional knowledge, skills and practices”.¹³ Lynn Sharratt said that collaborative professionalism meant school leaders would need to develop a genuinely shared vision with teachers and others.¹⁴

This language of sharing, learning, and co-creating is positive and necessary. But it may not go deep or far enough. There’s no talk about giving and receiving feedback and what that should look like; about professional dialogue and how deep or demanding that should be; or about cultivating critical thinking among teachers concerning popular change strategies. And students are almost invisible in this version of collaborative professionalism. They are the objects of collaborative professionalism, rather than engaged subjects who could work with teachers to bring about positive change together.

With Michael Fullan, one of us has tried to probe more deeply into what collaborative professionalism should be beyond sharing, talking, trusting and learning.¹⁵

Collaborative professionalism, we argue, should be a culture that permeates the whole school or system, not just a set of meetings or task-driven teams. It should promote “regular quality feedback related to improvement.”¹⁶ It should explicitly contribute to the improvement of the wider society. In collaborative professionalism, “everyone is involved: no exceptions”.¹⁷ There is enjoyment as well as impact; better time as well as more time.¹⁸ There is diversity and disagreement in a culture that values the individual as part of the collective.¹⁹ Last, there is collective responsibility for other people’s impact on their students as well as personal responsibility for teacher’s impact on students of their own. The school is no longer just about “my” students. It is about “our students.” Collaborative professionalism certainly entails sharing, talking, trusting, co-creating and learning. But it also values other verbs such as challenging, critiquing, including, empowering, and debating.

Collaborative professionalism is about working well together in a professional way. It is hard work for a good cause, but it is not self-abnegating or joyless. Collaborative professionalism makes teaching more interesting and engaging for everyone who is involved in it. Our report addresses these and other aspects of collaborative professionalism through five different global examples that also have some common and compelling characteristics.

2. Project Design

The findings from this report were reached after reviewing selected literature, drawing on our own international experience of researching and supporting professional collaboration efforts around the world,²⁰ then analyzing data from different global education systems that were implementing different examples of professional collaboration in education. We chose the examples by first determining which forms of collaboration were relevant and presently being used or considered in education, according to the research literature²¹ and how they addressed five different message systems of schooling: curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, whole school, and relationship to the whole society.²²

Additionally, the collaboration had to involve groups of three or more educators who were participating within or beyond one specific school building or site since dyads, or groups of two, have very distinct dynamics compared to larger groups.²³ This ruled out forms of collaboration such as mentoring, coaching or team teaching. We chose sites across the globe on four continents to ensure that diverse contexts and cultures were appropriately represented, especially since ways of collaborating, like ways of being or senses of time, can vary across different national and regional cultures and societies.²⁴ We also restricted our study to collaboration among education professionals rather than ones that also involved other partners such as businesses or universities.

After visiting each of seven sites and writing up preliminary case studies²⁵ we chose five systems to highlight in the report that were sufficiently developed in having existed and persisted for at least four years. For each of these final cases, we wrote a case study narrative.²⁶ These cases were then used to build the argument of this report to detail the characteristics and elements that represent collaborative professionalism in education.

The final five cases that are included in this report—*Open Class* / lesson study in Hong Kong; curriculum planning in the NW RISE Network in the US Pacific Northwest; cooperative learning and working in Norway; the *Escuela Nueva* model of collaborative pedagogical transformation across schools in Colombia; and a distinctive form of professional learning communities (PLCs) in the Keewatin-Patricia district of northwest Ontario, Canada—represent diversity of schools, systems and cultures, while also depicting different and distinct collaborative designs (Image 1). They indicate the key aspects of deeper collaborative professionalism in action.



Image 1. The global representation of the cases.

3. The Organization of the Report

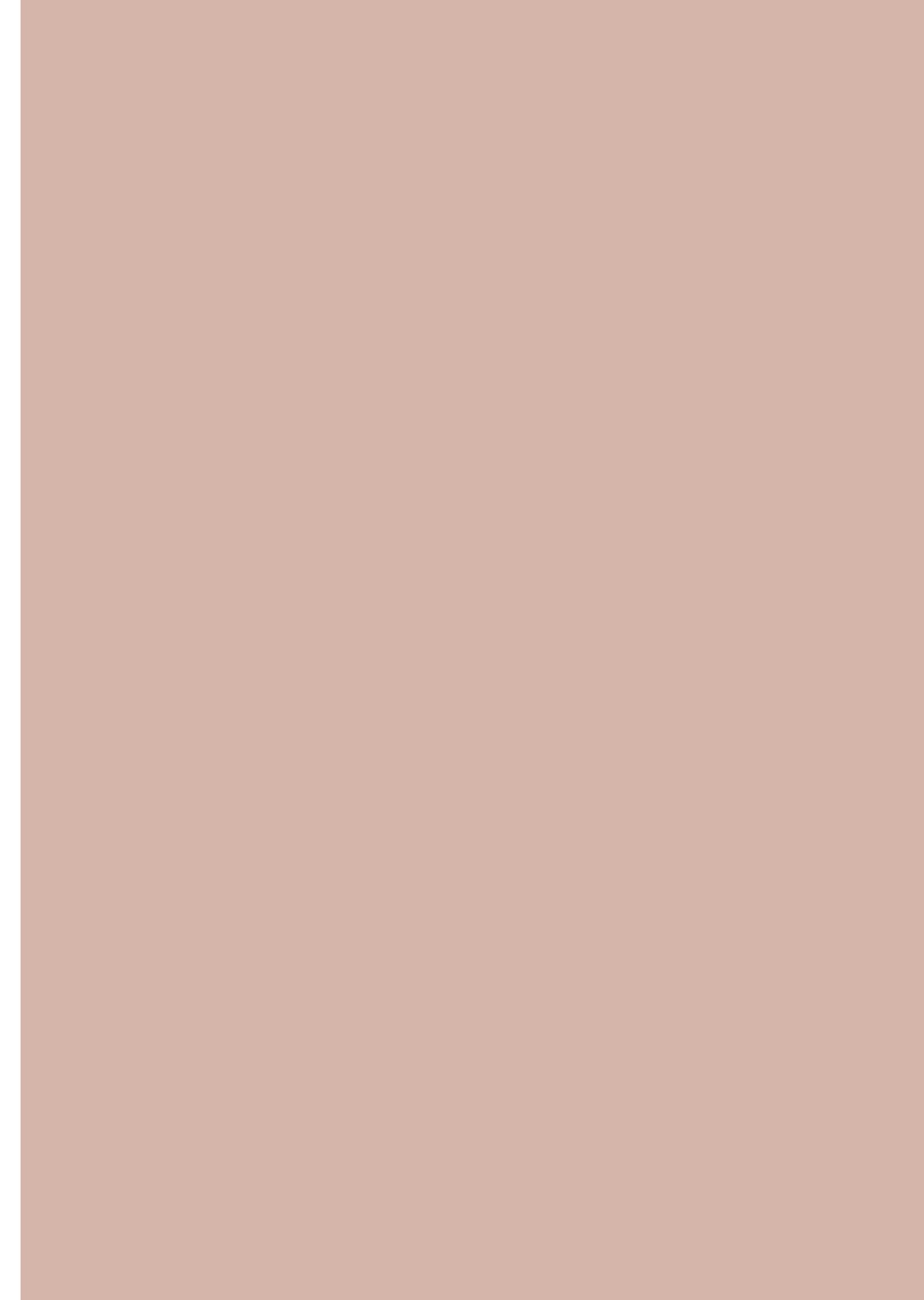
The remainder of our report does four things:

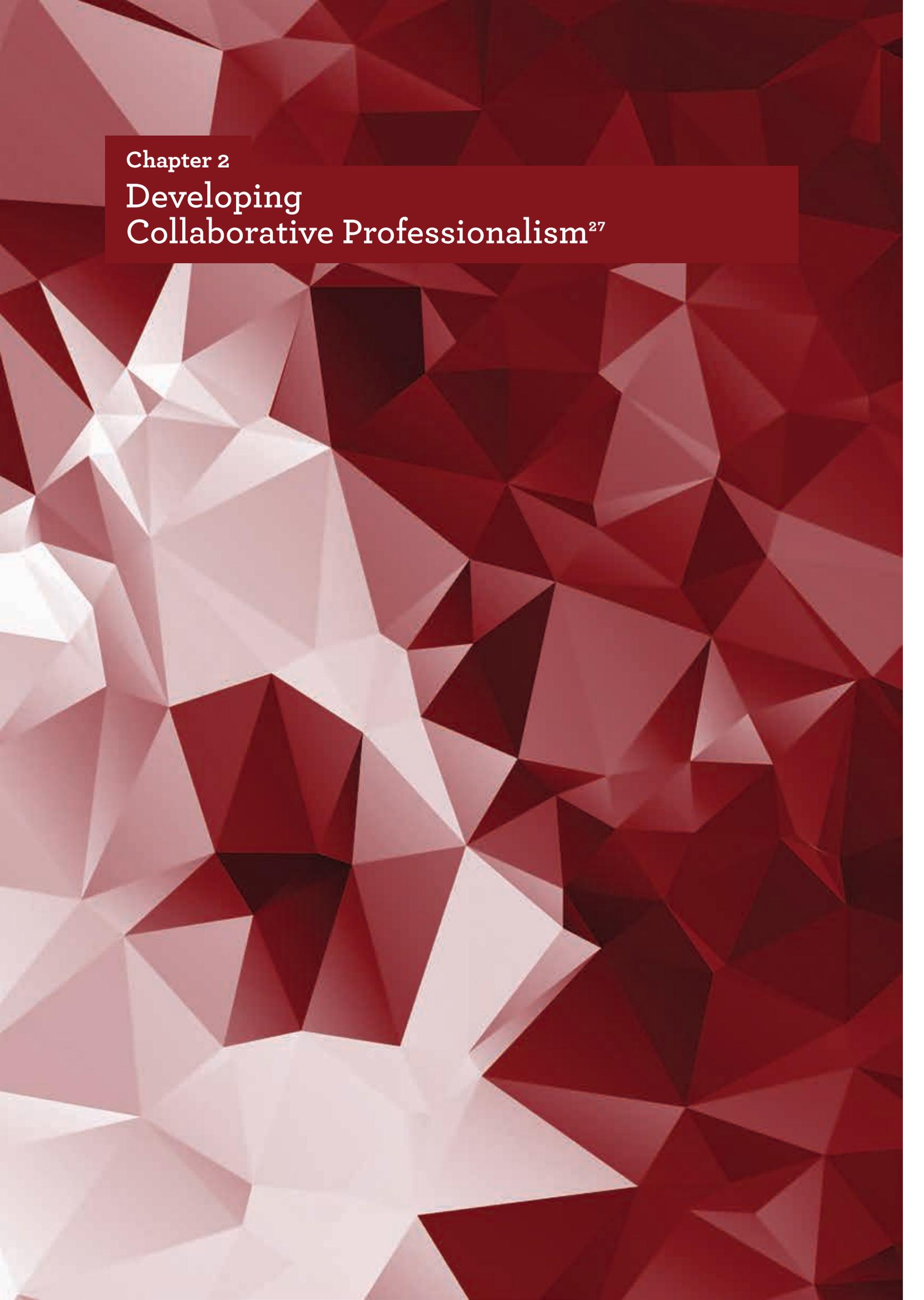
Our chapter on *Developing Collaborative Professionalism* describes how professional collaboration has evolved over time through five stages to the point of striving to achieve system-wide and sustained collaborative professionalism.

Chapter 3, *Designing Collaborative Professionalism*, charts five different deliberate designs of professional collaboration from around the world – ways that educators collaborate within their profession that approach states of deep collaborative professionalism. This provides a guide for educators who are deciding on the kinds of collaborative professionalism in which they want to engage to improve or even transform their professional practice and its impact on students.

Third, in *Deepening Collaborative Professionalism*, the report brings together the insights and findings of the five cases to set out core principles of deep collaborative professionalism; to relate them to Four Bs of collaborative professionalism in terms of what is going on before, beside, betwixt and beyond the immediate collaborative work; and to chart progress over time in the collaborative effort.

In *Doing Collaborative Professionalism*, the implications of this work are laid out as ten tenets of future practice. Finally, recommendations are made for policy, practice, and research in terms of what should be stopped, started, and continued to further the movement towards collaborative professionalism.





Chapter 2

Developing Collaborative Professionalism²⁷

Teaching is a practice, a skill, and a set of strategies. It is also a kind of work. Do a particular job over and over again and it starts to rub off on you. Funeral directors learn to be solicitous and humble. Waiters and waitresses learn how to dispose of surplus food by presenting it enthusiastically as the “special”. As they ease into the job, detectives begin to get more satisfaction from putting felons in jail than from consoling victims of crime.²⁸

Our identities and actions — who we are and what we do — are in many ways influenced by the identities and actions of those around us. The feedback we get from others presents a “looking glass” for ourselves.²⁹ Who our colleagues are, what they do, and how we interact with them every day, begin to shape our own character. How does this affect teaching? What does teaching do to teachers?

The first writer to take up this line of argument was Willard Waller, a school superintendent, in his 1932 classic, *The Sociology of Teaching*.³⁰ Waller had done his Masters degree in Chicago and was influenced by the way the Chicago school of sociology, as it came to be known, looked at people’s lives and work. Consequently, he turned this perspective on to the work of himself and his colleagues — teaching. “When teaching has formed them, what shape will it give them?” he asked. “Their daily work will write upon them. What will it write?”³¹

What Waller grasped was that there was something about the structure, daily demands, and repetitions of teaching that shaped teachers’ cultures and identities. Forty years later, community psychologist Seymour Sarason referred to these as the “regularities” of teaching.³² Among these regularities, Waller argued, was a bitter truth that “the significant people for a school teacher are other teachers, and by comparison with good standing in that fraternity, the good opinion of students is a small thing and of little price”.³³

In this chapter, we describe how the way we have understood and then deliberately organized and reorganized the culture of teaching — the nature of teachers’ relations with their colleagues — has gone through four different phases since the 1970s (Figure 1) and is on the cusp of a fifth. These stages are not completely discrete, of course. As we saw in the previous chapter, professional collaboration has almost always existed to some degree, here and there, in progressive school experiments, and so on. And, of course, the sequence is not always timed or ordered in the same way in all countries, everywhere. In this respect, the evolutionary stages describe major trends rather than clearly demarcated or universally identical historical periods.

1. **Emergence**— professional collaboration becomes an alternative to individualism
2. **Doubt**— collaboration is seen to have faults as well as strengths
3. **Design**— specific models of collaboration are created
4. **Opposition**— advocates of individual teacher evaluation question the evidence base for professional collaboration
5. **Transformation**— professional collaboration goes deeper as it moves towards collaborative professionalism

Figure 1. Evolutionary Stages of Professional Collaboration.

Once we understand this evolution, it becomes more possible to grasp why professional collaboration isn't always successful, why it can often go awry, and what we need to do to make it better.

A quarter century after Waller's book, another Chicago social scientist, Dan Lortie, studied the work of anesthesiologists and lawyers during his graduate studies. Lortie found that lawyers who started out in bigger firms, working with and alongside other lawyers, went on to have more career success than lawyers who mainly chose to work alone or with a small group of colleagues.³⁴

Lortie went on to study teaching where he felt that teachers worked in egg-crate isolation, got little or no feedback, and were stuck in a "flat" career that provided few opportunities for growth.³⁵ Based on his interviews with 94 teachers in the Boston area in the 1960s along with supporting surveys in Florida, Lortie concluded that this lack of feedback from students or colleagues led teachers to fall back on what they had seen their own teachers do from "the other side of the desk" when they had been students.³⁶ This inclined teachers to be conservative and resistant to change, and to also focus on what Lortie called *presentism*— concentration on immediate, small-scale tasks rather than longer-term commitments with uncertain outcomes.

For Lortie, there was a culture of individualism in teaching that was endemic to the job. It came from the physical egg-crate structure of classrooms, and the self-reinforcing absence of reliable or affirming feedback from colleagues and students alike. Individualism led to conservatism. If we had to express it as a formula, it would look like this (Figure 2):³⁷

$$P \text{ (presentism)} + I \text{ (individualism)} = C \text{ (conservatism)}$$

Figure 2. Representation of the relationship of presentism, individualism, and conservatism derived from Lortie's work.

1. Emergence — Individualism and Collaboration

Within the ubiquitous culture of individualism, there have always been outliers of innovation and collaboration. But it was not until the late 1980s that these patterns were recognized on any scale. Susan Rosenholtz undertook a study of the cultures of 78 elementary schools in Tennessee and their association with student achievement results in mathematics and literacy.³⁸ Most of the schools were what she called “learning impoverished.” Teachers were isolated yet they tended to teach in the same standardized way. They lacked certainty about their teaching and had low feelings of self-efficacy or belief in whether they could make a difference in their students’ learning.³⁹ In thirteen instances, though, the schools and their teacher cultures were “learning enriched.” Levels of certainty were higher, norms of continuous improvement prevailed, and students benefitted from a culture in which teachers provided mutual assistance and support.

Several years later, Tony Bryk and Barbara Schneider reported the results of detailed quantitative and qualitative research in Chicago public elementary schools that they had conducted in the 1990s.⁴⁰ They studied what they called relational trust among the adults and children in the school—which was developed through the relationships and interactions among people in schools over time.⁴¹ Relational trust consisted of mutual respect in listening to one another, personal regard for one another’s feelings and lives outside of school, competence in the work, and possessing a sense of integrity. The authors claimed that, “where relational trust develops over time, achievement trends also improve.”⁴² Specifically, they concluded, “schools reporting strong positive trust levels in 1994 were three times more likely to be categorized eventually as improving in reading and mathematics than those with very weak trust reports.”⁴³ The presence and benefits of these kinds of professional collaboration were also being demonstrated in other systems beyond the United States, such as in England.⁴⁴ Collaboration was informal as well as formal. Its benefits were indirect as well as direct. Overall, it appeared, it was better for student learning and achievement if teachers collaborated than if they didn’t.

These patterns, where many aspects of collaboration operate together over a sustained period with positive results for student achievement, remain evident in a broader body of continuing research.⁴⁵

2. Doubt — Strong and Weak Collaboration

It might have been better to collaborate than not collaborate, on average, but just like tall fighter pilots who have to squeeze into cramped cockpits, most schools, like most people, are not average.⁴⁶ Some kinds of collaboration are better or stronger than others, and through the 1990s, the research and writing on professional collaboration began to expose its downsides as well as upsides.

For example, Judith Warren Little created a continuum of collegiality in which weak forms of collegiality were centered on gossip, talk, and sharing of ideas while strong forms entailed actually working or laboring together in joint work that involved collective responsibility for results.⁴⁷ Little pointed out that, “much of what passes for collaboration does not add up to much.”⁴⁸ She questioned whether there was sufficient “joint deliberation over difficult and recurring problems of teaching and learning.”⁴⁹ Some forms of experience swapping, she went on, “are consistent with collegial norms that emphasize reassurance and sympathy while discouraging close scrutiny and skepticism.”⁵⁰

Around the same time, in a study of how teachers used their planning time, one of us found that some kinds of collaboration were forced, imposed, or artificial, and could reduce teachers’ motivation to initiate collaboration themselves. Professional collaboration, in other words, can be weak because it is evasive about differences, and it can also be brittle because it is imposed in a way that is fast, forced and fearful. This is what we termed *contrived collegiality*.⁵¹

3. Design — Specific Designs of Professional Collaboration

Efforts to design collaboration deliberately have existed for a long time. Little refers to shared decision-making and interdisciplinary teams as just two examples.⁵² In many parts of the world, teachers have designed curriculum together, moderated each other’s assessments, undertaken action research, and become involved in educational networks of teachers or schools.

These system-wide, design-driven interventions focused on professional collaboration include professional learning communities (PLCs)⁵³, collaborative inquiry,⁵⁴ and data teams.⁵⁵ The impact of these efforts has been mixed.⁵⁶ In the wrong hands, PLCs, for example, can become imposed and unwanted initiatives that teachers see as having little relevance to their work and which they abandon as soon as they can.⁵⁷ In the case of data teams, Datnow and Park have indicated that they were more successful in districts that had already established sufficient degrees of professional collaboration and trust.⁵⁸ Data teams, like PLCs, seemed to be less capable of initiating sustainable collaboration where it had not existed before.

Deliberately designed professional collaboration is now widespread. However, its effects are sometimes unknown, often variable, and seem somewhat dependent on the extent to which longer term and more indirect processes of informal collaboration have already become embedded.⁵⁹

The theory of action of professional learning communities (PLCs) and other collaborative designs has been that less individualism will reduce conservatism.

$\langle I = \rangle C$ (reduced individualism will diminish conservatism)

Figure 3. Representation of PLCs using Lortie’s discussion of individualism and conservatism.

However, if you reduce individualism, but also increase presentism in terms of imposing short timeframes for change, what actually results may be even *more conservatism*—a test score gain here or there, perhaps, rather than fundamental changes in teaching and learning.⁶⁰

$\langle I + \rangle P = \text{new kinds of } C$

Figure 4. Representation of how new kinds of conservatism form in teaching using Lortie’s discussion of individualism and presentism.

In deeper forms of collaborative professionalism, it is therefore necessary not only to do something about collaboration, or even to ease the pressures of presentism, but also to address the problem of conservatism itself in terms of the wider purposes of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

4. Opposition — The External Challenge to Collaboration

Despite some tendencies to undercook or overcook professional collaboration, the research evidence makes it hard to argue against. However, opposition to professional collaboration began to surface among market-oriented organizations of educational development. Their theory of change promotes competition that rewards individual teachers and schools that are effective and removes teachers and schools from the traditional public education space when they are not.⁶¹

For example, the New Teacher Project (TNTP) in the US published a 2015 report entitled, *The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development*.⁶² *The Mirage* was based on research in three large, urban districts and one charter management organization (CMO) across a two-to-four-year period. The researchers tracked teacher growth using multiple measures including summative teacher evaluation ratings, classroom evaluation scores, and value-added scores.⁶³ Teachers were grouped into quartiles to determine “improvers” and “non-improvers” who had made the most and least growth respectively.

The report concluded that despite substantial investment in PD, there was little evidence that PD activities, including those involving collaboration, improved the quality of teaching. “Improvers” and “non-improvers” were exposed to and experienced similar types of PD activities, and so differences in performance could not be attributed to PD provision. Second, despite substantial PD investment, most teachers did not “substantially improve” beyond the first three or four years of teaching.⁶⁴ Third, “only about 40% of teachers [reported] that the majority of the professional development they received, including ones involving collaboration, was a good use of their time”.⁶⁵ Perhaps improvement efforts should be based on something else like individual teacher evaluation, the authors concluded.

Scrutiny of the study’s design, however, points to many methodological flaws.⁶⁶ Restricting definitions of what counts as impact to specific interventions over time frames of two to four years exaggerates the impression of low impact and ignores common effects of collaboration that are also informal, indirect and longer term. The reason teachers show declining rates of improvement after four years may also be not a result of weak PD. It may be due to statistical regression towards the mean where it is easier for poorly prepared teachers who start out with little competence to make bigger early gains than those whose competence has already developed through on-the-job-mentoring.

The report also fails to consider international comparisons of professional development impact in higher performing countries that provide stronger support for teachers and teacher collaboration and where PD is less-top down in nature.⁶⁷ While formal and informal collaboration appears to attract only moderate support from US teachers, for example, a pan-Canadian review of professional development concluded that, “collaborative learning experiences are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools.”⁶⁸ Perhaps US systems like the ones covered in the TNTP study are just using professional collaboration for the wrong reasons in the wrong way.⁶⁹

5. Transformation — The Move Towards Collaborative Professionalism

Professional collaboration today can therefore be strong or weak; too comfortable or too contrived. With such variation in quality and impact, even if the average impact is positive, vulnerability to external critique is still substantial. The time has come, therefore, to remove the bad variation in *professional collaboration*. It is time to move from the high variability of professional collaboration, to more consistently high quality in *collaborative professionalism*.

The next big question, then, is what's the best way to collaborate? What designs are out there and how should educators choose between them? What else do schools need as well as a good design or protocol? How will working collaboratively fit into the wider culture or community? What's best? What's next?

This is the focus of our next chapter that will take us into five designs in different schools and systems. Here, we will see, collaborative professionalism is manifested in very different cultures and contexts, yet in ways that express a common set of inspiring and impactful principles.



Chapter 3

Designing Collaborative Professionalism

How do teachers collaborate? How do schools, professional organizations, and school systems deliberately design ways in which teachers can work together? How can a school choose a design on some principled basis, other than from a list of options, or because of what their system requires them to do, or as a result of what they have encountered most recently in a professional development workshop? As a review of the literature on teacher collaboration acknowledges, there is “a lot of conceptual confusion concerning teacher collaboration.”⁷⁰ A summary of literature undertaken contemporaneously to this report by Public Agenda and the Spencer Foundation similarly points out that “collaborative practices take many different forms and go by many different names.”⁷¹

Once the evidence started to accumulate about the benefits for students and teachers of collaborative activity, different designs for collaborative work began to surface. Some, like Japanese lesson study, had already been in existence for up to a century or more.⁷² Action research, the precursor for modern collaborative inquiry, has been in use since the 1940s.⁷³ Other forms of teacher collaboration, like collaborative curriculum planning, existed under the radar.⁷⁴ Further approaches to professional collaboration, especially ones concerned with evidence and data use, have been very new.⁷⁵

We went in search of deliberate collaborative designs that were widely known in many different parts of the world, albeit under different names. We also wanted to consider what the collaborative practices focused on.

Almost half a century ago, the British educational theorist Basil Bernstein argued that in schools, formal educational knowledge was realized through three message systems that conveyed what was important for students to learn.⁷⁶ They were:

- *curriculum* – which “defines what counts as valid knowledge”
- *pedagogy* – which defines “what counts as valid transmission of knowledge”
- *evaluation* – which defines “what counts as valid realization of this knowledge on the part of the taught”

One simple way of classifying collaborative practices, then, is to see what they focus on in relation to these message systems. If they concentrate on curriculum, then they will take the form of collaborative curriculum planning or review. If they focus on pedagogy and pedagogical transformation, then they might concentrate on culturally responsive pedagogy, or cooperative learning strategies, for example. And if they concentrate on evaluation, they might bring teachers together to undertake moderated marking or grading, participate in quality reviews of each other’s schools or districts, or develop and review portfolio or performance assessments together.

Of course, these categories are not watertight. Networks that bring together teachers of writing, for example, address issues of curriculum and pedagogy together.⁷⁷ Lesson study seems to be mainly about pedagogy, but also entails reviewing curriculum workbooks and other materials. But pinpointing where the prime focus of collaboration is in relation to these three message systems is a useful way to think about where to start when a school wants to embark upon or deepen its collaborative work.

In addition, there are at least two more message systems. One, which Bernstein added, is the whole school and its organization and direction.⁷⁸ Engaging staff in the vision or direction of the school is an example of this. So is the practice of schools assisting other schools to help them turnaround their performance. Another message system is the whole society, its development, and how student learning contributes to this.⁷⁹

With these considerations in mind, we set out a provisional chart of our five cases as examples of practices of collaborative professionalism below (Figure 1). The chart consists of the following cases:

- *Open Class/Lesson Study*: a Hong Kong secondary school, part of a network of 20 (five percent of all Hong Kong Schools), that has designed and developed its own version of lesson study, under the name “Open Class.”
- *Collaborative Curriculum Planning Networks*: a four-year old evolving network of 27 districts across four states in the US Pacific Northwest that engages teachers in “job-alike” groups for collaborative planning of curriculum units.
- *Cooperative Learning and Working*: describing how a school in southern Norway uses cooperative learning principles among its teachers as well as its students.
- *Collaborative Pedagogical Transformation*: highlighting the Escuela Nueva network of 25,000 schools that bases teacher collaboration on student collaboration and transformative pedagogy in rural Colombia to promote peace, wellbeing, and democracy.
- *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*: one of the most remote school districts in Ontario, Canada, that serves large proportions of aboriginal students, and that has moved across three generations of design to embrace teacher-led PLCs.

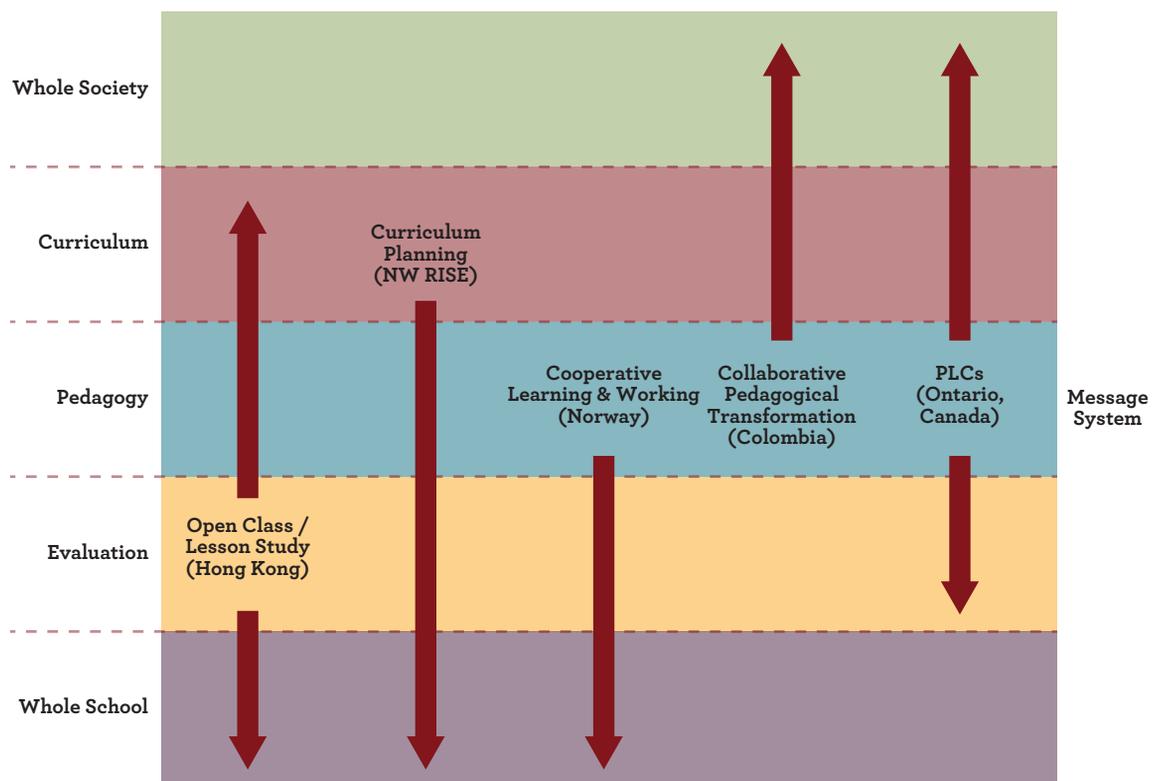


Figure 5. Cases included in the report by collaborative design, context, and message systems.

The five schools and systems were selected for several reasons:

1. Their *distribution on the chart* above — although their eventual location on the chart sometimes shifted or expanded after data had been collected and analyzed. The arrows on the chart show how the focus of each case of collaboration expanded and developed over time.
2. *Representation of a range of diverse cultures* and systems on four continents, rather than being confined to a single country or system that might then pose problems of transferability of what has been learned to other settings globally.
3. *Relationship to a wider system* such as a network, district, or national government policy framework that enables us to understand how collaboration in schools is mirrored in and enabled or supported by a wider system.
4. *Evolution and persistence* over at least four years, so that the collaborative practices are less likely to fail to develop or to fade away. It is for this reason we have not used a case of a multi-district peer review process that turned out to be at a very preliminary stage of development, and another district-to-district collaboration that had only lasted a short time and had largely disappeared by the time of our site visit.

5. *Fit with our emerging sense of collaborative professionalism*—we deliberately did not choose examples of data teams (widespread though they currently are), for example, as self-contained initiatives because, as studies of data teams reveal, the analysis of data by teachers works best when it is part of a broader process of collaborative inquiry, interpretation and professional judgment rather than a self-contained system of its own.⁸⁰

What we will see next are examples not just of teachers talking about or remembering their experiences of collaboration, but actually collaborating. We will see that teachers collaborate in rich countries and poor countries, in cities and in remote villages and small towns. We will learn how collaboration was deliberately designed and redesigned over time, how it came to be, and what it was like beforehand. We will see collaboration go beyond talk, beyond data, beyond meetings and teams, to become part of the life of schools and how they operate. It's time to look at collaborative professionalism up close, in action.

1. Open Class & Lesson Study

Why do many teachers prefer to be left alone with their own classes? One of the most common explanations is that they don't like to be observed or evaluated.⁸¹ Sometimes, it has been said, this is because they have little confidence or even false confidence in what they are doing, or because the complexity of what is behind anyone's teaching cannot be picked up in a passing visit. So teaching in front of other teachers, when children can act out and plans can go awry can make teachers vulnerable to the prospect of upsetting criticism.⁸²

In systems where your pay or your job can depend on evaluations from a principal who might otherwise never come into your class, feedback can often seem intrusive and harsh. Equally, principals can overcompensate for this worry by giving teachers comments that are too bland or insufficiently incisive. The consequence in many schools is that everyone gets anxious but little improves. Yet, John Hattie points out that giving teachers feedback on their teaching has one of the highest effect sizes on student learning.⁸³ Effective feedback is critical to improving teaching and learning, but teachers don't welcome feedback that feels episodic, arbitrary or unfair. What is the way out of this conundrum?

One option that started out in Asia is known variously as *lesson study* or *learning study*. At *Fanling Kau Yan College*—a secondary school with over 700 students on the outskirts of Hong Kong, near the border with Mainland China—they call it *Open Class*.

1.1 Open Class teaching

Welcome to Iris's 8th Grade English class at *Fanling*. Fanling is a government-subsidized school with a Christian foundation. As Principal Veronica Yau explains, many of its students come from surrounding neighborhoods where many “grassroots” families have “financial difficulties” and where some people have never travelled the 40 minutes or so by transit into the city center.⁸⁴ Because of the school's reputation as a successful school—it scores in the top 20 percent of schools that make the most improvement based on the English language proficiency of their entering students—some of its students also come across the border from the China mainland every day.

The school is nothing fancy architecturally or technologically. Like many other Hong Kong schools, in a city short on space, Fanling extends upwards across multiple floors—seven in its case. Fanling is a good school. Its teachers are very dedicated and they work incredibly hard. The principal has to insist that teachers leave the school no later than 7:00 pm at night. And in Iris's class, all this hard work shows.

Iris is teaching her students how to write a formal email to a professional—the school's social worker—about a personal adolescent problem. This objective is a required part of the Hong Kong English language curriculum. With her class of over 30 students, Iris's lesson consists of several precisely timed and sequenced components and it moves at a blistering pace. One of Fanling's prime areas of focus is developing students' ability to engage in self-regulated learning (SRL). As teachers in the school explain it, “if students fail, it's not because they don't want to learn but because they don't know what to do”. This approach requires sophisticated lesson structures and supports and high levels of teacher skill.

Based on the work of Barry Zimmerman and Dale Schunck,⁸⁵ SRL at Fanling means getting students to take individual and shared responsibility for their learning, to reflect on and give one another feedback on that learning, and to regulate and monitor their own emotional behaviors in the classroom while they learn. Instead of traditional three part-lessons, since SRL was first introduced into the first year of secondary school five years ago, a lot of the learning has been organized into eight steps or processes in which students have to demonstrate what they have been learning in real time. All in about 50 minutes! The eight steps are (Figure 2):⁸⁶

1. State and share objectives
2. Guide the learning to follow
3. Discuss in student pairs or groups
4. Show what they have been learning on a small chalkboard
5. Present this to each other and the class
6. Get public teacher and class feedback
7. Test what has been learned through worksheet exercises
or iBoard demonstrations
8. Conclude the lesson

Figure 6. The eight steps of SRL at Fanling.

The lesson is a combination of guided learning from the teacher, self-learning for each individual student, peer learning of students from each other, and shared learning as a whole class.

What does this look like in Iris’s class? Iris begins by clearly setting out the objectives for the lesson. They comprise the nature and language structures of formal email; explaining a problem with effects on feelings; then expressing this in students’ own formal emails and getting feedback on them from peers. The problem that is presented is a common one for adolescents everywhere – acne and body image issues that lead young people to experience self-consciousness and embarrassment. Iris displays the issue on her digital whiteboard and shows some positive and negative exemplars of how students might try to communicate this to their counselor. Iris is trying to ensure that students know what they have to do.

Students then quickly pair off to discuss what they see and to come up with some issues of their own that worry them in adolescence. They also have workbooks with questions to help them. The assigned time for discussion is very short – 20 seconds! Interaction is focused and precise. Iris then has some interaction with the whole class. Some of the students jump to attention and raise their hands enthusiastically. “Let me try, let me try,” they say – a common protocol for question and answer sessions in the school. There is another quick moment of sharing among students without referring to their workbooks – one minute this time.

The class then quickly forms itself into pre-arranged mixed ability groups designated by numbers and letters. They get out what they call their iBoards (small chalkboards that can be written on by a team) to write down how they would structure a formal email about an actual adolescent problem such as name-calling or mood swings that has been experienced by one of the group members.

In the next stage of the lesson, students hang up their iBoards on hooks at the front of the class so everyone can see them. Iris then asks for two group leaders to volunteer to present what is on their iBoard to the rest of the class. “Let me try,” they say again. The students make their presentations, engage in some more whole-class interaction, then Iris goes back to the whiteboard to draw some final conclusions about the characteristics of a formal email and closes the lesson.

The whole lesson flies by. It’s a whirlwind of orchestrated activity. The strategies are a sophisticated combination of US-style co-operative learning and a range of methods of more direct instruction. All this occurs under the supervision and guidance of a teacher who has absolute command and authority in her class where nobody can let their attention wander for a second. This is impressive enough. The really remarkable thing, though, is that Iris is teaching this complex class in front of a dozen or so visitors!

1.2 *Open Class feedback*

Every year, on two occasions, Fanling opens around half of its classes to outside visitors — up to 100 or more of them. It’s what the school calls *Open Class*. On the day Iris is teaching her class about formal emails, she and 27 colleagues are teaching in front of principals from other schools as well as teachers who have been sent there from other parts of Hong Kong by their own principals. This situation is scary enough for any teacher — a dozen observers, not just one or two, and a sophisticated and demanding lesson structure that could easily get derailed at any moment. But there is also something else. Once the class is over and the students leave, there is a post *Open Class* “conference” where visiting professionals are invited to give their feedback to Iris.

Some of the feedback is complimentary: the objectives and structure were very clear; there was lots of peer learning. More than a bit of the feedback is also unambiguously critical. Why did the teacher only call on a small number of students to volunteer answers? Was the pace of the lesson too fast for some students? Suppose they didn’t understand everything that took place and started to fall behind. What did the teacher do then? The lesson was brisk, but don’t there also need to be quiet moments when the teacher can tap into what her students are thinking? And what about the shy student whose presentation of her group’s iBoard results to the whole class was barely audible?

This is a lot of criticism for any teacher to endure, especially in public. Some teachers at Fanling remember all too well what it felt like being observed when they were in other schools, or earlier in their career. One said that when she was “very green” she “got very upset about feedback.” However, Fanling’s *Open Class* has very specific protocols that make teachers less vulnerable while also enhancing the quality of professional learning for the visitors and themselves.

First, the purpose and objectives of *Open Class* are made very clear when Principal Yau addresses all the visitors in an open assembly at the start of the day. Marco, the senior teacher leader, then reinforces the message with a power-point presentation on their *Open Class* procedures to the visitors who have come to the English class. He sets out three purposes of the *Open Class*—to foster professional growth through reflection on the lessons observed; to improve learning and teaching together; and to refine SRL lessons through the collective wisdom of all participants. He then presents five essential principles and protocols of constructive professional feedback to guide the observers (Figure 3):

- Mutual respect
- Equal participation
- Focusing on self regulated learning (SRL)
- Understanding the limitations of the teacher and the characteristics of the school
- Sincere and honest sharing of inspiration and suggestions

Figure 7. Fanling’s five essential principles and protocols of constructive professional feedback.

These principles and protocols mean that observers will be less inclined to make vague, general judgments or personally upsetting comments about what they think is good or poor teaching. The feedback is facilitated. No single person or point of view will dominate. The feedback will be neither too blunt nor too bland. Observers are directed to focus not on the personality of the teacher but on the task they are performing. Marco and Iris try to ensure this by running the post-conference in a carefully structured way like one of their classes. They divide the observers into groups— one concentrating on the objectives and the learning guides or workbooks; the other focusing on teaching strategies and student participation. Each group also gets their own iBoards and writes down four key ideas. The visitors are very engaged with the task and hang up their iBoards when they have finished, just like the students (Image 2). Then they move into whole group feedback.

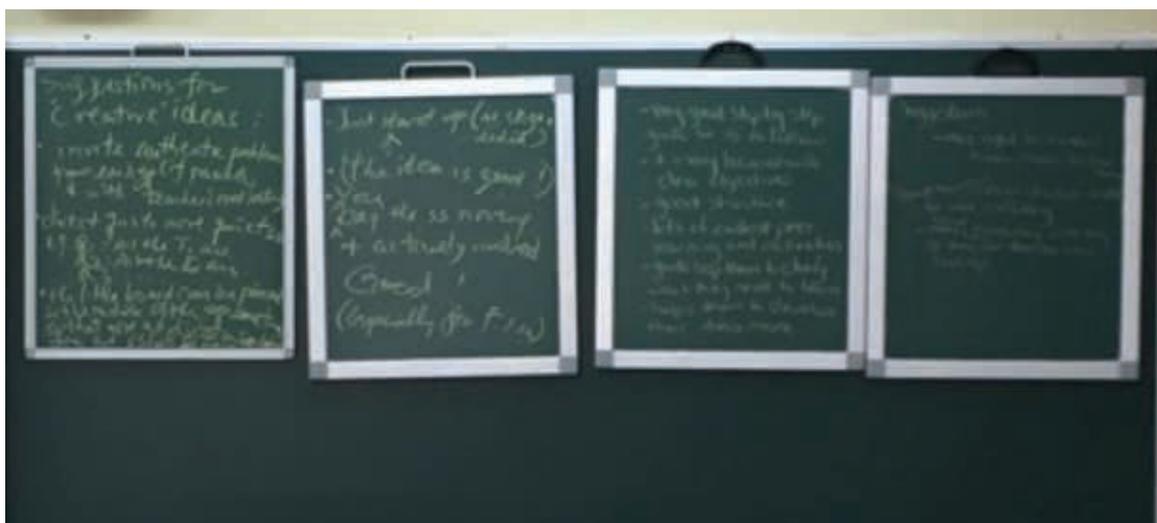


Image 2. The visitors' iBoards with their key ideas.

The structure focuses and depersonalizes the feedback, and both Iris and Marco respond with openness and authenticity. Iris isn't just stoic about accepting criticism. She and her colleagues at Fanling actively encourage and directly solicit it. Iris accepts it is easy to omit quiet students when others are so eager to respond. Marco explains how concentrating too much on formal grammar and vocabulary can limit other aspects of students' thinking. Visitors also hear how many students are able to keep up with the pace because they have practiced and read aloud, key parts of the vocabulary beforehand in afternoon preparation sessions. Everyone is learning. They “share what they can learn from the visitors and celebrate the learning together.”

1.3 Open Class planning

It's not only the protocols that create a positive feedback process, though. There's also the fact that this lesson is not Iris's lesson. At least, it's not *only* Iris's lesson. Marco has taught it. So have several colleagues in her department. The lesson belongs to all of them. They created and revised it together. They had rehearsed and then reviewed an earlier version of the lesson together in the previous week. Iris and her departmental team then prepared the lesson the day before *Open Class*. They discussed content issues like appropriate vocabulary and avoiding grammatical contractions. They reviewed the slide presentation for the visitors. Grace, the head of the English Department, made suggestions about how different iBoard groups could focus on feelings, language and other issues respectively. The lesson is a common product and responsibility. The successes and limitations belong to all of them. In Principal Yau's words “No one is perfect, but the team can be.”

All these processes apply to other subjects and teachers too. Every teacher teaches an open class at least once a year. Parents considering sending their children to the school are invited to open classes too. On the same day Iris was teaching her English class, Candy, the head of science, was doing an open class on energy transfer. As in the case of the English lesson, there were many components to this class. There were two teachers in the large class, rotating who was responsible for supervising simultaneous lab experiments. Magnesium strips were lit over Bunsen burners and paper balloons rose with the hot air. A student with severe visual impairment pushed a toy truck down a ramp. Another child blew air into a wind instrument to create sound vibration. Students and their teachers discussed thermal energy, sound energy, potential energy and kinetic energy. As in Iris's class, they watched their teacher lead lab demonstrations, got out their iBoards and worked in pairs, small groups, as a class and individually, when they filled out answers in their workbooks (Image 3).

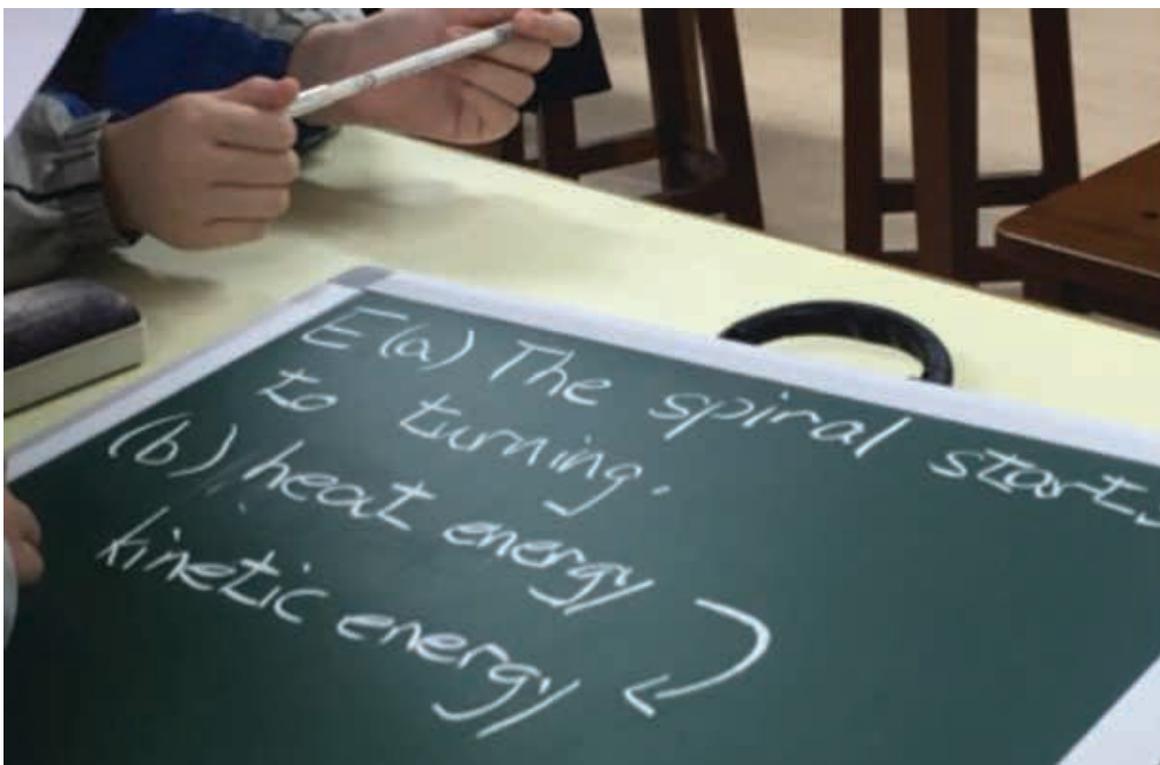


Image 3. Students working on their iBoards.

Like Iris, this was not the teacher's own lesson either. The day before *Open Class*, we joined Candy and a team of three other science teachers in a planning meeting for this lesson. All of them had taught the lesson before and were now reviewing what they experienced and what they would change. At first, they talked about logistical issues like the setup of the room, time management and the different pace at which each of them moved. Then they explored technical vocabulary and the language of the workbook. From this,

they started to imagine and reflect on how students experienced the lesson and they delved deeper into their own understandings and interpretations of their subject matter knowledge. Is it appropriate to say that hot air pushes a turbine, one of them speculated, if it is actually particles that are creating the movement? The teachers are excited. They are, as adults and intellectuals, engaging with high-level understandings of their own subject. Through this, they now also realize how difficult it must be for their students to distinguish between moving air and energy conversion. How deeply do students need to understand the nature of particles, they wonder. Describing what they are learning about energy conversion, in writing, on their iBoards, will make students' understanding more visible, the teachers decide.

So, the secrets of *Open Class* are in its *purpose* (shared professional learning and improvement) ; in the *structure* of protocols and planning procedures; and in the *culture* of shared ownership and responsibility. Educators at Fanling believe that all this work is having a positive impact on their students. Talking together, Iris and Candy note how, since SRL and open class feedback, student engagement has increased. They no longer have students who do not really like coming to school. There are far fewer discipline problems of students in class such as “sleeping, getting mad or not being on task.” “When students work together”, one of them says, “they have collective responsibility and don't let feelings get in the way.”

Assessment results determined by the Hong Kong Bureau of Education have also improved—for instance, by ten percent in English over three years. However, Principal Yau tells teachers “Don't worry about achievement results. Just improve the classroom atmosphere.” “We are not doing this to boost up results,” she emphasizes. “Otherwise, teachers will be very stressed.” Principal Yau and her staff believe that “when they change the teaching, the results will also change.”

1.4 Lesson study

Fanling's particular approach to the open class method is unique to it yet also part of a wider tradition in Asia and elsewhere of using precise collaborative methods to improve teaching and learning. These came to prominent attention in the West when, in the 1990s, in the days before the first OECD PISA test results of educational performance were released, Japan topped the international rankings on the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS). A book by Stigler and Hiebert drew attention to a phenomenon that they expressed in English as *Lesson Study*.⁸⁷ In Japan, they explained, there had been a long tradition—perhaps more than a century—of teachers observing each other's lessons. This had evolved into a precise methodology of presentation, observation, inquiry, review and implementation by groups of teachers within and across schools. Described by Stigler and Hiebert, these steps have parallels to those used at Fanling: defining and researching a problem that will be the focus of a lesson; planning the lesson; teaching it; observing it; and reflecting on its effects; revising the lesson; teaching and

observing the revised lesson; evaluating and reflecting a second time; then finally sharing the results.⁸⁸ Essentially, the lesson is a research lesson—a point of collaborative inquiry, action, and improvement.

Catherine Lewis of Mills College in California worked with a group of other researchers to bring lesson study practices to the United States—expanding to hundreds of schools—and claimed positive effects on teacher development, including building a more collaborative culture in schools.⁸⁹ Lesson study spread to other countries such as Singapore, there is an *International Journal of Learning and Lesson Study* as well as an extensive research literature on the topic, and the World Association of Lesson Study now brings together researchers and practitioners from all over the world.⁹⁰

A variant of lesson study more specific to Hong Kong is Learning Study.⁹¹ Based on the work of Swedish researcher, Ference Marton,⁹² Hong Kong specialist Lo Mun Ling,⁹³ and one of the founders of UK action research, John Elliott,⁹⁴ *Learning Study* concentrates more precisely on the phenomenon of learning (as opposed to issues such as behavior and management) and applies much more strict research procedures to the study process.

The clear protocols and procedures of lesson study drew many westerners to it. They regarded it as something that could develop or deepen ways for teachers to observe and evaluate each other's practice in schools and to break down the walls of professional isolation. But as Lewis warned in an early paper, lesson study techniques and procedures could not be properly understood without also understanding the culture and context in which they were used.⁹⁵ You couldn't take lesson study practices and directly transpose them to or impose them on western classrooms, she said. "The graveyards of U.S. educational reform are littered with once-promising innovations that were poorly understood, superficially implemented, and consequently pronounced ineffective," she warned.⁹⁶

Japanese teachers, Lewis pointed out, already possessed a strong history and culture of collaboration in which teachers plan and talk together in common workrooms and everyone gets involved in social activities, hiking trips, sports events, and so on. Unlike Americans, Lewis added, Japanese teachers and Japanese people in general also approach feedback and criticism as spurs to further improvement and believe that, just like student achievement, their own improvement will come about through collective effort. Japanese self-improvement, says Lewis, is almost a national religion. Last, in Japan, and unlike many US jurisdictions, lesson study occurs within a climate where observations are not used to produce quick gains in achievement scores, but to develop the whole child and his or her character.

The same considerations apply at Fanling. It's not just the practices and protocols of *Open Class* alone that explain its success. *Open Class*, like other technical procedures for collaboration such as data teams, also depends for its success on a set of surrounding factors that cannot be captured completely in a set of steps and procedures.

1.5 The four Bs of collaborative professionalism

Aside from the technical designs of professional collaboration, there are four sets of factors that affect how impactful or effective these designs might be. These are what we call the *four Bs* of collaborative professionalism (Figure 8).

Before. How did the school build collaboration before Open Class?

Betwixt. What other sorts of collaboration exist alongside Open Class?

Beside. What does the policy system wrap around Open Class?

Beyond. How does the school connect to ideas beyond Open Class?

Figure 8. The four Bs of deep collaboration.

1.5.1 Before. An iron and ironic rule of educational innovation is that an innovation effort is more likely to be successful if the school has already had experience of innovating before. The same is true of collaboration. A new structure or protocol of collaboration like data teams, peer review or lesson study is more likely to be successful if people in the school already have previous experiences of working well together with each other.⁹⁷

Candy, the science head, has been at Fanling for 12 years. There has been a “paradigm shift” since she came, she said. At first, “there wasn’t much interaction between students and teachers” or among teachers themselves. With Principal Yau’s arrival, nine years ago, things began to change. Teachers were encouraged to collaborate much more and the school became known for doing so.

A teacher who had been a vice principal in a previous school noted how “three Chinese history teachers in it taught alone and didn’t share materials.” At Fanling, however, “collaboration has always been a way of living.” The nature of the collaboration had changed though. Since self-regulated learning, Grace explained, although “teachers used to collaborate, it was informal and there was no special time or platform.” “Now it is more focused,” she said. Marco commented that while he had collaborated before in other schools, Fanling now put the “focus on how they learn together as teachers more.” If anyone wants to look at the portability of a collaborative practice, it’s important to consider the evolution that took place before it.

1.5.2. Betwixt. Fanling’s collaborative focus on improving self-regulated learning through open class planning, review and feedback doesn’t happen in isolation. It doesn’t occur in a culture where teachers work alone the rest of the time. In meetings, attention never wanders. Discussions are direct and precise. Referring to Hong Kong in general, as well as the school, Marco

commented that, “in this culture, time is precious. Every minute matters.” There’s no wandering around the topic or getting off the point. There is no idle chatter—until, that is, there are meals or social events, where everyone knows exactly how to relax and get to know each other as people.

Veronica Yau and her team choose new recruits to the school carefully based on their dedication to the students, their willingness to learn, and their ability to work in a team. They recruit “by heart,” “by *heart*,” she repeats, clutching her chest. All teachers are involved in recruiting new teachers, she says, and present their shortlists to the board. Instead of requiring applicants to teach a sample lesson, which would, in their view, be artificial, as the teacher would have no relationship with the students, candidates are asked to observe other teachers’ classes and give reflective feedback on them—just as if it was an *Open Class*. They are then invited to write a letter back to Marco on how the class could be improved. This way, the applicants learn what the school is like, how being observed is normal, and what the benefits of it can be. At the same time, the staff realize, “if they like to work individually, they may not be the person you are looking for.” Principal Yau stresses, “One flame is not enough.”

The school isn’t just looking for new recruits who will comply with what the group requires. They are “looking for people who take initiative and come up with new ideas; for someone willing to share their ideas proactively.” For instance, Jeffrey, a new teacher, is invited to lead other teachers on their use of technology. Marco, meanwhile, reflects that not only does he mentor new teachers; they also give him feedback that helps him improve his own classroom management skills.

Another of Fanling’s teachers had gone to three schools when he was training. In other schools, he said, “some teachers would like to work alone.” At Fanling, though, he “knew the culture was collaborative” and he “could express opinions and listen to ideas even if you are new and feel very welcomed by everyone.” The school gives you “so many chances to carry big projects even as a new member,” he said. He has already conducted workshops for them including carrying out a demonstration lesson of his own. In other schools he “would not be welcome to say anything,” but at Fanling, he knows that when he says something it “will be beneficial to other teachers as well.”

There is one more dimension to the culture of collaboration that surrounds the *Open Class* version of lesson study at Fanling. It is culture in the wider sense—the distinctive culture of a country and community. Accompanying us on our visit to Fanling was Dr Peng Liu from Hong Kong University. Professor Liu is an expert on Chinese culture and its impact on education. Understanding professional relationships in Hong Kong means understanding the convergences between British colonial and Chinese culture, he points out. British colonial culture has left a legacy of examination competition and status, of selection and quality, and of formality in professional relations. It has also bequeathed the importance of the English language that used to be the language of instruction before Hong Kong’s handover from Britain to China in 1997, and is still required in two secondary school subjects. At Fanling, these are English and science.

Then there is the considerable complexity of modern Chinese culture itself. Peng Liu explains that this culture comprises elements that include but are not restricted to Confucianism, communism or socialism, market capitalism, and a range of religious and spiritual influences such as Taoism, Buddhism and, in Hong Kong, including at Fanling itself, a range of Christian traditions.⁹⁸

In his brief summary of Confucianism, Dr Liu describes the centrality of five moral virtues: benevolence (the cultivation of feelings of respect, empathy, compassion, and love for all humanity); righteousness (just and appropriate conduct as part of the obligation to work for universal human well-being); propriety (in terms of proper conduct in relationships within families, among friends, and between leaders and followers); wisdom (the capacity to judge between right and wrong); and honesty (integrity and consistency between thoughts and deeds).

In addition to these virtues, conduct within Confucianism is governed by the importance of *learning* as a way of socializing people; *collectivism* in terms of the importance of the family, the group, the nation and the company; and *harmony* of relationships. In addition, traditions of filial *piety* have translated into paternalistic or maternalistic forms of leadership – though these are being broken down by significant generational changes among the young who live in a global environment of consumer culture and access to the Internet. Last, *guanxi* or networks of reciprocity tie people together in family, commercial and professional relationships.

Several spiritual traditions also support going with the natural flow of events and leading in a modest and introverted way (Taoism); enduring pain, embracing peace and avoiding arrogance (Buddhism); and acting with integrity in caring relationships that serve others (Christianity).

The result at Fanling is what Peng Liu calls *coordinated collaboration*. People participate and even initiate ideas in a culture of continuous learning as a way to support growth. They value and are committed to their professional community. They work hard, sacrifice and are dedicated. They also respect the rules of hierarchy. At Fanling, when Principal Yau sits with Marco on one side and Grace, the head of the English Department, on the other, they all participate, but she clearly cues the appropriate moment for the others to contribute. Everyone understands there are clear lines and distributions of responsibility. In meetings, there are no side conversations or interruptions. No one scrolls through their smartphones or answers emails on their laptops. Children stand when they answer questions or form cooperative groups. Guests are treated with honor. Gifts and thank you cards are obligatory.

It is impossible to understand the nature of *Open Class*, Lesson Study, or Learning Study in Hong Kong, Chinese, or South-East Asian cultures generally, without also understanding all of this. This does not make Fanling's culture of collaboration better or worse than ones in the US, UK, Latin America, the Middle East or other societies. But it does mean we have to work very hard to figure out what needs to be done when a particular design for collaboration is moved from one system to another.

1.5.3. Beyond. A school will not progress as well as it can if its teachers only collaborate with each other. A disappointing feature of US and other school systems is that they often discourage travel by educators to learn from systems outside their own country. In this respect, US systems too often act like underperforming schools, as if they believe they have little to learn from anyone else, and that cross-border and overseas visits are wasteful junkets, paid for with taxpayer dollars. False confidence and un-Confucian arrogance becomes their undoing.

By comparison, Fanling educators constantly seek inspiration, evidence and interaction from educators and researchers elsewhere. The initial idea of *Open Class*, in fact, came from connecting with Tokyo University's esteemed professor, Manabu Sato, an international expert on learning communities.⁹⁹ Iris and Candy discussed how they deepened Fanling's approach to lesson study five years ago after they visited schools in Singapore—a nation that is itself extremely active in supporting professional inter-visitation.¹⁰⁰ The Fanling team visited four schools that “did cycles of the same lesson over and over again to improve it”. They “found it inspiring to keep working on the same lesson.” Moreover, they learned, “the teacher conducting the lesson wasn't doing it with the teacher's class.” When they returned, they began to make Fanling's approach to *Open Class* more structured.

In Hong Kong itself, Fanling has initiated and leads a network of 20 other schools—five percent of all the schools—in using *Open Class* methods in an annual festival to which they invite members of the government Education Bureau. This influences the system that influences them.

Last, many teachers, especially younger ones, like their peers in other Asian countries such as South Korea, share what they are doing enthusiastically on the Internet.¹⁰¹ Fanling's teachers take smartphone photographs from their lessons and share them on the application, Whatsapp. They send up to 20 snapshots a day of power-point slides or things on the blackboard. Their principal can also see these, which helps her stay connected to what they are doing. Whether it is through international visits, local network building, or digital platforms, Fanling teachers are eager gatherers and disseminators of ideas that have impact for their practice.

1.5.4 Beside. In most cases, if we want to understand schools, we must also understand the systems they are in. Hong Kong has not always supported professional collaboration and educational innovation. In the mid 1990s, the city's education system was highly didactic and many teachers could not instruct students effectively in the required language of English. In a few short years, after the transfer of political authority from London to Beijing, Hong Kong education has risen into the top ten of the OECD PISA rankings. It realized that with the new availability of mainland Chinese low-cost labor nearby, its own citizens would need to be educated to much higher standards of skill.¹⁰²

The Hong Kong government sent ministry delegations overseas.¹⁰³ The teaching focus moved towards active learning, education for understanding, demonstrations of learning in practice, and wider life learning outside school that was connected to real-world environments.¹⁰⁴ But none of this would have taken off without appropriate professional development or strategies to circulate good practices and move them around. The former head of the Education Bureau had disapproved of the top-down approach to centralized curriculum reform in the UK, so Hong Kong searched for a more professionally inclusive approach to change instead.

In her last few days in office, Hong Kong’s Education Bureau Chief, KK Chan, explained some of the changes that the system had made since 2002 to strengthen the teaching profession and get it to work together more collaboratively.¹⁰⁵

- *Government funded collaborative projects* with research and development elements.
- *University-school partnership projects* that cover diverse topics from whole-school approaches, curriculum planning, pedagogy, assessment, literacy, e-learning, and values education.
- *Secondment (temporary transfer) of teachers and principals* to government and the university to nurture leaders in schools, consolidate and share networks, and transfer knowledge for different themes across the schools. “Schools were not happy at first because they lost good teachers”, Ms Chan explained, but they “persuaded them that it was a tribute to how good they were in developing people for the government and university”.
- *School-based professional collaboration* through promotion of collaborative lesson planning, peer observations, and staff development days. Processes such as peer observation, she pointed out, were outstanding in the China mainland. According to OECD data, peer review in Hong Kong in 8th grade mathematics and science increased by more than 25% between 2003 and 2011.¹⁰⁶
- *Creation of curriculum leadership positions* in primary schools.
- *Learning from other systems* by organizing visits to high performing systems in mainland China and Ontario, Canada, for example.

Many of the resources for this work go on grants in three-yearly cycles, generating considerable investment and energy for change across the system. Hong Kong is not a perfect system. It does not perform as well on educational equity or child wellbeing as it does on overall educational achievement.¹⁰⁷ However, the Hong Kong Education Bureau has avoided making detailed top-down mandates and provided support, incentives, encouragement and freedom for professionals to set directions and undertake initiatives themselves. The Bureau has created a platform for Fanling's *Open Class* innovation to flourish in its own school and throughout its wider network.

1.6 Summary

Lesson Study or Learning Study in the form of *Open Class* is a deliberate design of collaborative professionalism to bring about improvement and change. It involves rigorous cycles of collaborative planning, review, practice, feedback and public presentation in an environment that means the lesson belongs to everyone and that the problems, like the successes, are attributable to no one individual specifically. It is a design that shields professional learning and failure from the possibility of personal shame and blame.

Open Class prospers because of the ingenuity and integration of its design elements that deepen the dialogue and welcome critical feedback about teaching and learning in the environment of real practice. At the same time, while the tools and protocols of *Open Class* have deepened pre-existing, and more informal processes of collaboration, they have not initiated effective collaboration where it did not exist before. They are supported and sustained by a surrounding professional culture where other kinds of collaboration prevail as an ethic of working and improvement. *Open Class* and its teachers also benefit from a culture that is eager to learn and open to learning from elsewhere in Hong Kong, on the Chinese mainland, and overseas. And it is enabled, though not micromanaged, by a policy system that encourages, expects and actively supports pedagogical innovation and collaborative professional development. Not least, in high performing Asian countries like Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan, precise methods of professionally coordinated collaboration occur within cultures and traditions that value the collective good, individual sacrifice, harmony, hierarchy and humility in a context that accords high value to and respect for learning, teaching, expertise and authority.

2. Collaborative Curriculum Planning Networks

2.1 Collaboration in rural environments

“We all live in the sticks.”¹⁰⁸ These are the words of Martha, a high school teacher of English Language Arts (ELA) in a rural school in Washington State, USA, about the network of rural school educators to which she belongs. Schools like Martha’s find it hard to get access to what can come so easily to teachers in towns and cities: other colleagues who teach your own grade level, share the same curriculum, or who can just come down the corridor to give some ideas, advice, or moral support if you’re having a rough day. But “in the sticks,” teachers often find they have to do pretty much everything themselves.

Martha’s school is so small she is the only teacher of her subject. So she cannot repeat a lesson she has prepared for different classes. “When you’re teaching four or five or six preps a day each year, and they can change from year to year, you don’t have that luxury of time” to collaborate with other teachers, she says. In small rural high schools, you are so busy teaching, you hardly have time to plan. And, in Martha’s words, if you’re the only teacher of your subject “it’s hard to collaborate with yourself!”

This is the double disadvantage of education in rural America. In former manufacturing towns where the industries have closed down, among poor immigrant agricultural workers, on Native American reserves, or in forestry communities that have been all logged out, working people struggle just as much as they do in bigger cities. But they are also isolated from large centers of commerce, higher education, philanthropy, and investment. And they are isolated from each other too.

Although Martha and her colleagues in the vast region of the Pacific Northwest are often surrounded by spectacular natural beauty, they also work with communities who are faced with many kinds of deprivation. This includes their own professional isolation. So teachers and principals from 27 of these districts, including Martha, have started to do something about the isolation. If they can conquer this, they believe, they will be better equipped to combat the problems posed by rural deprivation for the students they teach.

Twice a year, Martha and her colleagues drive over mountain passes and across state lines to get to places like Spokane, Washington, where she and teachers and administrators from other rural schools and communities convene for two days as members of the Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement (NW RISE) Network. Some of them take multiple flights to come all the way from Alaska for these “convenings”. What brings them here, other than the additional attraction of bigger and better shopping?

At 7:30 AM, the hotel ballroom is already filled with the lively chatter of friends and colleagues reuniting and catching up after many months apart. Like other professionals, teachers are notorious for wanting to “talk shop.” But these educators have come to Spokane for more than a bit of chitchat. They have come to work. During their two-and-a-bit days in this small city, teachers from rural and remote schools in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington will listen to presentations, share ideas, and fill-in online surveys about their students’ learning and their school’s progress, in real time. Most of all, and most of the time, though, educators will get together in what their own survey responses have indicated are their most valuable groups. These are job-alike groups of colleagues working with similar subjects or groups of students across their schools such as math teachers, kindergarten teachers, teachers of special needs, and school administrators. In their own schools, sometimes hours from the next school, rural educators are often the only teachers of their grade or their subject. They have no one else in similar situations to connect with or learn from. This is why Martha so values her own job-alike group of English Language teachers.

2.2 Job-Alike collaboration

Like educators in the other job-alike groups, Martha’s group is trying to plan lessons, experiences, and units of work with her colleagues that will increase their students’ engagement with their learning and with their life within and beyond their community (Image 4). David,¹ a younger ELA teacher from rural Oregon, appreciates this work on lesson planning, especially when resources may be few and far between. “As a new teacher, it’s overwhelming to plan so many different activities,” David says. When you live in an isolated area and don’t have other teachers to talk to about your ideas, “just the fact that some people can get around a table and help to plan activities can be so beneficial and helpful”, he points out.

¹ Pseudonym



Image 4. The ELA job-alike group working on collaborative projects at a 2016 convening.

“The challenge is you sometimes feel like you’re on an island,” another NW RISE teacher says. “And I’m the only 5th grade teacher and there’s times when I think where am I going to go for ideas?”¹⁰⁹ All staff members are pulled in many different directions with multiple responsibilities, including the principal. “I’m the superintendent, principal, bus driver, custodian, part time, all of those,”¹¹⁰ one says. But, he continues, NW RISE has offered something new that is helping him and his school re-think teaching and learning. “Joining NW RISE was a great opportunity for us to link us with other small, rural schools,” he says. “For the first time in my principal-ship, I felt like here’s a group of people that really get the challenges that I have.”¹¹¹

2.3 Focus on engagement

Student engagement is the focus of the NW RISE Network—and for a good reason. Globally, the number of students in rural areas who do not have access to education and who are not in schools is twice as large—16 percent compared to eight percent—as in urban communities.¹¹² In the US, over 40 percent of K-12 schools are located in rural communities. Almost one third of all US students attend rural schools.¹¹³ Eighty-five percent of the persistently poor counties in the US (where 20 percent of the population has lived below the poverty line for the last 30 years or more) are classified as rural counties.¹¹⁴ Other challenges of rural American communities include weak economic development, chronic absenteeism, low educational aspirations,

poor achievement, and low high school and college completion rates.¹¹⁵ In the Northwest region of the US, “66 percent of Northwest districts are in rural areas” and “nearly 500 rural schools in the [US] Northwest have five or fewer teachers.”¹¹⁶

In the US and elsewhere, student achievement is closely connected to student engagement. Of course, it is possible to be resilient and to achieve without much immediate engagement—through perseverance, sacrifice, grit and relentless pursuit of some ultimate goal. But if students’ surrounding life circumstances are not supportive, then getting their attention above and beyond all the other things they have to cope with—living in poverty, going hungry, looking after younger siblings, or encountering drugs or violence in the family or community—is usually a prerequisite for success.¹¹⁷ For teachers in the NW RISE Network, this means learning to work with and plan around what students and their rural communities have, as well as what they lack. And it means working with other rural teachers (and their students) to create the inspiration, ideas, curriculum, and assessments that can bring their students’ learning alive.

Some of the value of these collaborative planning teams is simply about realizing that, different as these teachers’ circumstances are, they are ultimately all in the same boat. “These teachers are down in the trenches fighting to keep kids from dropping out, from committing suicide, and from getting pregnant,” says one of Martha’s fellow collaborators. “And we’re one-on-one with these kids. It gets to you,” she adds. “And so this has given us a chance to see that there are others just like us”. “It’s very rewarding,” she concludes.

There’s more to deep professional collaboration than the ability to relate or commiserate, though. Misery may love company sometimes, but it doesn’t get people out of bed and off to school or work. Doing something deliberately to try and make a difference together is what deeper collaborative professionalism is about.

2.4 The ELA Job-Alike group

Chris Spriggs described how she, Martha, and another founding member of the ELA job-alike group got started. “We had decided that we really, truly wanted to focus on student engagement, but that we wanted to focus on authentic learning,” she told us. Danette Parsley, Chief Program Officer at Education Northwest and the instigator of the NW RISE Network, says,

This is not an academic exercise. This is real work—and really relevant, in real time. They don’t treat this as something separate, or something in addition to what they’re doing. This is adding value to what they need to do tomorrow, the next day, the next month. And they use each other as supports to do their work.

“The ELA group was right out on the front line as a model,” Danette stated. As their first project together, Chris and the other group members picked the task of teaching their 9th to 11th grade students how to write and defend an argument. In a world of wild opinions where too many people think they are experts,¹¹⁸ and where arguments are reduced to shouting matches even on national TV, these teachers understood that making a defensible argument is not only a college-going requirement; it is an essential tool of democratic reason.

In the first year, the ELA group’s argument topic asked students to adopt a stance toward one-to-one technology implementation in their schools and write an argument with reasons and evidence to convince a designated audience of their position (including anticipating any objections to the argument). Different community-based audiences for these arguments included school, district, or community members with whom the students interacted and to whom they directed their writing. With a touch of authenticity, these groups included the district technology board and potential community funder.

The argument topic in the next year had students adopt a stance on the use of drones, which could include private, public, or government use depending on the particular project and audience. Other ELA projects have involved “day-in-the-life” time-lapse videos in which students use smartphones to film and describe their local, rural communities to one another in ways that build pride in their own communities alongside understanding of others’ communities as well. All of these projects enhance writing by increasing engagement. Students learn about different genres and structures of writing, and about how to consider different writing purposes and audiences in authentic practices that enable them to share their own life experience, reflect on their identity, and interact with other rural community members. But most importantly, many of the projects, including writing arguments, have involved connecting the students so that they could collaborate to work on their writing. As Chris explained, the teachers “put the kids together, and then they are given a common peer editing rubric that they use to give feedback and post onto *Schoology* [a digital platform] for their peers to read.”

What impact has this work had on students? Chris had noticed how “the students talk a lot more about these other schools. They reference kids, they talk about how they want to go there and visit, they want to do more, they want to participate more.” In addition, she said,

They’ve learned a lot more about the actual writing process because I don’t think I would have spent as much diligent, meticulous time breaking down each part of the writing process as I do now with the group. I think it’s made the students more alert to audience when they’re writing. It’s made them pay way more attention to their word choice.

Students agreed. One of them who had written about drones to their rural community's state representative said,

I took the project a lot more seriously. I thought I could be heard. So I tried to express how I felt about drones and tried to get my point across clearly. I was just trying to sound more professional. I wasn't trying to use slang or anything like that. I was trying to use words that would get my point across. Because I felt like the state representative, if he was just to read it and it was just me talking like how I would with my friends, he wouldn't take me seriously and just push my paper aside.

Students advanced many arguments. One discussed the value of drones for surveying her agricultural and farming community. Others worried about invasions of privacy. By engaging in peer feedback across schools, they were able to improve each other's writing, while also considering these different perspectives.

Of course, having high school students collaborate via technology can also pose risks such as students posting inappropriate remarks to their peers in other schools. As Chris explained though, students “had to learn about *netiquette* and speaking to one another properly online and not using *Schoology* like a social media site.” These kinds of lessons (including writing apologies to recipients of inappropriate remarks!) helped students to learn and develop as people, how to provide feedback to improve writing, and how to empathize with “people who live in a much different world than you do.”

Danette Parsley describes how the work of the ELA group has inspired other job-alike groups:

Engaging students — that was an unexpected thing that took off from the ELA group. They were really early adopters. That group used the collaboration protocols. They got to know each other, landed on a project, and said argument writing is something we all need to do. It developed into a combination of sharing resources, designing some lessons, and not too far into it they realized, “Wait a minute, instead of us just designing lessons together, why not get our kids involved?” They were on the front edge, which I think is brilliant. Now I see this trickling over to some of the other job-alikes and it's so energizing.

The network's success does not just hinge on the network coordinators. It also comes from teachers taking active roles, making their collaborative projects meaningful, and encouraging one another in their work. Much went into the design of the NW RISE network to enable it to be this way.

2.5 Network design

Like some of the best educational networks before and alongside it, NW RISE has a specific and deliberate design.¹¹⁹ Not all networks, including educational networks, are designed in the same way, though. They have different content or purposes such as disseminating innovation,¹²⁰ supporting improvement, or implementing change.¹²¹

Networks can also assume different forms. Mark Hadfield and Chris Chapman¹²² outline three different kinds of networks.

- Hub-and-spoke networks are organized around a central hub where information is disseminated to participants on the periphery.
- Nodal systems comprise mini-hubs, as in schools that are clustered together by region, level, or focus to implement and give feedback on government policies and strategies.
- Crystalline networks have no recognizable hubs. Interactions occur across the network on multiple and overlapping pathways of communication.¹²³

The NW RISE Network grew out of collaboration between State Education Agency (SEA) members and Education Northwest to find better ways to serve remote, rural schools in their states. Danette Parsley recalls that the network came out of a question:

What if we created a network across the region to work side by side with the rural districts that you [SEAs] don't get to normally reach? And we learn from them and schools learn from schools and districts from districts and you're learning with them?

The group, led by Education Northwest, developed a design team to brainstorm what kind of network would be best and what the aims of the network should be. To facilitate and inform the work of the design team, Education Northwest partnered with us at Boston College because of our prior experience with building and evaluating large-scale networks elsewhere.¹²⁴

2.6 Network principles

Using these examples, and drawing on the literature of educational networks, the design team determined eight elements that were characteristic of successful, high-performing networks and used these to inform the design of NW RISE.¹²⁵

1. *Shared goals — which are determined early and are relevant, purposeful, and desirable for all network members.* After much discussion, the NW RISE design team decided that their focus would be on increasing students’ engagement with their learning and their communities, by building the professional capital¹²⁶ and especially the social capital of teachers across rural communities¹²⁷ so they could collaborate more effectively. These strategies, it was determined, should also fit statewide and federal concerns with getting students college and career ready, and should not add to teachers’ and administrators’ workloads.

2. *Site selection and participation — in which potential members view participation as being attractive and worth the effort.* The first core group of schools — just nine to begin with — were approached by state leaders on the grounds of being ready and willing to participate in terms of their own local needs. Additionally, the design team determined that the network would be for “small” districts, approximately 400 or fewer students in one K-12 campus, to create a network of similar districts and schools.

3. *Form of networking activities — this depends on the size and purpose of the network but the more that activities involve teachers themselves, the more likely that collective responsibility will be established.* Once the initial group of schools met, the first task, in addition to building relationships, was for each job-alike group to choose its focus. Some, like the ELA group, found this quickly, one found it perhaps too quickly and then had to step back and regroup (a problem that Michael Fullan calls false clarity¹²⁸), and some had to go well beyond the first convening to figure out what they could work on together. In the end, though, each group determined its direction for itself and did not have a purpose imposed on it.

4. *Focus — network members must decide what activities will be most useful to achieve the network goals.* Job-alike groups became an early favorite of network members and remained the major point of focus throughout. Technology-based communication evolved more slowly. Inputs by Education Northwest and Boston College productively disturbed existing mindsets, as did invited presentations from outside experts. Open space technology, where participants could offer their own presentations in a fair-format, led to sessions being presented on a wide range of topics.

5. *Steering — where high-quality leadership supports, directs, and facilitates, but also allows space for distributed leadership.* The design and mix of activities and engagements was carefully designed by the steering committee and informed by continuous participant

feedback. For instance, the Education Northwest team provided a collaboration and implementation protocol — SPUR — that was used to guide the collaboration process in a purposeful way through a process of brainstorming, reflection, planning, implementation, and then more reflection.¹²⁹

6. *Resources — leaders can help to provide resources, but they should also empower other network members to become proactive about commitment and securing support.* The federal grant that Education Northwest successfully secured made the network possible in the first place, but long before the midpoint after a presentation by us on principles of sustainability,¹³⁰ network members and state representatives discussed how to access and indeed donate their own resources to make the network sustainable beyond the term of the grant. Colored paddles were used during steering committee meetings to signify agreement or the need for additional discussion on these crucial points (Image 5).

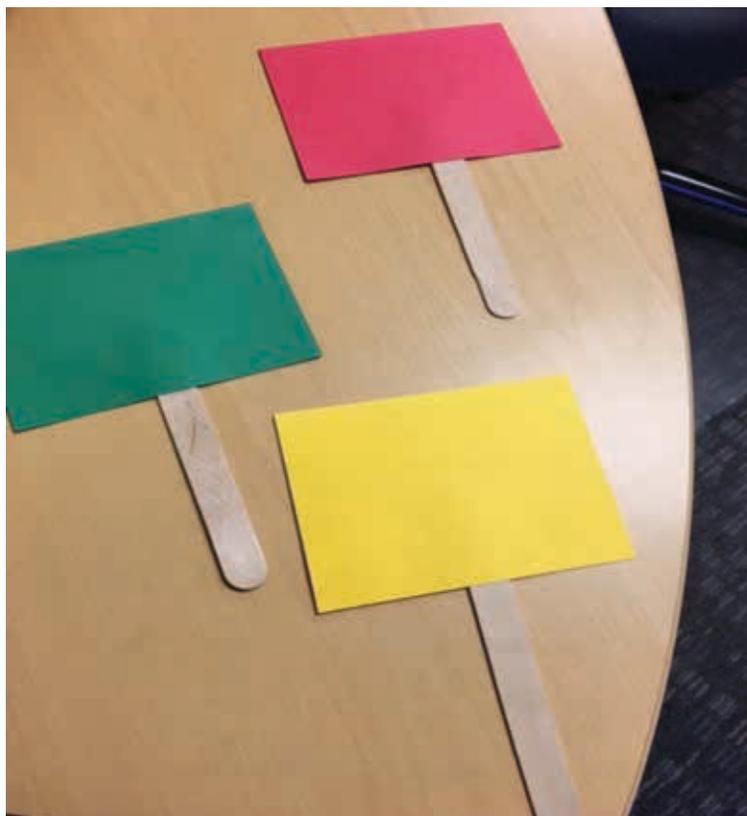


Image 5. Paddles used to include and give voice to all perspectives and also expedite decision making

7. *Network citizenship — there needs to be clear rules about participation.* These norms and rules were especially important to job-alike groups who had to agree how and how much to communicate digitally between convenings, and to present webinars to other members on topics of their choosing.

8. Spread and growth — new participants, purposes, and activities will emerge, and both growth and change will have to be acknowledged and dealt with. The network members continue to discuss, decide, reflect on, and review how much and how fast they should grow in order to have greater reach versus how they can maintain the intimacy of smaller group interaction that enabled them to build trust and mutual understanding. This is one of several common dilemmas of networks discussed by Lieberman and Grolnick.¹³¹ At present, after four years of planning, three of which have comprised in-person school convenings, the network has tripled in size.

2.7 Network technology

The benefits and drawbacks of technology for innovative professional development are hotly debated. Can online interaction substitute adequately for face-to-face communication at lower cost? Whatever the merits of the overall arguments on either side, in rural communities (assuming there is broadband capability), digital technology makes shared professional learning available in ways that could not be offered in any other form.

The platform used by the ELA job-alike group, as well as all NW RISE network members, is *Schoology*, a learning management system that provides a virtual, digital space to share resources, post comments and engage in dialogue asynchronously, and also to conduct collaborative meetings in real time. Having both asynchronous and real time options to collaborate means that teachers can work across time zones and within different school schedules, while also setting aside intentional time to virtually meet “face-to-face” for pertinent updates. Though the teachers also use e-mail, Google Docs and other Google platforms, as well as Skype to connect and collaborate, having a central platform like *Schoology* for all project resources and a reliable virtual meeting system has helped the group to stay organized and map out their future plans.

Together, the in-person meetings and digital and virtual connections create a balanced and blended approach to collaboration. The in-person convenings provide the foundations for relationships, trust, and substantive lesson planning. The technology, meanwhile, allows for the implementation of projects, the regular check-ins between in-person meetings, and the ability to engage students more directly in the work. This progression from teacher to student collaboration made the collaborative work especially relevant and impactful for teachers and students alike.

2.8 Net worth

“We believe that teachers working with teachers is the most effective way that you can improve schools and we believe that teachers are professionals who have way more to offer to each other than perhaps they’re ever given the opportunity to ever elevate and express, especially in small, rural

schools.” This work of teachers, as expressed by Danette Parsley, is ultimately to improve the learning experiences of students. For Danette, professional collaboration doesn’t merely amount to setting teachers free, though. She and Education Northwest “wanted to provide scaffolding for job-alike groups.” However, “once the flame hits, you don’t need to provide the scaffolding anymore,” she concludes. Chris Spriggs, for example, is now facilitator of the ELA group as she encourages other teacher leaders to reflect upon their students’ needs to drive new collaborative projects. From the argument writing project to the day-in-the-life student films about community and identity, these planning ideas were driven by the teachers, who in turn were inspired by their students, rather than being directed by their principals, the state education administrators, Education Northwest, or Boston College.

In the NW RISE network, teachers work with teachers, schools work with schools, in relation to authentic purposes and audiences and with the engagement of their students. This benefits the students and also retains the commitment and ignites the fire in teachers. Chris talks about the impact of the network on herself and other rural teachers:

They get rejuvenated, excited, they go back, they talk to the other teachers about it. And for me, it’s completely changed my thinking. I’ve been so isolated as a teacher. I just have gotten used to being my own boss and doing what I want and making my decisions. And then I have to come here and hear ideas that don’t necessarily go with mine and learn to be flexible and see others’ perspectives. It’s also been nice just to work with other people who have the same frustrations. They don’t get paid very much, but they do 20 jobs and work late nights and they coach and they advise. That’s just been something that’s been enlightening and helped me. But it really has changed my life to come here and work and be around everyone. They’re so inspiring, and their philosophy very much matches with mine.

Another teacher says how the network has “reinvigorated my teaching style. I try new things. I work with these teachers and have collaborated a lot more.” A secondary history teacher echoes these words:

What I love about the [network], it’s the only one that I know that is totally focused on rural schools. So many of these conferences, I’m [typically] the odd man out because I have a class of eight kids. The other teachers have no idea what that’s like. Whereas when I go to a NW RISE conference or jump on Schoology, I know everyone’s on the same page.¹³²

NW RISE network members aren't all on the same page by coincidence. A carefully and intentionally designed network architecture, along with creating space for teachers to be agents of their own improvement, led to a form of collaboration that is both deep and sustainable in an unlikely place—the rural and often remote US Pacific Northwest.

3. Cooperative Learning and Working

There are strong cases for increasing collaborative professionalism in many educational systems. But what is the argument for investing further in teachers' professional capital and especially social capital in countries that are already affluent and where traditions of democratic decision-making have become integral features of the society? One of the wealthiest countries per capita on the planet is Norway.¹³³ It tops the United Nations Human Development index and its people were rated the happiest in the world in 2017.¹³⁴ Norway's educational performance has been less impressive, though. Although its 15-year-olds have begun to improve on OECD's PISA test of student performance, it is still only just in the top third of 72 countries and territories and barely above the OECD average.¹³⁵

Talk to Norwegian educational leaders and some of them will attribute weak performance in education to the “oil laziness”—the difficulty of motivating high school students who found it easy to obtain employment in the energy sector even though they had few qualifications. But now the oil has gone, educational results have been steadily improving. This may have something to do with the educators as well as the students' job motivation.

Over the past few years, the Norwegian government has urged systems to pay more attention to data as they strive to improve their schools together. With government encouragement, school districts are collaborating more with each other. Substantial grants have been awarded to university providers of teacher education to form partnerships with local schools and school districts.

Collaboration may not be new to Norwegian society, but it is relatively new for Norwegian teachers. Outside its three or four cities, in a nation of just four million people, Norway has historically been a rural society where teachers spent much of their time working in small schools. This gave them a lot of individual authority and autonomy in their own schools and classes. Many teachers also had other jobs, like farming and running local stores that left little time for collaboration outside their classrooms. This is one reason why teachers' time, even today, is calculated very precisely in their work contracts. What do the push and pull of these different factors and forces mean for professional collaboration in this society?

3.1 Consistency of cooperation.

Aronsloekka primary school, one of 19 schools in the municipality of Drammen, 45 kilometers southwest of Oslo, has been developing its own form of teacher collaboration over several years. The idea underpinning professional collaboration is to base the principles for interaction and learning among teachers on the principles of learning and interaction among students. The school has invested heavily in cooperative learning and believes that there should be consistency in the forms of cooperation within classes and among teachers.

Cooperative learning has a number of exponents and advocates, but one of the best known is the work of US expert Spencer Kagan that stretches back until at least the mid 1980s.¹³⁶ Kagan’s widely adopted work promotes cooperative learning as a philosophy involving up to 250 classroom strategies to improve academic achievement and develop students’ social skills and team-building. Most teachers use just a few core strategies, as one of Kagan’s trainers in the UK explains.¹³⁷

We have seen cooperative learning in action ever since one of us worked with Michael Fullan in Ontario, Canada, in the late 1980s to build a consortium of four school boards that based much of their initial work around training in cooperative learning and classroom management. Early evaluations we conducted indicated that the training processes were highly successful, but that after initial summer institutes for teachers, many schools did not follow through because of weak support from the principal or the wider culture of the school. Many teachers weren’t able to persist in getting their children to cooperate unless there was a culture where the teachers cooperated, too. This is why consistency between student and teacher cooperation is essential.

Principal (in Norway, the term is rektor) Lena Kilen and her deputy Marcus Kathrud understand this very well. In our site visit at the end of May in 2017, we observed cooperative learning in classrooms and also as an organizing principle for teacher meetings.¹³⁸ When we walked into one of the primary classes, cooperative learning strategies were clearly evident. Children had to talk about the goal of the Norwegian language lesson. They stood, “mixed up” by snaking around the room as in a game of musical chairs, and then found partners for a brief, reciprocal discussion. They started by talking about how they would cooperate, and how they would discuss together, right down to the pitch of their voice. They stood and mixed up once more with different partners to discuss three difficult Norwegian words that have a *kj* sound.

There is meta-cognition at work here — children were thinking about how they work together. Five of the most popular “Kagan strategies” were listed on the board. Three of them were being used on this day. Two of the most widely adopted, here and elsewhere, are “round robin” where children take turns to respond orally in their group. Another is “rally coach,” in which one partner coaches the other in solving a problem, then they exchange roles. In doing so, they explain aloud what they are thinking. These strategies are good for

“listening, showing respect, and helping”, says Lena. The teachers will use the standard strategies from the Kagan playbook, but also invent their own “a lot” if student needs require it. As the class proceeds, it is clear that the children are very familiar with the strategies, and like their peers in Fanling in Hong Kong, they know what to do.

One of the teacher’s colleagues explains aspects of the group formation. Groups are mixed ability—again like Fanling—with the highest and lowest in a group of four being “face partners” and those in between being “shoulder partners” “so they can help each other if one gets stuck.” This “stops the mind wandering” so that “more [of them] finish on time when they do [the work] together.”

At the end of the morning, a school staff meeting exhibits many of the same principles and processes that are evident in the cooperative learning classroom. The meeting engages staff in determining the goals for the school and connecting this to the long-term, five-year (2016-2020) Quality Plan that the school compiles to share with the municipality.¹³⁹

There is ice cream and relaxed social conversation at the start of the meeting. A repeat of the earlier class structure is evident as teachers snake around each other once more, form pairs and then, for 30 seconds each, using the Kagan methods that the principal names in the meeting, they discuss what inspiration and motivation are. Now the task is to return to their corners in groups the principal has carefully composed and discuss how to get students from being inspired to being motivated. The reason for this is to think about how a data-driven focus can result in teachers thinking about many students who are merely in the middle rather than high up the range of achievement results. In one of the groups, teachers talk about needing to pair up with someone to learn more about the cooperative learning structures. Another shared her wish to extend her repertoire of methods from about five to ten.

For a while, Principal Kilen takes over and connects discussion to data in the quality plan, indicating that 56 percent of their students report they look forward to going to school. This is better than the municipality average, she points out, but she emphasizes that this is still bad for many children. They have a “moral purpose that they owed the students something,” she insists. Their motivation, perseverance, and experiences of dealing with failure have to be addressed. This means using the Kagan structures more extensively and more deeply, the teachers conclude. They must try to move from levels three to four of “Kagan implementation,” they decide.

Finally, back in their groups, teachers work quietly on reviewing and revising statements they had drafted in relation to their school goals the previous week. The conversation is quiet and restrained—quite different from Hong Kong! This exercise is not just a matter of technical drafting. Teachers raise examples that challenge their thinking, such as how to reconcile the mother who was concerned that her child was introverted and didn’t want to be in groups all the time, against the importance of helping children to become more social and ensuring that “it is not so easy for kids to hide any more.”

Lena and Marcus “want teachers also to be leaders and big picture thinkers.” The teachers work together on a range of things in teams. Like other schools with professional learning communities (PLCs), for example, some teams focus on specific topics where teachers share strategies in relation to reading, social skills, math, and cooperative learning itself. Everyone has the opportunity to be in one of these groups, Lena explains. But in addition, teachers are also involved in “how they run the school; on developing the school and its directions.” “They plan the next meetings as they know what the next step is.” This includes deciding what the priorities will be and what kind of culture they will have. “There is no way you fall asleep in our staff meetings,” Lena says.

In many schools around the world, teacher collaboration or professional communities translate into working on specific aspects of pedagogy or the curriculum that have immediate or short-term impact on teachers’ own classrooms classroom. The big picture is left to the principal and the senior management. But at Aronsloekka, as we will also see in the Colombian schools of Escuela Nueva, all teachers can see what they are part of, how they contribute, and where their responsibilities lie.

3.2 Context of cooperation

Where has the idea of organizing staff teams to resemble cooperative learning lessons with children come from? What inspired it, drives it, and sustains it now? To address this question, we will turn to the points raised in our discussion of *Open Class* and Lesson Study. What went *before*? What other collaborative processes occur *betwixt* the cooperative learning? How does the policy system in the municipality and the country stand, on the shoulder, *beside* the cooperative learning design? And how do the teachers and principals find inspiration, training, stimulation and connection *beyond* the school?

3.2.1 Before The previous principal, as one experienced member of staff recalled, had created an environment where teachers felt secure but she controlled much of the detail of decision-making. She decided “where the cupboards were, the color of the curtains, the selection of the books.” So the teachers were “not used to professional decisions.”

When Lena arrived five years ago, teachers had collaborated, she noticed. They would “tell each other what they have been doing, talk together; see what others were doing.” But this didn’t run very deep. Indeed, sometimes the collaboration resulted in the gossip and storytelling of Judith Warren Little’s characterization of weak collaboration.¹⁴⁰ “Talking about each other was one of the dinosaurs that would be left behind,” Lena recalled. “If we don’t agree, it is better to say it when we are together,” she stressed. “Building a positive culture is so hard,” Lena continued. “When the days are good and bright, it is easy. But when they are grey, it is not.” Lena emphasizes that “if you don’t participate, you cannot complain after.” And in meetings, if “teachers talk about other things,” the principal and deputy stand beside them so that “they feel uncomfortable eventually.”

Before the co-existence of cooperative learning in teacher culture as well as student classrooms, there also had to be prior investment in the cooperative learning itself. Teachers were sent on intensive training courses to Manchester, England, until a critical mass of them built up in the school. But not all the early efforts were successful. One teacher explained that, when they started, “Kagan didn’t work.” Children were “shoving each other, crawling on the floor, wouldn’t do as they were told.” So the teacher had to spend six months to establish a safe learning environment. She moved away from “Kagan” for a while to re-establish basic behaviors like “raising your hand.” “Kagan has no theory of having an orderly environment in place,” the teacher commented. Only once order was re-established was cooperative learning re-introduced.

Different teachers progressed at different speeds, but they all worked together in supporting each other in moving forward. Failure, and stepping back sometimes, had to be experienced and undertaken before achieving the more consistent success that is evident today. The method is not successful all by itself. It is influenced and sometimes enabled by all the work that goes before and around it.

3.2.2. Betwixt In the classroom and the staffroom alike, cooperative learning at Aronsloekka does not exist as the only collaborative initiative, like an island in space and time. It is, of course, a specific methodology (of US origin) acquired via trainers or institutes in the United Kingdom. But like other initiatives, it matters how externally appropriated methods and designs fit with and develop alongside the rest of the school culture.

First, there is the importance of nature and the outdoors as a place of learning and development. At recess, we walk around the schoolyard where children are playing. There is a friendship bench for students who have no one to play with (Image 6). A soccer ball bounces down a ditch and across a small stream where a child goes to collect it. There are no fences around the playground.



Image 6. Two children on the school's friendship bench.

Like other Scandinavian countries, schools embrace the outdoors. Whole school assemblies addressed by the principal are held outside, even in the middle of winter. In Norway, they say, there is no such thing as bad weather. There is only bad gear. At Christmas, children and their teachers go into the woods together. In autumn, they pick blueberries. In summer, they play in the river and make campfires. Play, nature, and conversation are seen as ways of building relationships and creating memories together — children and adults, all together, for this is where adults and children alike, every day, see parts of each other that are not always visible in the classroom. School, say Lena and Marcus, teaches children “to love how to move, to get around and be with your friends, to learn to talk.” Like an indigenous community in Northwest Ontario and like rural schools in the jungles of Colombia that will be introduced later in this chapter, schools work with the environment, not against it.

Norwegian education also emphasizes the importance of the whole child and their development. Cooperation is part of this. One of the four pillars of the official Norwegian curriculum is to communicate, collaborate, and participate. Another is to explore, inquire, and create. One of the reasons we have schools, Lena says, is to “make people feel good about themselves; be part of a community — to be good in subjects but also being a person and being active.”

Sixth graders teach computer coding to first graders. Teachers plan collaborative lessons using iPads and also Lego materials. They send pictures home digitally so parents can see the school “is a good place for the child to be.” This “builds relations with parents in peaceful situations” that makes it easier to address “difficult stuff” later on. Cooperative learning as a strategy or a particular design is therefore surrounded by many other ways of building collaboration among the children and all the adults connected with the school.

When Norwegian educators go to Manchester in the UK to participate in the Kagan training institutes, they also become aware of how their own system and culture are distinct. Teachers in England are formal, one teacher noted. They are addressed as “Sir” and “Miss.” The men wear shirts and ties. Teachers in Norway, however, are called by their first name. “Children have a different mindset in Norway,” one of the teachers said. “They don’t fear the teacher.” This means thinking carefully about how the precise methodologies of cooperative learning are applied in the more informal setting of Norwegian schools.

3.2.3. Beside The policy system in Norway also supports the collaborative direction in which Aronsloekka is moving. Norwegian curriculum goals are very broad and leave considerable space for school and teacher discretion. Time bargains between unions and government also enable collaborative efforts. The contract for primary school teachers’ work is 42 hours per week, with 32 of those to be spent at school. Nineteen of those are taken up with instructional time. Of the remaining 13 hours a week, nine are allocated for personal planning and assessing with the remaining four being up to the principal’s discretion — though she usually discusses how to use these with the union representatives.

One priority, especially since we met towards the end of the school year, is the annual plan and planning process for the municipality’s Quality Review. In the past years, partly as a result of networks to and connections with the Ontario educational system, most municipalities have introduced data systems to monitor progress towards educational goals. The data are reviewed internally and also between the principal and the director of the municipality. “I have to know my numbers,” Lena says. But, she feels, the use of data adds more precision to some of the school’s discussions and decisions. There are some affirmations, such as the fact that Drammen’s value-added improvement score is greater than anywhere else in Norway. There are also questions about the fact that girls are not achieving as well as boys in reading (which contradicts the national trend), the need for improvement with the growing number of children from immigrant families, and large numbers of children “in the middle,” who are above proficiency but would benefit from greater challenge.

These issues are discussed with staff to support their planning processes, but they do not constitute separate data teams with special funding or for specified problems that replace or override all the other kinds of professional collaboration that exist in the school. The use of data is part of a wider collaborative and improvement strategy, not the driving force or design of that strategy.

3.2.4. Beyond Last, Aronsloekka has been able to adopt its own particular path by learning and networking from many other systems beyond it. It has learned a lot from connections to and visits with educators in Ontario, and is part of a small network of schools that have formed a partnership between Alberta, Canada and Norway. Also, of course, its adoption of the Kagan approach to cooperative learning derives from a US-based approach that has been widely used in Canada and now provides training in the UK. The staff at Aronsloekka collaborate externally, as well as internally.

4. Collaborative Pedagogical Transformation

Aronsloekka is a case of collaborative professionalism that benefits from multiple partners working together, in a well-resourced environment that enables international collaboration and training and is well supported in provisions of teacher time. Is this kind of collaborative professionalism a privilege and a prerogative of affluence? Is it unattainable in less developed economies, especially where many teachers work in great rural isolation?

In 1976, one woman, a teacher's daughter in Latin America, didn't believe so. At the age of 24, returning home from completing two Masters degrees at Stanford University, she set about transforming education in poor rural communities, then in cities, then in other parts of the world, to the point where her inspiring vision has been realized in over 25,000 schools.¹⁴¹ Her name is Vicky Colbert. In 2013, Colbert was the first recipient of what was then the nearest thing to a Nobel Prize for education – the WISE Prize for Education – for successfully transforming learning for children in poor communities over almost 40 years in her native Colombia and also in 16 countries elsewhere. In 2017, she was then awarded the inaugural Yidan Prize of \$4m for her global contributions to educational development.

4.1 Vision of *Escuela Nueva*

However collaborative a movement may become, most social movements start off with an improbably inspiring vision or dream of just one or two individuals.¹⁴² Even in her mid-twenties, Colbert knew that “if we don't have quality basic education, nothing will be achieved in any country in the world. You won't have social development, economic development, peace, democracy! It's the only way.”¹⁴³ To give children in rural Colombia a chance, she and committed educators who came to work with her had to teach children the power of community, democracy, and engagement. Colbert and her colleagues, Óscar Mogollón and Beryl Levinger, didn't just want greater access to basic education, or even to *quality* basic education in terms of providing more effective traditional teaching to improve performance in the basics. They wanted to transform learning in ways that gave it meaning and purpose for thousands and then millions of poor or disadvantaged children.

For Vicky Colbert, one of the founders of *Escuela Nueva—the New School*, the model has been her life’s work, from starting out as a young idealist to becoming the “genial grandmother” she is today.¹⁴⁴ In a country that had been torn apart by violence, drugs, and corruption, she and her colleagues first began implementing and spreading their student-centered, democratic model of learning in the most improbable of circumstances.

Interviewed by *The New York Times* while she was receiving her WISE prize, Colbert reflected on how *Escuela Nueva* had begun. “When you see these isolated, invisible schools, why wait for big educational top-down reform from the government?” she said. “We started the fire from the bottom up, by making small changes in classrooms and working with rural teachers to improve morale, results and resources.”¹⁴⁵

4.2 Learning in *Escuela Nueva*

Carlos has been a teacher with *Escuela Nueva* for most of his life. Like Colbert, it “has become my life project,” he tells us.¹⁴⁶ For the last 12 years, he has taught students from six grades—early elementary to middle school—all together in one room in a remote, rural school high in the Andes. When we enter Carlos’ school, the president of the student council, a middle-school aged boy, welcomes us. Then the secretary says a few words about the school, tells us that they are working on math and literacy in their learning guides, but that they are particularly excited about their school gardens. The students are proud of their school and welcome us with open hearts. Using grade-appropriate learning guides, they are all following the curriculum at their own pace while Carlos and the other students guide and assist them when necessary. Carlos connects the experiential learning in the garden to the math, literacy, and science lessons in the learning guides—the content varying depending on the grade level of the particular student in the multi-grade classroom. It’s a highly cooperative environment—teachers supporting students and students of all ages assisting each other.

Outside, the forest teems with life. Carlos and his students have turned this environment into a multi-grade classroom as well. There is a space to watch and record observations about birds. There are gardens in raised boxes including carrots and other root vegetables (Image 7) that, as one other visitor to *Escuela Nueva* schools has noted, “are used as staples at mealtime, often prepared according to their parents’ recipes.”¹⁴⁷ There’s even a makeshift playing field behind the school where students kick around a threadbare soccer ball during a break from classes. Nature and physical activity are integral rather than incidental to learning here. These form the content for math, science, and literacy—the subjects becoming authentic and real, connected to the school’s backyard. Learning comes alive here.



Image 7. Students examining plants in their outdoor garden.

At one point, Carlos' principal, who oversees several small schools in her cluster as well as here, rides up on a motorcycle and removes her helmet. Narda is just as proud of the school as Carlos and the students. As we walk with her, a much younger student shows us the mural at the front entrance of the school (Image 8). It is a colorful map that students have made of their local area so they and their teachers know where the school is in relation to their homes, and other natural landmarks. This is the pedagogy, culture, and life of learning at *Escuela Nueva*.

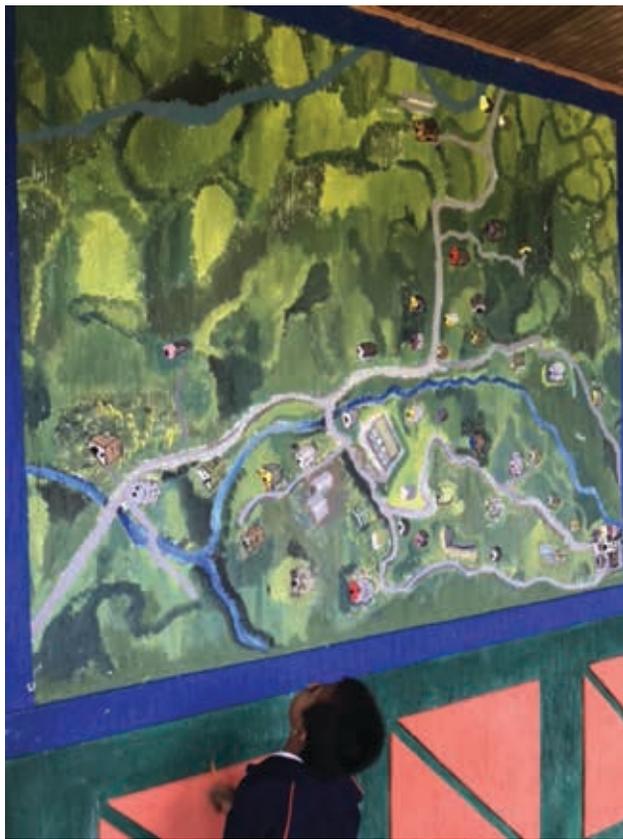


Image 8. A young student looks up at the school and community mural

The vision of learning in *Escuela Nueva* is that it is cooperative, relevant, engaging, experiential, flexible, and personalized, so children can follow the curriculum “at their own rhythm.” Colbert explains that, “relevance for us is crucial,”¹⁴⁸ and she adds, “We need a relevant curriculum specifically for the rural areas”. Work is often organized around interdisciplinary projects. For example, the birdlife around the school has formed the basis for learning about different animals, while also providing opportunities for descriptive writing. The pedagogy and the learning are also participatory. Together, students create, care for, and observe the gardens, bird-watching observatory, and other natural exploratory centers around their school.

These are not new pedagogies, Colbert insists.¹⁴⁹ *Escuela Nueva* was about taking good old pedagogies, “renovating” or “recovering” them, and “putting them back in Latin America” where they had a distinguished lineage— as, for instance, in the legendary work of Paulo Freire in Brazil in the 1960s.¹⁵⁰ The emphasis on participatory values in the schools was nothing new either, Colbert pointed out. It stretched back at least as far as American educator and philosopher John Dewey, a century before.¹⁵¹ Through school government and elections, school committees, and leadership in the classroom, this was “how you learn democracy in the classroom,” Colbert explained. “Nothing that we do is new in the philosophy of education, but we do help to make it replicable,” she added— particularly by having teachers learn the pedagogical model from

other teachers and their students. In an article in *The New York Times*, David Kirp explains that, “when teachers unfamiliar with this approach are assigned to these schools, it’s often the students themselves who teach them how to apply the method.”¹⁵²

Personalized and cooperative learning are essential to developing these democratic competencies in *Escuela Nueva*. Peace and citizenship are an essential part of the curriculum in a culture where conflict has been rife and a peace settlement was only finally reached between the government and FARC rebels in 2017. In this Colombian setting, peace and citizenship are not peripheral to the basic curriculum of literacy and math, as they are in many other nations, but essential outcomes in forming the character of young people who will make up the future of society. Colbert and her colleagues would likely agree with Adam Smith’s claim that “sympathy is the basic emotion of democracy.”¹⁵³

The curriculum of *Escuela Nueva* is not somber, though. Children “learn through playing and interacting” in a “student-centered model.” “There is a lot of talking,” Colbert explains.¹⁵⁴ One of *Escuela Nueva*’s teachers expresses it this way: The children are “happy, active, engaged. We don’t force them to learn things, because these children are autonomous in their decision-making. They’re leaders. They do things with more pleasure, more love, more happiness. They’re all the time playing with and participating in their own education.”¹⁵⁵

In the classroom, the distinctive approach to learning in *Escuela Nueva* is supported by learning guides that are low-tech and low-cost — somewhere between a book and a worksheet — that are adjusted to each student level. But in the end, the success of learning that is relevant, experiential, flexible, cooperative, and participatory depends a lot on the teacher. So how does *Escuela Nueva* prepare and support its teachers and spread what they know?

4.3 Teachers in *Escuela Nueva*

A distinctive feature of *Escuela Nueva*, and of collaborative professionalism as a whole, is the philosophical, ethical, and practical *consistency* between the way learning is organized for students and the way learning, work, and improvement are organized for teachers. Collaborative professionalism does not compel teachers to use democratic pedagogies, as they have sometimes been required to do elsewhere in the past.¹⁵⁶ Nor is it collaborative professionalism if teachers are made to analyze data together to undertake swift interventions within otherwise unchanged classrooms. Collaborative professionalism is not about preparing or pressing teachers to cooperate so they can get better at a bad game where teachers collaborate but students have little or no voice at all.

Colbert and her colleagues knew that they had to educate and inspire a teaching force that was committed to the remote, rural areas of Colombia. Even more than the teachers in the NW RISE network in the US, many of the teachers working for *Escuela Nueva* experienced extreme isolation. Many of them are the only teacher in a one-room, multi-grade schoolhouse, far from peers elsewhere. *Escuela Nueva* introduced these teachers to a distinctive model of pedagogy. It also brought them a new way of thinking about teacher preparation, professional development, and collaborative support.

A distinctive feature of Colombian education is that it is decentralized. This means that teachers like Carlos are often alone running the multi-grade schools with one principal, like Narda, supporting several of these rural schools in a cluster. Decentralization also challenges educators to find innovative ways (with limited availability of digital or virtual technology) to share ideas. In the face of these geographical obstacles, *Escuela Nueva* came up with three interrelated design features:

- *Initial training workshops*
- *Micro-centers for pedagogical demonstrations and professional interaction*
- *Networking across and beyond the micro-centers*

Escuela Nueva provides initial training on the active pedagogies that are central to its student-centered model. As Colbert explained, teachers are exposed to the same methods as the students such as cooperative, democratic, and experiential learning. The follow-up collaboration—the micro-centers—is where teachers support one another to learn, understand, and implement the model more effectively.

“The micro-center is the follow-up mechanism to the workshop for those who learn the *Escuela Nueva* model,” Colbert points out. The micro-center model of collaboration stemmed from Colbert and her colleagues’ observations of how much teachers could learn from other teachers, especially in these rural communities. “The whole process of teacher-to-teacher became so powerful for us,” Colbert said. “Teachers could support and learn from one another. It was the only mechanism for them to come together and not feel so isolated.”

One aspect of the micro-centers, the demonstration site, is an integral part of how teachers can learn from teachers, Carlos explained. “I am very open to receiving teachers new to the model,” he said, “especially when those teachers are open to learning the *Escuela Nueva* model.” By observing the model in action, teachers new to *Escuela Nueva* see the students learn collaboratively using the learning guides. By engaging in relevant, active learning, as well as being able to put questions to the teacher hosting the demonstration, these teachers can move quickly from theory to practice to envision what the model might look like in their own classrooms.

Beyond the micro-centers, *Escuela Nueva* staff and supporters have also created a network, often set up around a particular cluster of schools or state. The network consists of teachers participating in micro-centers, along with those who do not have the opportunity to meet regularly in those centers, to continue to learn more about active pedagogies from one another. Sitting in on a network meeting in Quindío, a state of Colombia, we joined about 30 educators from all over the state who had come together, many on motorcycles from over the mountains (Image 9). A labor strike for public sector employees, including teachers, was under way, but, to the surprise of Myriam, the coordinator, the teachers came anyway. The network and micro-centers was so important to them, they said, that they were willing to meet even with the strike going on.

Carlos served as the network president in a role parallel to student presidents in the schools. He called the meeting to order. Teachers presented to the broader group about how they have learned to make active pedagogies come alive in their own schools. Two of them talked about how they are using gardens as an opportunity to discuss economics, since the students and teachers are selling what they grow to nearby villages.

Later, there was time for teachers to reflect on their participation in the network and the micro-centers. Is the time well spent? What could be different? Is their participation making a difference in their understanding of the *Escuela Nueva* pedagogical model? Is it improving their teaching and the students' learning? Though the teachers are passionate about the pedagogical model, they are also aggrieved about the obstacles they face in their isolated, under-resourced, rural schools, as well about government policies that assign their priorities elsewhere. The strike issues are not far away after all. The conversation speeds up and sometimes becomes heated. The teachers are as passionate about injustice as they are about their children. In the spirit of Latin American intellectual life, passion, politics and professionalism all merge together in animated dialogue. This is their distinctive culture of collaborative professionalism.



Image 9. The network meets on a May morning. Vicky Colbert is seated on the far right.

4.4 Impact

Progressive, student-centered practices are sometimes criticized for being an indulgence of educational romantics that does not get results. The evidence of the *Escuela Nueva* model, however, is that it works. A World Bank study found that students learning in this student-centered, collaborative environment generally outperformed other Colombian students in more conventional public schools.¹⁵⁷ Another study by UNESCO found that, other than Cuba, Colombia was more effective than its Latin American counterparts in serving its rural students.¹⁵⁸ A consistent finding across ages and schools has been the positive impact of the active pedagogies and the democratic model of learning on civic behavior¹⁵⁹ and on “*convivencia*” or peaceful coexistence.¹⁶⁰ After decades of conflict and violence, this is a significant achievement in its own right.

4.5 Design

Escuela Nueva is the result of an intentional design consisting of two pedagogies: a pedagogy for transforming learning and teaching, and a pedagogy for building collaborative professionalism and undertaking system change (Image 10). This design values the knowledge and capacity of teachers and students in constructing something innovative and engaging that can

uplift the teaching and learning of all in the service of purposes that help transform the entire society. It provides training and learning guides, as well as support to form micro-centers and networks. Teachers know that their own collaborative activity models and supports the collaboration they promote among and with their students. Teachers are not just inspired and trained by *Escuela Nueva* leaders, then left alone to battle things out by themselves in their own isolated classes. There is a backbone of organization and support.

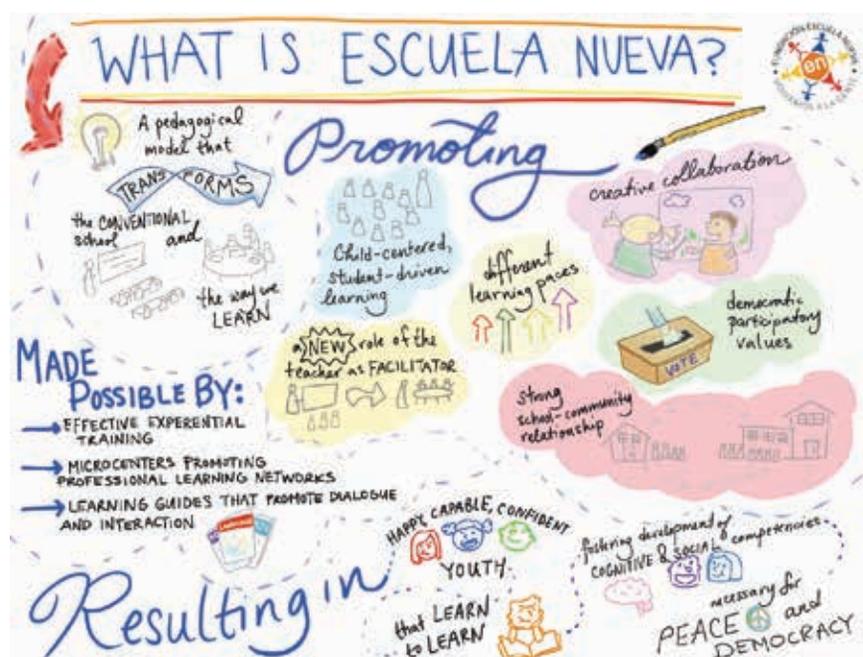


Image 10. The Escuela Nueva theory of change, as indicated by a dynamic representation of key words, principles, and graphics.¹⁶¹

Although Colbert rightly stresses how cost-effective *Escuela Nueva* is as a model of change that gets results compared to other change strategies in developing countries,¹⁶² it is still extremely difficult, without sufficient government funding, to network and support teachers in a consistent and sustainable way across the entire system.

When money is tight, so is time. Time pressures have been identified as a ubiquitous impediment to teacher collaboration almost everywhere, in countless studies.¹⁶³ Laura Vega, head of community connections for *Escuela Nueva*, has worked closely with the micro-centers and networks and understands the problem. She explained how “when teachers are together, when they work so far away, [some] principals make the most of that time, have them fill out paperwork, talk about other reforms.” It is down to principal discretion to determine if collaborative time will be kept sacred or if contrived collegiality will arise as other systemic pressures and agendas take over.

Ultimately, though, as many teachers remarked, participation in micro-centers, the network, and even the active pedagogies model, is largely voluntary, and when resources are short and time is scarce, other issues and demands can often feel more pressing. Vega describes how she and others at *Escuela Nueva* are helping to evolve the model to meet the challenges. “We’re thinking about how we might use digital connections and technology to support teachers after the training,” she says. These wouldn’t replace the micro-centers, network, or other in-person collaboration that are so important to educators like Carlos. But they would create more opportunities for teachers to connect back to *Escuela Nueva* staff who know the model well and can provide the support, especially if a teacher either isn’t participating in a meaningful micro-center, or isn’t in a micro-center at all.

Rural school teachers in Colombia and across the world normally do not have the time or resources to leave their one-room schools to visit other teachers’ schools as demonstration sites, or to inquire into their practice through micro-center and network activities. Sometimes they are able to find another educator to cover their class. But on other occasions, these teachers would have to shut the school for the day if they wanted to learn elsewhere. This can incur a loss of learning for students. Until very recently, it also potentially exposed children to the risk of violence or other uncertainties outside of the school. Since keeping the students in school is so important, this is another reason why new elements of the model are being considered to supplement the already-strong backbone.

Of course, the founders and leaders of *Escuela Nueva* can and do appeal to the moral purpose of their work. Sometimes, obstacles can be overcome by inspirational leadership and by believing in the moral purpose of the work. Principals like Narda, for example, see the value of *Escuela Nueva* and allow their teachers, like Carlos, to actively participate in their micro-center so they can deepen their understanding of it and spread it to others. But not everyone is like Narda. In Carlos’ words, “the goal is to make the new teachers fall in love with the model.” Inspired by love and affection, and a pedagogy of hope, Carlos believes that teachers will see the value of collaboration and the larger *Escuela Nueva* model, and let nothing stand in their way to become better teachers for the students of rural Colombia.

The sheer will, charisma, and persistence of individuals like Vicky Colbert, Narda, and Carlos can bring transformative pedagogical change to many of the poor in remote rural communities. But even with all of this hope and willpower, and notwithstanding a brilliant change design, the scarcity of resources and the absence of wholehearted government support can still hinder the ability of *Escuela Nueva* and other systemic innovations like it, to be consistent across most schools and sustainable over time.¹⁶⁴ *Escuela Nueva* has forty years of development behind it, a global network of support beyond it, and a Latin American culture of passion and commitment betwixt it. It also now needs a Government system to stand beside it.

4.6 Summary

The *Escuela Nueva* model of collaborative pedagogical transformation is, in the resource-scarce environment of rural Colombia, not a perfect one in terms of being able to consistently fulfill its purposes everywhere. Its pedagogical transformation is not always matched by the availability and strength of professional collaboration. But in circumstances of weak government funding, local poverty, and inherent isolation, *Escuela Nueva* already achieves more for its students in terms of impact than the government has achieved with students in comparable circumstances. It remains an extremely cost-efficient method of transformative change, and it persists in being a profound and persuasive alternative to top-down models of prescription and standardization that narrow what children in poverty learn to the basics and do little to improve the sustainable capacity of teachers in other developing countries. Finally, it considers how it can evolve to meet the obstacles before it head-on to ensure that teachers who want to learn about and implement the model can do so.

Escuela Nueva represents and repeats many of the features of collaborative professionalism we have uncovered in other designs (Figure 9):

- *Talk plus action*
- *Products with results*
- *Feedback from colleagues*
- *Candid dialogue*
- *Collaborating with and among students, not just for them*
- *Pursuing learning that has meaning and purpose*
- *Growing and improving sustainably*

Figure 9. Features of deep collaborative professionalism in Escuela Nueva.

In addition, the *Escuela Nueva* model and its widespread and longstanding implementation have drawn attention to three further aspects of collaborative professionalism that are also pertinent to other settings within and outside the developing world.

- Consistency between collaborative and critical pedagogy in the classroom on the one hand, and the nature of professional collaboration among teachers on the other — also a feature of cooperative learning for children and adults in Drammen.

- Culturally appropriate and responsive collaboration that embraces the local learning environment as an opportunity for nature and physical activity, that recognizes and draws upon the longstanding intellectual, pedagogical and cultural traditions that have been part of educational development in Latin America, and that assigns value to animated conversation and play among adults as well as children.
- The role of the individual as well as the group in initiating and inspirationally sustaining a powerful movement for the transformation of learning and the teaching profession that sometimes runs counter to the orthodoxies of government policy.

5. Professional Learning Communities

Since professional collaboration has an overall positive effect on learning, could it be introduced deliberately to bring about change that benefitted students? One of the first answers in education was *professional learning communities* or PLCs. PLCs have moved through three generations over the past twenty years—culminating in an emerging third generation that coheres with the principles of collaborative professionalism.

5.1 The first generation

Shirley Hord, a specialist in change theory and strategy, first coined the term professional learning community to describe a community of continuous inquiry and improvement.¹⁶⁵ PLCs, as they later came to be known, had the following components, according to Hord (Figure 10):

- *Shared power and authority among all educators in a school*
- *Shared vision of student learning as a touchstone for teachers' work*
- *Collective learning among staff to address & respond to students' needs*
- *Peer review, assistance and feedback*
- *Supportive conditions of time, space and training*

Figure 10. PLC components according to Hord.

Though first named by Hord, these basic ideas about PLCs were already circulating under the various banners of deliberately designed collaborative cultures,¹⁶⁶ communities of practice,¹⁶⁷ learning organizations,¹⁶⁸ and professional communities¹⁶⁹ involving reflective dialogue about practice.¹⁷⁰ Essentially, professional learning communities were and are:

- Communities where educators are committed to a shared vision of student learning and development and also to each other as fellow professionals and human beings;
- Learning communities in which students' learning improves, educators engage in their own continuous professional learning, and the organization itself learns collectively in the way it inquires into and solves problems as opposed to rushing to judgment;
- Professional learning communities where expertise is cultivated and valued, evidence is respected but not revered, and dialogue as well as feedback in the service of better professional practice is deep, direct, and demanding rather than overly polite and evasive.

Ontario, Canada, is one of the highest performing jurisdictions on the international PISA results of student performance and receives high and widespread praise for the quality of its teaching force.¹⁷¹ Except for one brief policy interlude in the late 1990s, Ontario has invested in building professionally collaborative cultures as a system-wide commitment for over 25 years.

In the late 1980s to mid 1990s, within a non-prescriptive and professionally supportive policy environment, one of us worked with Michael Fullan in partnership with a provincial elementary teacher's federation to develop a framework and a set of guidelines for professional collaboration, then to disseminate these through an extensive program of professional development and leadership training across the whole province.¹⁷² Among other things, the framework was used to build a culture of collaboration as a context for introducing cooperative learning and classroom management initiatives in four of the province's largest school districts.¹⁷³ The framework warned against overly *comfortable collaboration* that was too weak and informal in how it limited itself to superficial talk and undemanding exchanges of materials and ideas.¹⁷⁴ The framework also argued against the dangers of imposed, artificial, and stilted procedures of *contrived collegiality* in which teachers were forced into collaborative meetings and other interactions to implement the imposed requirements of principals and policy-makers.¹⁷⁵

The results of this systemic effort were evident in many places, including a new high school in southern Ontario whose principal had undertaken graduate study on learning organizations and complex systems. He used what he had learned to design the new school he led and opened as a learning community from 1994. His school was part of what, in retrospect, we can now view as being a first generation of professional learning communities. We studied this school in depth several years later.¹⁷⁶

The school's mission was to "be a center for lifelong learning responding to the community". Among its goals was "to provide a culture that fosters cooperation and collegiality". In teams of four, teachers shared responsibility for about 60 students, planning interdisciplinary curriculum together, and taking collective responsibility for all the students. Every teacher was encouraged to see the "big picture" and to see as well as take responsibility for the consequences that their own actions and preferences had for others in the system. This occurred through a sophisticated structure of process and management teams with crossover membership, but also through the shared vision and the establishment of professional learning communities in 1999 that were deliberately mixed by age, experience, gender, and subject discipline. These communities focused on topics like authentic assessment that were chosen by the participants themselves.

Shared big picture thinking came about not just through the way that teams talked about practice, though. It also arose from the structure of the work itself and the caring ethic that underpinned it. Teachers shared responsibility every day for curriculum and for students. They also cared for each other as a community. A teacher new to the school commented, "You can't work in the school and not care about your colleagues. That's just the way the school works". The teacher continued, "you hire people that care about you and worry about you and when you are stressed out, you talk to them."¹⁷⁷

One of the simple ways this ethic manifested itself was in what happened when teachers got sick. In many schools, teachers who became ill still showed up for work because they didn't want to let their colleagues down or have their students' learning disrupted by substitute teachers. At this high school, though, caring colleagues put peer pressure on sick colleagues to stay home until they were well. Also, because teaching was done in teams, the other team members already knew the students and curriculum and could use substitute teachers to fit into that team environment. Teachers didn't just think about the big picture. They lived it.

In the beginning, therefore, professional learning communities in Ontario were a way of life for teachers, not just a set of meetings or procedures. They were also led by teachers and principals in partnership, rather than managed by administrators independently.

5.2 The second generation

In 1998, former US school superintendent Rick Dufour and his coauthor Bob Eaker published the first of many influential works on PLCs, based on Dufour's work at Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois.¹⁷⁸ They rolled out their idea of PLCs globally through workshops with systems around the world over almost two decades. This body of work in theory and practice, especially in the way that many school administrators and systems interpreted it, took PLCs into a second generation.

DuFour's interpretation of PLCs¹⁷⁹ became the most widely known and experienced by schools and their leaders globally. It set out three core principles of a PLC:

1. Focusing on specific student learning goals and interventions, through which teachers can make immediate instructional changes;
2. Deprivatizing practice through a culture of collaboration that makes teaching public;
3. Focusing on learning and achievement results, using formative assessments and useful data to inform specific recommendations for improving teaching and learning.

Literature reviews of PLCs in North America and the UK show overall links to positive impact on teachers and on student achievement.¹⁸⁰ However, the model advocated by Dufour emerged and was often implemented at a time in the US and elsewhere where there were strong policy pressures to improve measurable student achievement very quickly, in schools and across systems. This meant that PLCs often became interpreted as and equated with short-term interventions to improve student learning as represented in high-stakes standardized test scores.

This second generation of PLCs, like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, was a bit darker than the first. Research by Diane Wood¹⁸¹ in one school district, for example, showed that in a context of compliance-driven high-stakes accountability and short-term tenure of the district superintendent, PLCs were overly directed from the top in ways that undermined the authority and autonomy of teachers. Schools could also not allow sufficient time to develop practices of inquiry that were robust and critical.

In Alberta, in Canada, even when there were no high stakes testing pressures, a study of three districts implementing school designed innovations pinpointed one district that selected the innovation for the schools—PLCs—and brought in a high profile international training team for multiple days. Other districts accorded more discretion to schools to design the innovations that suited them, and then enabled them to network them together and inquire into their practice by funding bits of time for teachers

to meet and also visit each other's schools. This district, however, imposed PLCs and used the resources to appoint a consultant in central office and to bring teachers to the workshops. These workshops were the only time teachers met, the schools did not know what each other did, and the implementation was unsuccessful.¹⁸²

Studies such as these help explain the findings of a 2014 study by Boston Consulting¹⁸³ in which PLCs were the strategy of professional development most favored by system leaders and professional development providers, yet teachers liked them the least of all. Second generation PLCs might therefore have spread them out broadly, but the leaders of these PLCs often defined student achievement in terms of narrow performance goals, specified within short time frames. As one of us has written elsewhere, in their second-generation version, PLCs were “turning into add-on teams that are driven by data in cultures of fear that demand instant results” in literacy and mathematics test scores.¹⁸⁴

As we shall see, Ontario was not immune to some of these second-generation trends. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, after several years under a Conservative government that imposed a highly prescribed curriculum, publicly criticized the teaching profession, and reduced the amount of time teachers had available to plan and collaborate outside classes, it restored partnership with and support for teachers and their federations. This was undertaken in exchange for teachers' commitment to raising student achievement in literacy and math. Part of that commitment involved working in teams in 6-week cycles to make interventions with students whose achievement scores were falling behind.

5.3 From second to third generation

In many places, PLCs are now moving into a third generation. The Canadian province of Ontario represents a transformation from PLCs with the *second generation* characteristics of focusing on specific short-term strategies to raise achievement results, to *third generation* patterns of more sustained and systemic cultures of collaborative inquiry focused on genuine and deep interest in students' learning and whole development.

This transformation has been evident over the past years in the Keewatin-Patricia School District—a district with 17 elementary schools and six high schools in the northwest of Ontario in a far-flung territory the size of France. Existentially as well as geographically, Keewatin-Patricia is about as far from the cosmopolitan provincial capital of Toronto and its vast surrounding conurbation as you can possibly get in the province. Fly in with Bearskin Airlines in January in the depth of winter and the ice cracks under your boots as the temperature plunges far below minus 20 Celsius. The culture and community are different from Toronto, too. Over 50 percent of the students come from First Nations, Metis, and Inuit populations.¹⁸⁵

Ice can impede your progress when you are walking through the communities that make up this sprawling district. It can also give you a surface to play hockey on. Ice hockey, or just plain hockey to North Americans, is a national pastime of Canada and Canadians. Some Canadian babies, they say, can skate before they can walk. Steve Dumanski is a teacher and a hockey coach. He is part of a students' hockey academy in the Keewatin-Patricia (KP) district that has been made famous on CBC national TV news.¹⁸⁶

“When you get a kid that’s on that path that you’re fearful of, and you can bring him back, and he’s excited about it, that’s why I’m here,” says Steve. Steve and his colleagues have noticed how students who experienced little or no success in the regular school environment could surprisingly display success, motivation, and even leadership on the ice. How could they transfer that into other environments of learning, educators wondered, including those in the regular school day?

This was no easy task. Although they have a rich ancestral culture and are often surrounded by awe-inspiring rural environments, indigenous communities in Canada, as in many other countries, have been subject to multiple historic indignities and injustices. Governments took children away from their parents to residential schools which inflicted great cruelty on them, forced children to abandon their own language and culture, physically relocated communities away from their traditional hunting grounds, and, in the Arctic, even slaughtered the dogs on which communities depended for food and safety against predators.¹⁸⁷ Although the Canadian government has now established a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to address this shameful side of the country’s history, the legacy of whole communities experiencing multiple post-traumatic stresses has been one that includes extreme poverty, widespread unemployment, health difficulties such as hearing impairments, family breakdown, alcoholism, drug and other substance addiction, high youth suicide rates, and low educational achievement.

Some of the schools in Keewatin-Patricia have over 80-85 percent indigenous students. According to provincial records, only 53 percent of Aboriginal students graduate in four years, compared to 88 percent of non-Aboriginal students.¹⁸⁸ On Ontario’s standardized test, known as the EQAO, only 24 percent of KP students in Grade six met the math standard in 2016, compared to the provincial average of 50 percent. Similarly KP students scored 56 percent and 54 percent in writing and reading, respectively, compared to the Ontario averages of 80 percent and 81 percent.¹⁸⁹

When we first studied the school district in 2010 with our colleague, Matt Welch, the district and its dedicated leaders including the special education superintendent at the time, Sean Monteith, were endeavoring to engage as well as they could with the distinctive culture of their students. This included engraving into the floor of one of its schools symbols of the Seven Teachings of the indigenous culture—truth, love, respect, humility, honesty, wisdom, and courage (Image 11).



Image 11. School floor with engraving of Seven Teachings of the indigenous culture.

In addition, Sean and his district director at the time felt they had to address students' low performance and struggles with literacy and language. They and their colleagues were strongly influenced and inspired by the work of Rick Dufour in their decision to establish and implement PLCs that would promote collaborative and "open and honest" conversations among teachers about their practice, the needs of aboriginal students, and achievement data.¹⁹⁰ According to Monteith, PLCs in the district had been around "as a vehicle for professional collaboration for teachers and school leaders for probably 15 years." Led by their principals, teachers were given time to share ideas, effective lessons and samples of work with one another, and to engage in tasks such as moderated marking using common rubrics in order to try and improve students' writing.

To the superintendents, one of the reasons for the PLCs was simply to raise expectations about what students could achieve. Some students arrived at school being apparently a-lingual – seemingly without language – some teachers felt. Learning problems resulting from fetal alcohol poisoning made some students seem almost unteachable. Teachers' deep seated beliefs about students' capacities were disturbed, though, once they had to engage with colleagues inside and outside their classes, especially with special education resource teachers who were now assigned to work alongside them in regular classes. Teachers had strong differences of opinion about how work was to be graded, but the more demanding culture that had come into being led one teacher to say "as professionals, we (now) feel it's OK to walk into someone else's room and tell them you goofed about something, or ask for help".

The PLCs began with clear administrative direction for teachers to post data walls in their schools.¹⁹¹ There was also unavoidable pressure to pay attention to the EQAO test and to have children “do explicit practicing in what the test question is going to be like.” District administrators conveyed a strong sense of urgency to produce results and abandon previous excuses. “You can’t say it’s the increased number of aboriginal students coming into the classrooms,” one of them said. Some teachers were “terrified” of the test. One district coordinator described how “teachers are definitely feeling under more scrutiny, more pressure from senior administration. Principals regularly are in classrooms. They’re doing walkthroughs. They’re looking for specific things. They want to see evidence that guided reading is happening. There is a lot of pressure on teachers to make changes.”

Teachers were asked to reflect on and discuss EQAO scores in their PLCs. The pressure was intense. The PLCs definitely had strong, second-generation characteristics. Looking back on this period, after feedback from one of our research teams, the special education superintendent acknowledged that he might have been pushing too hard sometimes, because his passion for his students and their future was so great. “I realize that what I intended to be challenging conversations have sometimes been experienced as oppressive conversations,” he recognized.

But even as he spoke, the PLCs were already evolving from their second-generation character into being more genuinely collaborative, more ready to include a wider range of data and test scores, more teacher-led. Genuinely collaborative cultures started to evolve and PLCs extended beyond looking at data and student work examples in teams. Teachers in PLCs were now about becoming more comfortable (though not *too* comfortable) with colleagues and watching what they were doing, building relationships, trying out colleagues’ ideas, and believing that all students could learn and were everyone’s responsibility.¹⁹²

By the time of our site visits in 2016 and 2017, Sean Monteith had become the district’s director. Ontario provincial priorities as a system had evolved beyond what had previously been labeled as “the Drive to 75” —75 percent of students reaching proficiency in literacy and math¹⁹³— to a broader strategy expressed in Ontario’s new 2014 vision: *Achieving Excellence*. This vision broadened the quest for excellence beyond the basics of literacy and math. It directly addressed issues of inequity (especially those experienced with indigenous students) and saw these not just as a matter of narrowing measured achievement gaps, but also of paying attention to students’ sense of their own identity and to special education inclusion.¹⁹⁴ *Achieving Excellence* also accorded high priority to improving students’ wellbeing in their whole development as people. During this time, Sean Monteith had also expanded his own view of what was important for his students and their teachers and he used this to put measured test results in perspective, as Shaneé Wangia explains in her case study report on the Keewatin-Patricia district¹⁹⁵ and as was found in the *Pearson Efficacy Review* that Monteith sought out when he became director.¹⁹⁶

The *Efficacy Review* became a key way for Monteith to hear from school leaders and practitioners from across the board. Chantal Moore, a principal, explained, “I think the Teacher Efficacy Group is a powerful venue for teachers to be able to talk with the Director about the things that are going on at the classroom level and the challenges they face.”¹⁹⁷ In doing so, Monteith gave voice and capacity to the many leaders and teachers in the schools, who in turn became agents of change within their own buildings.

The EQAO test still exerted its influence in Keewatin-Patricia just as it did in other boards as schools prepped children for the exam and laid out their desks in rows to simulate the testing environment. But now, as one educator indicated, “our Director’s pretty clear in reminding us that it’s not the be all and end all of the world”. The EQAO, she continued, “doesn’t really come on the radar other than in September when we get our scores”.

PLCs in Keewatin-Patricia now concentrate on wellbeing and the child’s whole development for its own sake and as a key to achievement. Students, the district recognizes, must first be well, in order to achieve well. This means engaging with the problems in the indigenous community—right down to working with families through the Aboriginal family support worker position they created, by giving children food to take home, and by doing their laundry for them in washing machines provided by the school. It also means building on the community’s assets. In Keewatin-Patricia, focusing on the whole child is essential to restoring a whole people’s dignity and identity and its opportunities for success.

A PLC for district staff including teachers, educational assistants, school and district administrators, resource teachers, and community service providers now meets every six weeks to discuss tools and strategies to help students manage their emotions. These include creating emotion boards with faces showing different emotions, class books of emotions incorporating pictures, and modeling for students what to do when experiencing particular emotions.¹⁹⁸ The PLC here is delving deep, far beneath the surface of how to raise immediate scores on the EQAO.

School level PLCs are now not run by principals but by teachers. Indeed, following the lead of a group of teachers at one of the schools, teacher-led PLCs have become a district requirement. The school in question is Sioux Mountain’s—the hockey coach’s—and the initiating PLC is one that he and his physical education colleagues created together. We came across Steve and his interdisciplinary team in May 2016, sitting round their laptops in their workroom, trying to identify the academic and non-academic skills that students in Grades one to eight were displaying on the hockey rink so that they could be made transferable into standards and rubrics for regular classroom settings. Previously, school-level PLCs in the district had, according to one teacher, been “a very top down kind of thing as opposed to collaborative, and did not support best practices.”¹⁹⁹ This group successfully argued that teachers were now ready to run their own PLCs.

Having a voice in developing improvement strategies made the work of the teachers in the PLCs more productive and relevant. These very challenging

circumstances often called for the kind of ingenuity that can't be taken from a standardized change menu. For instance, one classroom at the Open Roads Public School that included children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, who also happened to have attention deficit and autism spectrum disorders and high sensory needs, was fitted with a climbing wall after the installation of kitchen furniture to support more practical learning merely resulted in students climbing the kitchen cabinets. Syrena Lalonde, principal at Open Roads, explained that, “there are three classrooms like this throughout the Keewatin Patricia District School Board and are called ‘transitions north classrooms’”. The wall was one of 20 sensory tools used in the room. Students now used the climbing wall for short periods any time they were unable to retain concentration when they were sitting down (Image 12). This change, initiated by teachers on the advice of an occupational therapist, significantly reduced the scale of classroom management problems.



Image 12. Climbing wall used as a sensory tool at Open Roads Public School.

The teacher-driven PLC worked in an equally ingenious way. “We’re linking hockey to other areas of the curriculum,” Steve explained. “So in science and math, we’re able to study how the skate and stick are made, how the puck comes off the stick with such velocity,” and so on.²⁰⁰ “We’re taking hockey, we’re connecting it to the curriculum, which is engaging the students, as well,” he continued. Student participation in the hockey academy is also used to encourage students to attend school, decreasing the absentee rates that impede student learning. In the words of a CBC television reporter, “if you don’t go to school or don’t do your work, you don’t get on the ice.”²⁰¹ Students got the point. “Now I listen, do my work. It’s a privilege, not a right,” said one. “Hockey academy is helping me with my confidence,” a female student added. “It’s getting me out of trouble,” an older boy explained. “It is. It’s helping me.”²⁰²

The hockey-related PLC starts to convey what it is that is deep about the professional collaboration at Keewatin-Patricia and that qualifies it as collaborative professionalism.

- *It is led by teachers. They pick the focus in a culture where they are already closely connected to students, their learning and development.*
- *It concentrates on the whole student and his or her development, not just cognitive learning or achievement scores.*
- *It does not shy away from difficult professional dialogue that poses hard questions about teachers’ practice.*

This doesn’t mean that principals don’t participate in and sometimes use their expertise to guide discussions. Also, other PLCs still address bread and butter issues like writing and math as well as more innovative ones like those connected to hockey.

The PLCs in the two Keewatin-Patricia schools we visited are also deeply concerned with student wellbeing, equity, and identity. After decades of indigenous culture being viewed as irrelevant or even as an interference to traditional learning— as a deficit and source of shame— students’ cultures are now increasingly incorporated into the curriculum. Teachers use examples from nature and from traditional fishing activities in their curriculum.²⁰³ They also introduce outdoor activities like building fires and shelters to connect learning to students’ lives in natural and even wilderness settings where they often learn best. There are feasts and powwows, chiefs and elders are invited to be guest speakers, and Sean, the director, has been to meetings of tribal chiefs from all across the province.

These ways of attending to indigenous students’ wellbeing are not just essential for indigenous students. They are good for all students. Many urban students are in educational environments that deprive these students of nature and the outdoors and thereby make their learning less effective.^{204 205}

Sean Monteith wants PLCs to connect with the whole of who his students are. “A ‘no hat’ policy is not a PLC topic,” he explains, half-joking. “Asking questions about our indigenous and aboriginal student population, wondering why they are engaged in some subject areas or in some schools and not in others—that is a good PLC topic.” When PLCs go deeper in these ways, they are not as linear and sequential as *second generation* PLCs. They do not operate under the leadership of administrators, within restricted parameters of time, to devise clear strategies that promise to deliver increased achievement results. “The PLC work is dirty work,” Monteith explains. “Educators, teachers, and administrators like to work in a clean, tidy world. But PLCs can be messy. There may not be a finite object in the beginning or a pin-pointed outcome in the end.”

5.4 The provincial system

There is no *third generation* of anything—a family, a TV series, or an educational change—without a *First* and a *Second* one *before* it. At the same time, high functioning PLCs do not live long and prosper without support from and connections to other systems *beyond* them. The systems that surround and sit *beside* PLCs are indispensable to the success of the PLCs themselves.

For one thing, Keewatin-Patricia’s hockey program has benefitted from investment from its community partners. Groups like *Jumpstart* help the school to acquire the hockey equipment. Volunteers from the local *Friendship Center* set up equipment and help check on students who unexpectedly leave the ice, whether for behavioral or emotional reasons, so that the teachers and coaches can focus on the students building their skills on the ice.²⁰⁶ Two visitors from a nearby university approached the hockey PLC to offer internships to indigenous high school students who could assist in supporting students on and off the ice.

Second, advances in videoconferencing technology and provision of laptops with Skype facilities for students have enabled PLCs and the issues that concern them to be addressed across the vast expanse of the district and its schools in real time. Every school now has advanced videoconferencing equipment with high resolution screens and rooms that can host over a dozen people, so educators, and also students who have to go to high school away from their families, can connect virtually in real time. The videoconferencing doesn’t just allow for meetings. It changes the nature and improves the quality of professional learning. Professional learning “is not an event” any more, one member of the district explained. “It’s more personalized...I don’t have to wait for a face to face meeting and get all my peers together, so I have more access to expertise. I know people on the board that I can access. I think they have the ability to have those critical friends in different areas based on the learning.”²⁰⁷

Third, the Ontario provincial policy system has itself moved onward from an age where PLCs often amounted to teams that analyzed student progress in literacy and math displayed on data walls, in six-week cycles based on diagnostic and standardized test assessments. The teams tagged individual

students as red, yellow, or green and identified short-term interventions that might be needed for the reds and the yellows, and also changes in instruction where some learning outcomes were registering few greens.²⁰⁸ From 2014, the priorities of *Achieving Excellence* have explicitly supported broader learning goals along with wellbeing for all students as an effort to secure greater equity for all groups, as well as excellence. The goals of learning are now deeper and broader, and they are seen as part of the development of whole persons and communities, their wellbeing and identities. Underpinning these priorities are principles of collaborative professionalism that are supported by government and all the partners, including teacher federations and administrative organizations that work with it. A key component of such collaborative professionalism is *collaborative inquiry* (CI).²⁰⁹

5.5 Collaborative inquiry in Ontario

Building on the growth of CI in the province over several years, an Ontario Ministry of Education report argues that,

Through CI, educators work together to improve their understanding of what learning is (or could be), generate evidence of what’s working (and what’s not), make decisions about next steps and take action to introduce improvements and innovations. And then they start again on emerging new issues and challenges. Notably, CI sees educators as key participants in understanding how to achieve excellence and equity in education.

The ministry lists many CI initiatives, such as PLCs, affecting thousands of schools in mathematics learning, middle years programs, and indigenous education, for example. There is no one protocol or path for CI, the authors of the document say. Indeed, they echo the conclusions of Canadian and New Zealand researchers Helen Timperley, Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert that “inquiry is not a ‘project’, an ‘initiative’ or an ‘innovation’ but a professional way of being.”²¹⁰ With the aid of provincial and world-renowned thought leaders and trainers in collaborative inquiry such as Jennifer Donohoo,²¹¹ as well as ministry and teacher federation support for the idea of teachers inquiring into and leading change together as a way to bring about continuous improvement,²¹² the policy environment has enabled collaborative inquiry to spread throughout and become embedded in the 72 districts that make up the provincial system.²¹³ This environment has enabled PLCs to evolve over time from linear, data-driven processes managed by administrators, to more ingrained forms of evidence-informed inquiry that have become embedded in teachers’ work as a way of life.

Last, PLCs in Keewatin-Patricia have been able to grow over time within circumstances of high stability in district leadership as the influential special education superintendent was promoted to being the district director. The district leader has been deeply connected to the school’s community over a long

period. He has also been open to his own learning as the district and its PLCs have evolved. This has protected the district's PLCs from the constant churn of district leadership that has afflicted similar efforts in the US and elsewhere.²¹⁴

5.6 Summary

Since the late 1990s, among many deliberately designed processes of professional collaboration, PLCs have been probably the most widely used of all. Due to the energetic and, for many, inspirational work of Dufour and Eaker²¹⁵ in training countless school systems globally in the principles of protocols of PLCs, there are few educators in many countries who have never heard of or experienced some kind of PLC in their practice.

PLCs began as a philosophy and a set of principles, then, in the second generation, evolved into protocols of planning and administration. This widened their reach and got many educators started with a clear framework to support them, but this was often at the expense of educational depth—especially in systems that were faced with the pressing accountability requirements of high-stakes testing. In time, though, a less linear process of PLCs has emerged that addresses deeper and more holistic aspects of student learning and development, that uses evidence thoughtfully in combination with other kinds of expertise, and that engages teachers and their leadership as part of their everyday work, rather than being driven by administrators in episodic team meetings. In short, as PLCs have acquired more depth, they have moved in the following ways (Figure 11):

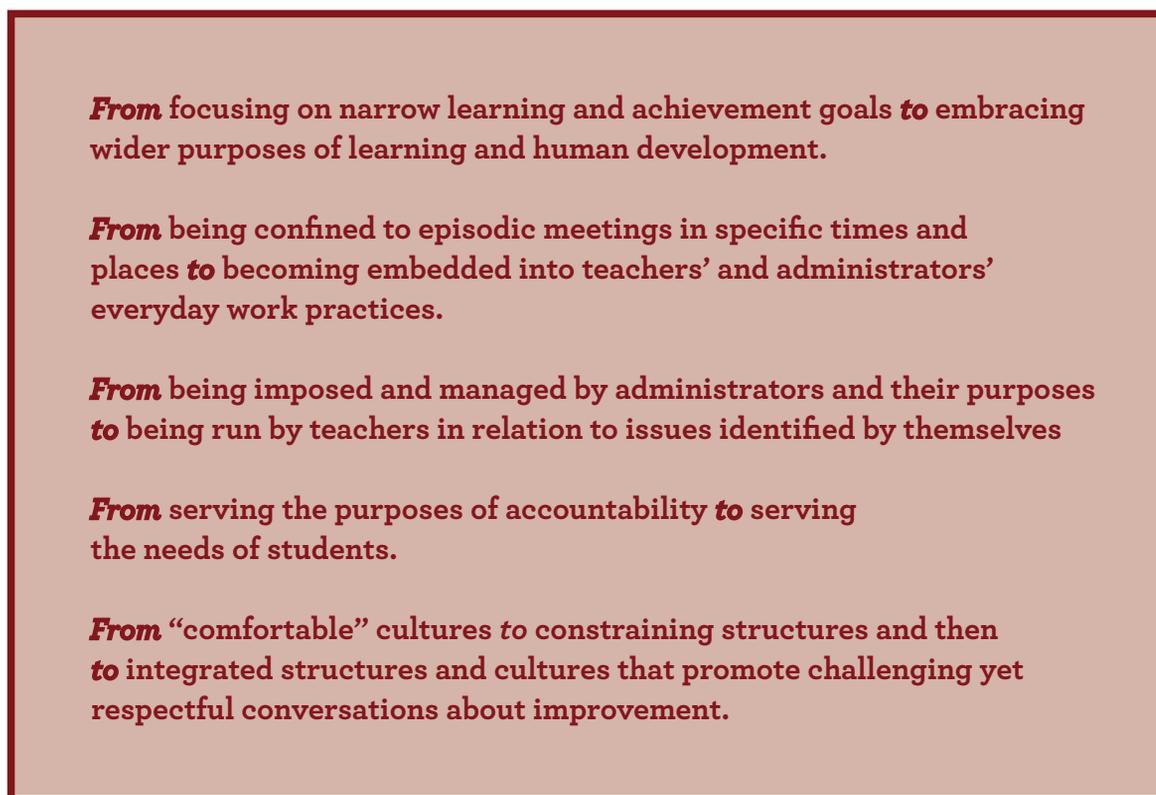
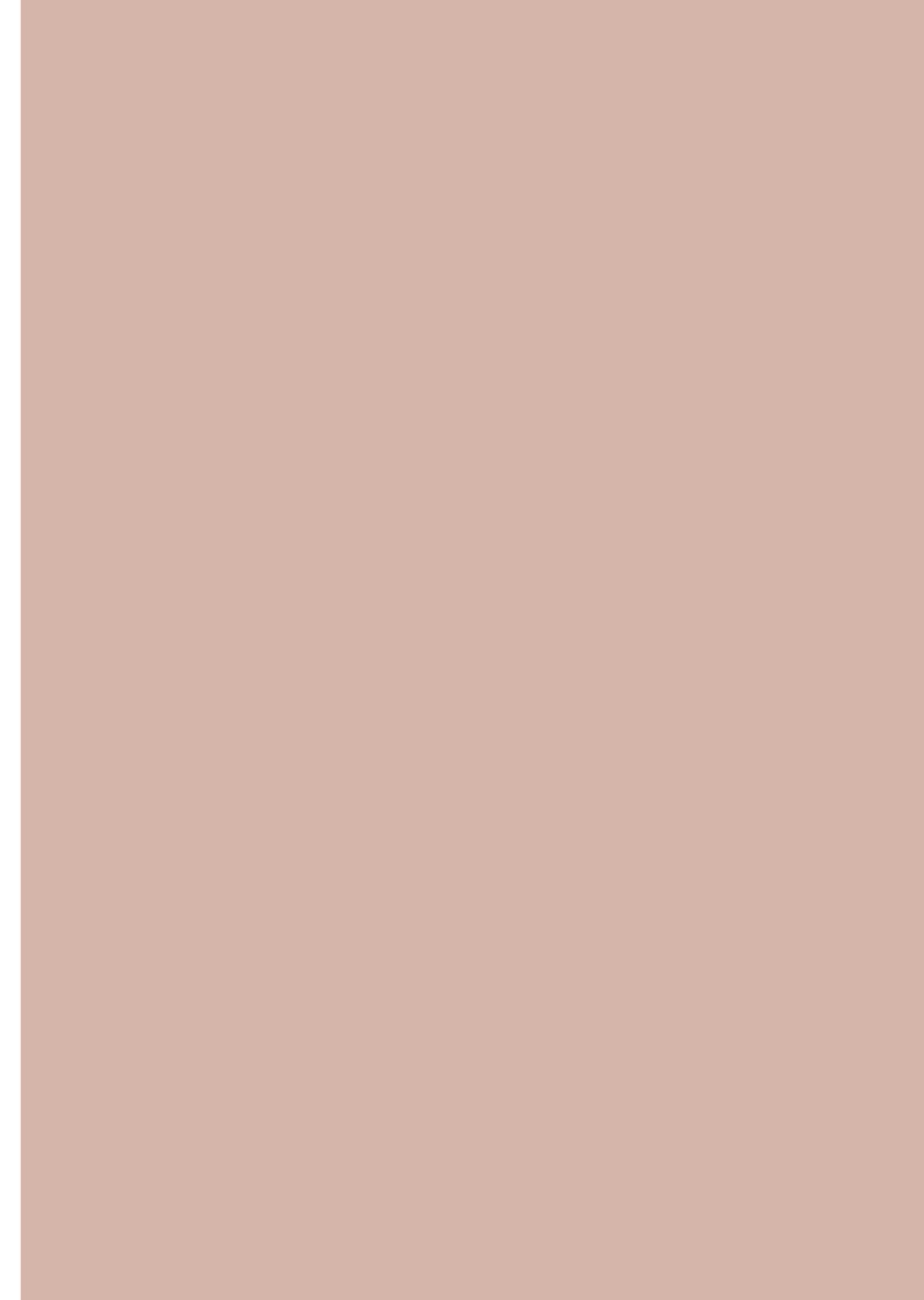


Figure 11. Movement over time of the PLCs in Keewatin-Patricia.

The case of Ontario and Keewatin-Patricia illustrates how PLCs can progress from being just forms of professional collaboration to becoming deep versions of collaborative professionalism that are responsive to diverse student and community needs, and that attend to holistic issues of academic excellence, equity, and wellbeing.



Chapter 4

Deepening Collaborative Professionalism

We've heard the argument, examined the evidence and seen five global examples of collaborative professionalism. We have begun to see glimpses of why these carefully selected examples represent not just different designs or protocols of professional collaboration, but how, in the way they have been developed and come to life, they also amount to what we call collaborative professionalism.

So, it is perhaps time to finally define the thing before we pick out its key characteristics.

Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success. It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. The joint work of collaborative professionalism is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care for and have solidarity with each other as fellow-professionals as they pursue their challenging work together, and where they collaborate professionally in ways that are responsive to and inclusive of the cultures of their students, themselves, the community, and the society.

This is a lot, so we'll break it down shortly. But sometimes it helps to know what something is by being very clear about what it is not. Collaborative professionalism is not about being trapped in endless, interminable meetings. It is not about gathering in meetings, networks, or clusters with no clear end in view, or in pursuit of a goal or a target that belongs to someone else. Collaborative professionalism is not a device to get teachers to implement questionable government mandates. It does not devote most of the time that teachers spend together to reviewing and responding to quantitative data in short-term cycles of intervention and improvement. It does not flourish when teachers and principals are given insufficient time to develop their leadership and demonstrate their impact. Collaborative professionalism has no place for superficial discussion, fake feedback, or false praise. It should never feel torpid, turgid or tedious, but it is not always fun either.

Collaborative professionalism does not subordinate teachers to their principals, but it does not foment insubordination against the leadership and authority of those principals either. Collaborative professionalism is not exclusionary or mean-spirited. It does not set one collaborative community against another — department against department; school against school; district against district. Collaborative professionalism has no place for schadenfreude — taking pleasure in other people's suffering, when a competing school loses students, or when its performance begins to decline, for example.

Collaborative professionalism does not grow in systems of envy, fear, or threat. Last, collaborative professionalism is not the enemy of positive individuality. It does not suppress the accomplishments of some for fear that this will irritate and intimidate the rest, but diversifies and celebrates many individual and also collective accomplishments together.

The remainder of this chapter brings together what we have learned about collaborative professionalism through three devices that we have had small previews of or “teasers” for in the cases discussed in Chapter 3. First, we draw out ten principles of collaborative professionalism and briefly reconnect these to the evidence embedded in the five cases. Second, we show how in all cases of collaborative professionalism, the protocols of particular collaborative designs are embedded in wider and longer-term cultures of teaching and change, as well as in surrounding systems of stimulus (or disturbance) and support from outside any particular schools. Last, we review the key elements of progression that we might see when a school or network progresses from being a culture of professional collaboration to being a community of collaborative professionalism.

1. Ten Tenets of Collaborative Professionalism

Through our review of the evidence and examples of this report, there appear to us to be ten tenets of collaborative professionalism that set it apart from mere professional collaboration. These ten tenets are itemized below, then discussed one by one (Figure 12).



Figure 12. The ten tenets of collaborative professionalism.

1.1 Collective autonomy

Collective autonomy means that educators have more independence from top-down bureaucratic authority, but less independence from each other.²¹⁶ Collective autonomy values teachers' professional judgment that is informed by a range of evidence, rather than marginalizing that judgment in favor of the data alone. But collective autonomy is not individual autonomy. Teachers are not individually inscrutable or infallible. The egg-crate has emptied; the sanctuary has gone. Instead, teachers' work is open, and opened to each other, for feedback, inspiration, and assistance.

In the cases we examined, teachers were given or took authority. They were relatively autonomous from the system bureaucracies, but less autonomous from each other. Colombian teachers work in a decentralized system. This inhibits access to outside support, but also can shield educators from constant monitoring or interference. They are more accountable to each other than they are to the system. The system still presents pressures and obstacles, but there are ways to collaborate to push back. The Ontario system encourages many kinds of collaborative inquiry as a routine part of what it means to be a teacher. Neither Norway, nor Hong Kong, is driven by top-down implementation. NW RISE teachers integrate what they are doing with system priorities, but the network is not micro-managed by any of the state systems.

1.2 Collective efficacy

Self-efficacy is the expression of the belief that I can make a difference, have an impact, or achieve my goals. Collective-efficacy is about the belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what.²¹⁷ Self-efficacy is like the child fending off burglars in the movie *Home Alone*. Collective efficacy is the power of crime prevention embedded in the strategy of *Neighborhood Watch*. Indeed that is where the idea first emerged.

Teachers and administrators in our global examples believed that together they could do better and have a greater impact on all their students. In Ontario, they began to believe their indigenous students really could learn despite the extremely challenging circumstances of their communities. In Norway, the teachers concentrated on how to motivate their students who, the data indicated, seemed stuck in the middle. In Hong Kong, nobody was perfect, but everyone believed they could all improve—and this precept guided the teacher hiring process. In Colombia, educators had the magnificently improbable shared belief that they could and would help bring about peace in the future society.

1.3 Collaborative inquiry

In collaborative inquiry, teachers routinely explore problems, issues, or just differences of practice together in order to improve or transform what they are doing. Collaborative inquiry goes by many names including collaborative action research or spirals of inquiry, to name but two. But the processes involve similar steps of identifying issues of practice, then inquiring into them in a systematic way together in order to make positive changes in practice.²¹⁸ In collaborative inquiry, teachers use a range of evidence to underpin the inquiry and its findings, then make plans and implement them together on the basis of what has been learned, before another cycle may begin all over again. At its best, collaborative inquiry isn't a separate method or process that is divorced from the rest of the work of teaching. It isn't a project that student teachers have to undergo as part of their training to indulge their education professors, suspecting that they may never have to do anything like it ever again in their career. Nor is it a funded initiative that may come to an end when the resources disappear. Rather, it is embedded in the very nature of teaching itself, as an orientation or stance that all teachers possess and practice in relation to their work.²¹⁹

Wherever they could, teachers in the case examples inquired into problems before rushing into solutions for them. In the NW RISE network, when students made inappropriate remarks online during peer feedback with students in other schools, teachers didn't just discipline the students or shut down the collaboration, but explored with the students how to relate to one another for this particular activity by researching and learning about *netiquette*. The teachers in Fanling's *Open Class* inquired into the lessons they planned together, then trialed ways to improve them. In Drammen in Norway, teachers took data seriously that pointed to aspects of underachievement that sometimes surprised them, like the many students who did not progress much beyond proficiency. In Ontario, collaborative inquiry is advocated in ministry policies, supported by influential thought leaders, and given allocated time from government funding.

1.4 Collective responsibility

Collective responsibility is about people's mutual obligation to help each other. It is also about the duty to serve the customers, clients, patients, or students one has in common. Collective responsibility is about *our* students, rather than just *my* students. It is about our schools in our community, not just my school on my own piece of land. When they practice collective responsibility, educators avoid doing harm to neighboring schools, even ones that compete with them, by leaving them with most of the students who have special education needs, or by enticing their best teachers to transfer out to them. More than this, teachers help each other to become better, and so do schools in the same community. Because if all schools get better, then the community becomes stronger, and eventually the children start school better prepared and not so difficult to teach.²²⁰ There will always be a need for external accountability in most public school systems. But accountability should be the tiny remainder that is left once responsibility as been subtracted.²²¹

All across the world, in our case studies of collaborative professionalism, teachers took responsibility for each other's and for all of their shared students' success. In Hong Kong, the lesson and its results belonged to everybody, not just to the teacher who taught it. If the teacher in an *Escuela Nueva* school felt stuck, the students would step forward to help or they could turn to other teachers in their micro-center afterwards. The hockey coaches in Ontario weren't just responsible for hockey. They were responsible for all their students and for collaborating in professional learning communities with other teachers that could help those students succeed.

1.5 Collective initiative

In collaborative professionalism, there are fewer initiatives, but there is more initiative. Teachers step forward, and the system encourages it, or at the very least does not impede it. People do not feel that they have to wait to be told what to do. They understand that it is better to seek forgiveness than ask for permission. Educators are inspired and empowered to try out

innovations that engage their students and re-ignite their own passions for teaching. And this initiative is not just the product of idiosyncratic or eccentric individuals—though it may start out that way. Rather, because of expectations, processes, structures, and funding structures in the school or the system, teachers are encouraged to share what they have started with other teachers so that they can get involved and learn from it, too.

Many teachers, and sometimes students, stepped forward to make changes in the schools and networks we observed. They didn't have to wait to be asked. In Ontario, teachers insisted on running their own professional learning communities (PLCs). In Hong Kong, new teachers presented workshops to experienced ones. At NW RISE convenings, teachers offered presentations on their work in school, and worked with their students to share time-lapse videos of their communities with each other. In Colombia, they rode over the mountains to meet, even when strike action regulations forbade it. Collaborative professionalism is about communities of strong individuals who are committed to helping and learning from each other.

1.6 Mutual dialogue

Collaborative professionalism and professional collaboration are alike in that they both involve teachers talking. What distinguishes them from one another, though, is the kind of talking. In both cases, talk is always courteous, and often personal. Families are known. Birthdays are remembered. Sickness and just “off-days” are excused. Sometimes teachers socialize together. They also share ideas, narratives, and problems. Collaborative professionalism goes further than this, though. Talk is also the work. Difficult conversations can be had and are actively instigated where they are justified. Feedback is honest. You can tell somebody when they “goofed”. Discussion develops the back and forth quality of genuine dialogue, of valued differences of opinion about ideas, the merit of different curriculum materials, or the meaning of a student's challenging behavior. This dialogue isn't just a free-for-all in a no-holds-barred discussion. It is often facilitated and moderated, and its participants are sometimes protected by protocols that insist on clarification and listening before disagreement is expressed.²²²

In Hong Kong, teachers welcomed critique and feedback from those observing their open classes, knowing that it was shared across all of the teachers who had prepared the lesson and that it would improve the lesson itself. In Ontario, the teachers in the hockey academy PLC took skills that many might expect to be unique to the ice and shared them with science, math, and literacy teachers to make learning interdisciplinary and interesting for vulnerable, indigenous students. In the NW RISE network, teachers no longer only had their own ideas to draw from, but were challenged, inspired, and pushed to work with members in their job-alike groups to improve their practice and better engage their students. One of their teachers, in fact, was glad to be challenged, and no longer felt like she was the boss in her own classroom. In *Escuela Nueva*, teachers got into animated discussions about the value of their

network, and the constraints of government policy. Norwegian teachers were more restrained in their own ways of having dialogue, but these conversations still encompassed the big picture of the school’s vision as well as technical questions about their own cooperative learning classes.

1.7 Joint work

In her classic 1990 article that raises the deceptively simple idea of joint work “of a more rigorous and enduring sort,”²²³ Judith Warren Little discusses joint work like this:

*I reserve the term joint work for encounters among teachers that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching (interdependence), collective conceptions of autonomy, support for teachers’ initiative and leadership with regard to professional practice, and group affiliations grounded in professional work.*²²⁴

Joint work, claims Little, is founded on a norm of collegiality which “favors the thoughtful, explicit examination of practices and their consequences.”²²⁵ Doing is related to thinking and talking in order to examine and improve professional practice.

To collaborate is indeed to labor or work together. Multiple people are involved, so this work becomes joint work. Like a joint in carpentry, joint work connects people and binds them together to construct something bigger than themselves. Joint work, as Little pointed out, can take many forms. But ultimately it means making and doing something of value, while also thinking about it together.

Joint work exists in team teaching, collaborative planning, collaborative action research, providing structured feedback, undertaking peer reviews, evaluating examples of student work, and so forth. Joint work involves actions and sometimes products or artifacts, like a lesson, or a curriculum, or a feedback report, and is often facilitated by structures, tools, and protocols.

In Norway, joint work was exemplified in the collective construction of the school’s Quality Plan. In *Escuela Nueva*, it was mentoring and coaching each other in the micro-centers, or even in just building a garden together. In NW RISE, the joint work was evident in the curriculum planning of the job-alike groups, and in the webinars that teachers presented to each other. And in Hong Kong, at Fanling, almost everything about the *Open Class* process—the planning, revising, presentation, and feedback—was joint work in Little’s most rigorous sense.

Joint work in these cases was not just about rolling one’s sleeves up and getting one’s hands dirty, like grading a big pile of papers together, or agreeing to have a colleague’s most challenging student on a day when they are being badly behaved. Joint work is thoughtful work that involves dialogue, as well as doing. In collaborative professionalism, talk is part of the work.

1.8 Common meaning and purpose

Collaborative professionalism aspires to, articulates, and advances a common purpose that is greater than test scores or even academic achievement on its own. Collaborative professionalism addresses and engages with the goals of education that enable and encourage young people to grow and flourish as whole human beings who can live lives and find work that has meaning and purpose for themselves and for society.

In Norway, Aronsloekka's vision – to develop young people's ability and to thrive in nature and with each other – was genuinely shared, not administratively imposed. NW RISE educators wanted to increase students' engagement with their learning, lives, and communities. In Northern Ontario, meaning and purpose was expressed in the quest for inclusion, equity, and dignity for indigenous people. In Colombia, it was nothing short of peace and democracy. In Hong Kong, by contrast, it was about the formation of character in a complex and fast-paced society. All these are much larger questions than raising achievement scores in literacy and numeracy, important as those things might be.

1.9 Collaborating with students

In educational change, students are usually the purpose, targets, and objects of change and teachers' professional collaboration. Rarely are they also its acting subjects and participants. But in the very deepest forms of collaborative professionalism, as we discovered to our surprise, students are actively engaged with their teachers in constructing change together. In this respect, student voice is the extreme end of student engagement.

Not all of the systems and schools we observed had completely moved to this position. However, the processes and practices of collaboration in Norwegian and Hong Kong schools both arose out of the principles and practices of cooperative learning and self-regulated learning that had been used in teachers' classrooms. In Colombia, students shared in the role of teacher by stepping in if the teacher's knowledge or skill was insufficient at that moment. And in NW RISE, the English language arts teachers collaborated with and through their students when they shared their argument writing drafts across the remote divides, or when they took time-lapse videos of their respective communities and shared them with each other.

1.10 Big picture thinking for all

Education is not alone as a world where executives typically see the big picture and everyone else just works away in their own little corner. In the past, big picture thinking belonged to educational leadership conferences whereas conferences for classroom teachers focused on particular skills and strategies. In collaborative professionalism, though, everyone gets the big picture.

The Ontario school that set itself up as a learning organization did so in a way that everyone did not merely see the big picture, but actually lived how everything was connected to everything else. In the micro-centers in Colombia, teachers talk about the politics of their network as well as their practical contributions to it. Teachers in Drammen create their school’s vision together. And in NW RISE, it’s the schools, not the executives at the Education Northwest Center who determine what the strategy for sustainability will be.

1.11 Summary

If the Ten Tenets were asked as ten questions, they might run something like this:

- Are you able and willing to make significant professional judgments together?
- Do you truly believe that all your students can develop and succeed and are you prepared to make sure that they do?
- Do you ask questions about your own and others’ practice on a regular basis, with a view to acting on the answers?
- Do you feel almost as responsible for the other children in your school or community as you do for your own, and do you take responsibility with others to help them?
- Do you seize initiative and step forward to innovate, make a change, or help a colleague in need, before you are asked?
- Do you get into deep dialogue or even heated debate with colleagues about ideas, plans, politics, or the best way to help struggling children who need another way to move forward?
- Do you have other colleagues you do truly fulfilling work with, inside or outside your school, in terms of planning, teaching, reviewing or giving feedback, for example?
- Is your teaching and your own learning imbued with meaning and a deep sense of moral purpose, and do you also use your influence and authority to help young people find genuine meaning and purpose in their lives?
- Do you collaborate with your students, sometimes, as well as just for them?
- Do you “get” the big picture of your organization, understand how everything is connected to everything else, and take responsibility for your own part in all of that?

2. The Four Bs of Collaborative Professionalism

Whenever a new method, practice, or protocol surfaces in education, there is a common tendency to spread it too far and too fast, with little thought as to what else may be needed for the particular model or design to be effective in a sustainable way.

Giving feedback will fall flat in a culture of fear. Teachers will approve of PLCs less frequently than their administrators if the PLCs serve purposes that are enforced, narrow, and educationally questionable. Transformation does not transpire without trust. Reform cannot be implemented or sustained without the existence of positive professional relationships.

So what are the *four Bs of collaborative professionalism* that help us understand and also activate the contexts and cultures that precede, succeed and surround it? (Figure 13)

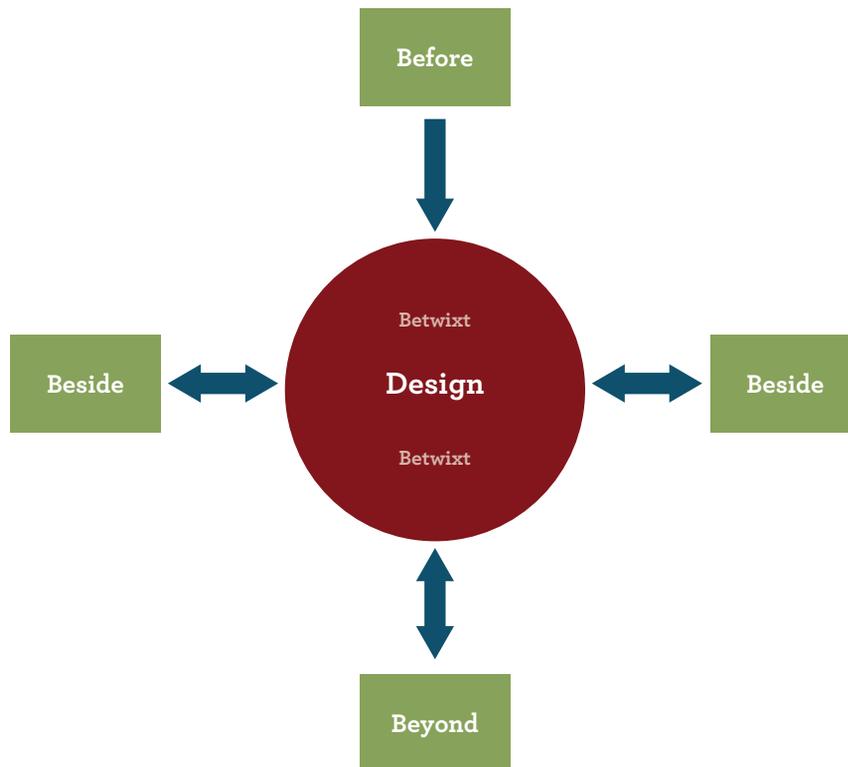


Figure 13. The four Bs of collaborative professionalism.

2.1 Before

What came before the model of collaborative professionalism existed? Direct and short-term impact of collaborative designs will only achieve success in conjunction with longer-term processes of culture and community building. Fast change, like sprinting athletes, will not succeed unless there has been a longer and slower warm-up period beforehand. A brilliant model or system of collaboration is like an architectural award-winning building: it is just an empty shell unless there is a living culture that suffuses and surrounds it.

What goes before, beyond, beside, as well as betwixt any innovation in collaborative professionalism is almost always an inalienable part of its success. Understanding this, and having the time and skill to evolve it, is the essence and, to the outsider, also one of the greatest mysteries, of inspiring leadership.

Principal Lena Kilen and Veronica Yau, in Drammen, Norway and Hong Kong respectively, had built their cultures of collaboration over nine years before we saw the collaborative designs they had introduced to their teachers. The NW RISE network had evolved in a carefully managed process of growth over four years rather than turning into a club that signed up instant participants or becoming a bureaucratic cluster that was designed to be a middle layer of policy implementation. *Escuela Nueva* has been four decades in the making and carefully crafted to include trainings and support mechanisms through collaboration. And before the teachers in Northern Ontario were ready to take over the leadership of professional learning communities, principals had carried the responsibility for running them for years before that.

Lesson study, data teams, and other designs can consolidate or even concentrate the effort and energy of these longer-term processes more sharply, but they cannot cut short or replace them.

2.2 Betwixt

What other kinds of collaboration exist *betwixt* or alongside the model in question in the school and in the distinctive culture of the whole society? The designs for professional collaboration that we have reviewed were not isolated, insulated instances of joint work now and again, or here and there. NW RISE organized many other processes, as well as the job-alike groups, though they remain core to most of the convenings. The ice cream in Norway and buffets in Hong Kong were places where task-based teams transformed into social groups. And so what if teachers who spend most of their lives serving the children of tiny fishing villages, small farming communities, or homes deep in the forest also want to do a spot of shopping together in the big city on the weekend after their meetings are over?

In all of this, the wider culture of a society is reflected in how a system or practice of collaboration unfolds in a school. The calm restraint of Norwegian educators and the love of nature they share with their children; the animated interaction and passion for teaching and politics among Colombians; and the

coordinated collaboration of Hong Kong hierarchies — these are just three examples of how and why systems of professional collaboration cannot be transplanted wholesale in a culture-free way if they are to transform into collaborative professionalism.

2.3 Beside

What support does the system provide beside the specific collaborative design in government grants, in official allocations of time for collaboration, or in wider professional networks? All schools exist in systems and must therefore find ways of being coherent with them or, if the systems are unhelpful or misguided, coherent among themselves as an alternative.²²⁶

The NW RISE teachers integrated their job-alike planning with the curriculum standards of their respective states. Fanling's *Open Class* was made possible by generous innovation grants, in cycles of support, from the Education Bureau. Norwegian educators benefit from the flexibility of a broad and humanistic curriculum, rather than one that is narrowly preoccupied with literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of almost everything else. And it is supported by official allocations of time that enable professional collaboration to occur. By contrast, where a suitable system of support didn't exist, *Escuela Nueva* patiently built its own.

2.4 Beyond

What connections does any specific design have to collaborative ideas and actions *beyond* the school, elsewhere, in overseas schools, international research, or online interaction? Internal systems can get productive stimulation from external disturbance. When new knowledge comes in and out of a system on a regular basis, this prompts the system to change and energize other systems as well.

Staying in your own class, school, or country all the time is the way that only human ostriches seek inspiration. If people only look inward, they never see what's outside them — sometimes right next door. This is one way that schools fail and systems stagnate: they limit their capacity for learning.

The NW RISE schools communicate physically and virtually despite the hundreds and thousands of miles that separate many of them. Norwegian teachers train for cooperative learning in England and visit high performing systems in Ontario. Hong Kong educators travel to high performing systems like Singapore, Japan, and Shanghai with particular ends in view of what they want to see and learn from — which has had definable effects on their own practice. The *Escuela Nueva* network now stretches across many different parts of the world, transcending the rural to inform the urban and the global.

Meanwhile, technology connects NW RISE teachers on *Schoology*, gets the word out from Fanling teachers on *Whatsapp*, enables schools and families to connect with each other through high quality video technology across the northern Ontario wilderness, and both Aronsloekka and *Escuela Nueva* are beginning to incorporate technology into their learning.

2.5 Summary

Beyond the immediate protocols of collaboration, schools that practice collaborative professionalism are global and local, natural and digital, outside-in and inside-out. They populate a both/and rather than either/or way of thinking that John Dewey would have been proud of. They are sustainable and nimble, focused on the long term and the short term, and are both direct and formal, and indirect and informal, in a culture that is about action and interaction but always, relentlessly, for an unswerving greater good.

3. Moving from Professional Collaboration to Collaborative Professionalism

Finally, we want to return to a framework that we introduced in one of the cases to emphasize that it applies to all of them — a framework that indicates the progression from professional collaboration to collaborative professionalism (Figure 14). In short, as PLCs (and the other collaborations) have acquired more depth, they have moved:

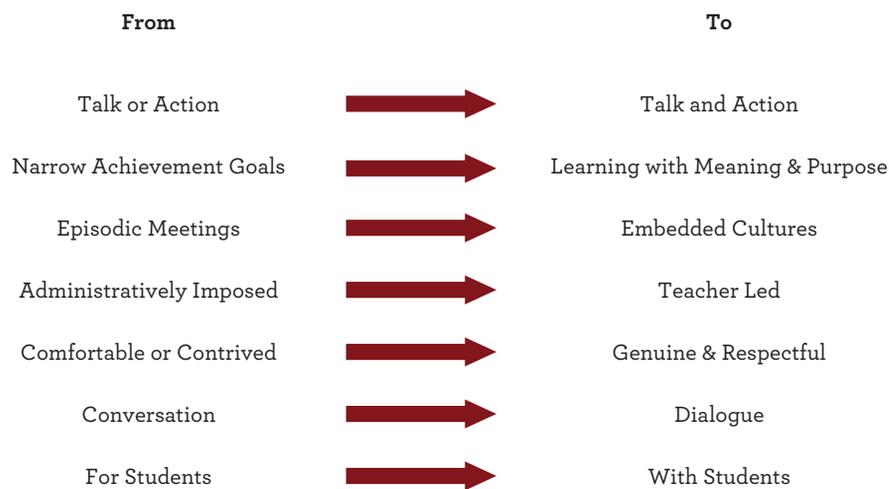
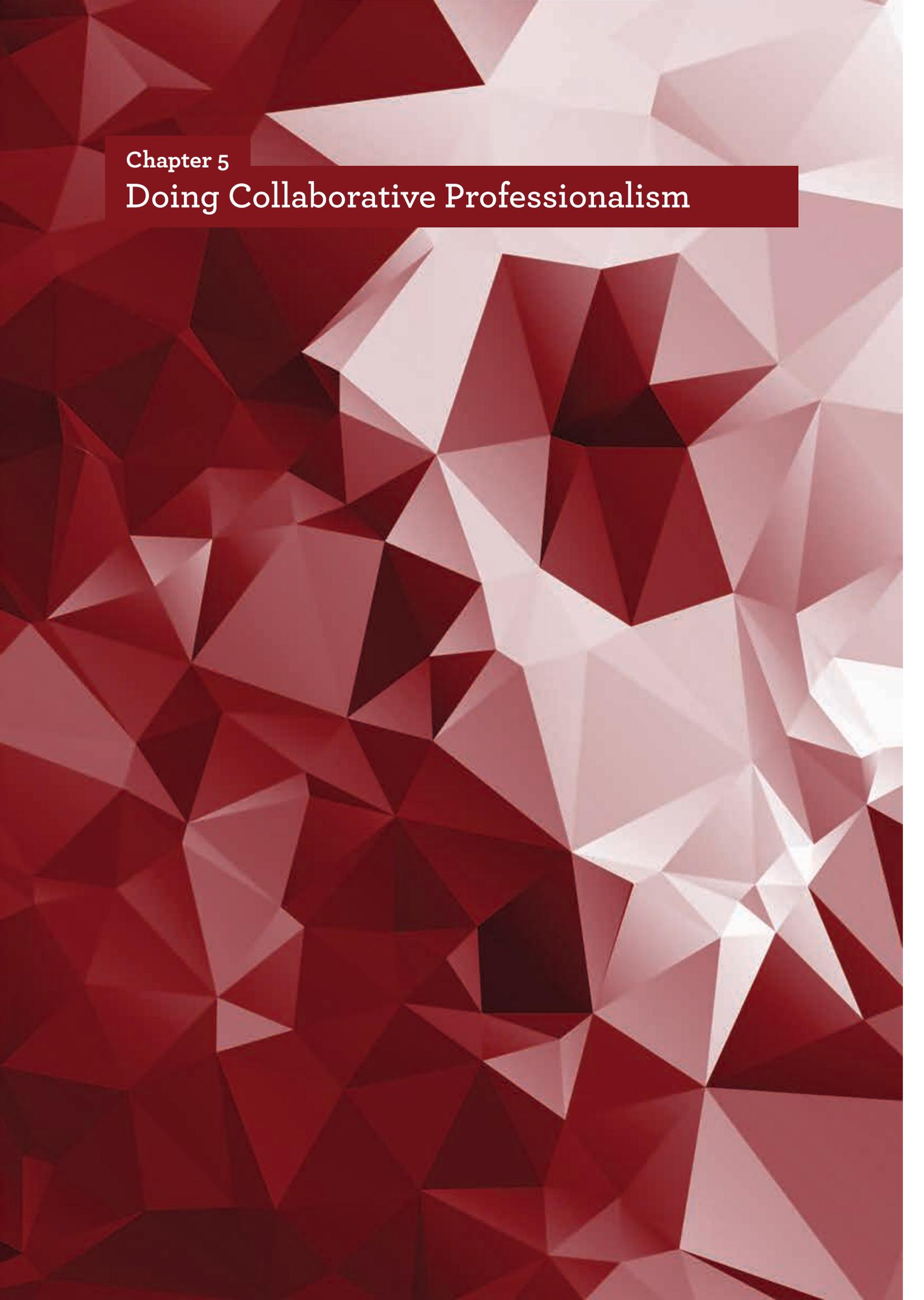


Figure 14. Moving from professional collaboration to collaborative professionalism.

In the past 20 years, many educational systems and their leaders have been pushing for more professional collaboration. But they have often pushed for the wrong kinds of collaboration in the wrong way. In collaborative professionalism, we want not only more collaboration, but also more professionalism involving good data and good judgment, more candid and respectful professional dialogue, more thoughtful feedback, more collective responsibility for each other's results, and more courageous engagement with bolder visions of education that will help young people become change makers in their own and other people's lives.

Next, and last, we look at what practitioners, leaders, and policymakers can specifically do to make that happen.

The background of the page is a complex, abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous triangles in various shades of red, from deep maroon to light pink, and white. The triangles are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some appearing to point towards the viewer and others receding. The overall effect is a textured, crystalline surface.

Chapter 5

Doing Collaborative Professionalism

Most reports on professional collaboration and professional development typically end with a three-part advocacy for better leadership, more time, and more resources. Reports never conclude that we need poorer leadership, less time, and fewer resources! We want to add something else in this concluding chapter to the standard recommendations for time and resources. What we focus on instead is what we should do to strengthen collaborative professionalism, not only how much time or money we have to do it. In particular, we ask:

- What should we *stop* doing?
- What should we *continue* doing?
- What should we *start* doing?

1. What should we stop doing?

1. Stop investing too much in data teams at the expense of collaborative inquiry

Children, learning, and teaching must come before dashboards and digits. This doesn't mean that we should abandon data in education. Data help us track and monitor progress. They enable us to identify gaps that need narrowing and gates that are closed to some groups more than others. They can draw attention to students whose needs are too easily overlooked, regardless of intentions—the quiet children in a class, or the unusually large numbers of students in the middle levels of performance, as found in Drammen, for example. Data can also help us solve problems by pinpointing the reasons for issues such as low graduation rates, grade retention issues, or high teacher turnover. Progress monitoring, problem solving, and accountability all function better with data rather than without it.

But data teams shouldn't dominate what teachers do or even what they think and worry about. And not all data are big data of numbers and algorithms. Too much emphasis on data analysis can bring together social scientists, bureaucrats, and technology companies in a disturbing alliance of self-interest that distracts teachers from the core of their work—teaching and learning. This triple alliance is overly inclined to believe it can control schools and society through pure science in a process that is linear and predictable rather than complex, improvisational, and messy—a delusion that has appealed to policy makers and academics since the 1800s.

What matters most of all is that educators inquire into what they are doing continuously and that they use the big data of numbers and the small data of professional judgments in combination as a way to inform the process.²²⁷ Put big data first and the data drive improvement in the wrong directions, drawing teachers into time-consuming activities that are not the core of their work, which is teaching, learning, and the development of children. Data teams should be part of cultures of continuous collaborative inquiry, not the other way round.

2. Stop importing unmodified alien designs

Many designs for collaborative professionalism, such as lesson study, end up being ineffective when they are adopted without any consideration of the culture in which they evolved. To avoid this frequent flaw of innovation efforts, we advise that every inquiry or improvement team should have, get, or develop a resident anthropologist. Anthropologists understand culture. They understand their community's own culture — what is important, how people interact, and how the community evolved over time. They understand other cultures — the values that define them, the distinctive nature of their relationships, and how all these things have been shaped by traditions in the country and by leadership over time in the school. When an innovation or collaborative design comes to the attention of a school or a system, the person or group assigned the responsibility of acting as anthropologists can help everyone figure out what can stay the same and what needs to change about the design to adopt it successfully in one's own community.

Reform is like ripe fruit, one of us once said. It rarely travels well.²²⁸ Designs for collaborative professionalism are the same. But designs coming from afar can work if people actively figure out the relationship with their own culture. Will the new way of collaborating need more or less formality or hierarchy, more or less informality and “fun,” more or less prescription of stages and steps, if it is to transfer successfully? Without someone playing the role of anthropologist, though, many people not only find it hard to understand other cultures; they also don't even grasp the distinctiveness of their own. Cows don't know that it's grass that they're eating. All this may sound farfetched, but some companies have been able to reinvent themselves successfully by hiring actual anthropologists to figure out their own history and story so the company can add new chapters for the future.²²⁹

Whether it is lesson study, collaborative inquiry, helping another school, or being a critical friend for other educators, policymakers, principals, and all kinds of teachers must actively consider and decide how a new design for collaborative professionalism will and won't work in their own school. We should not embark on blitz campaigns to replicate new designs. Rather, we must inform educators of their potential collaborative options, present frameworks to them to help them personalize collaboration and make it more effective, and emphasize the importance of the human element — remembering their students, and the cultural and contextual factors that frame the learning that takes place.

3. End high rates of educator turnover

It's hard to collaborate effectively when the personnel keep changing. When leaders keep changing, schools constantly lurch from one direction to another and either teachers leave as well, or they learn to wait while the tides of change wash in and out. When many or most of the teachers keep changing, things are even worse. Students start to feel that nobody cares enough to stay and when nobody else cares, neither do they. Teachers cannot collaborate with each other if they are making many new acquaintances every year. When there is a culture of high turnover, teachers behave as self-centered individuals who have to sink or swim by themselves. They feel overwhelmed and alone, and they lose hope quickly. Then they leave too, just like the others before them, perpetuating the very problem that defeated them.

High turnover can sometimes be inherently hard to avoid, as in international schools, where many teachers develop their lives and careers by moving from one school and country to another about every three years. High turnover is, however, also an effect of deliberate policies that endlessly expose educators in urban schools in some countries to top-down reforms and interventions. Even worse, the system or the school can be so driven by profitability that it seeks a teaching force that is young, cheap, and forever moving on in order to lower the cost of education and reduce resistance to the principal's and owner's wishes, or to imposed change. This helps explain the reason for the arguments we reviewed earlier that oppose collaboration or criticize its effectiveness.

The collaborative designs that were adopted in Hong Kong, Ontario, and Drammen emerged when there had been years of leadership stability that had built a strong culture of collaboration alongside and around specific designs such as professional learning communities, lesson study, and co-operative learning. But what should schools do if this culture does not already exist; if high turnover is part of the problem the present staff have inherited?

Paradoxically, one of the causes of high turnover is lack of investment in social capital and collaborative professionalism. The research of Susan Moore Johnson and her colleagues shows that teachers are more likely to stay in their school or the profession if their work occurs in cultures of collaboration.²³⁰ Any effort to build collaboration as a leader to provide support, fulfillment, and a growing repertoire of effective strategies for young teachers will increase the likelihood that they will become more resilient and persist.²³¹ And, like Fanling school in Hong Kong, training new teachers in skills like teamwork and appointing them on the basis of those capacities can accelerate how quickly effective cultures of collaborative professionalism can be established. The best way to develop collaborative professionalism is with collaborative professionalism. So, if you do something and get started, there is a good chance you will initiate an upward spiral.

2. What should we continue doing?

1. Keep evolving the complexity of collaborative professionalism

Moves to establish stronger collaboration may start out simply — perhaps through having some social gatherings to build relationships, or through creating teams that work on particular tasks like curriculum development. Over time, though, the move from professional collaboration to deeper collaborative professionalism occurs when the formal and informal, long-term and short-term aspects of collaborative activity become increasingly complex and integrated as a way of life and not just a set of activities or events. In the case of NW RISE, for example, we saw how collaborative professionalism evolved deliberately from relying on project resources and central backbone structures to becoming more crystalline in nature where participating educators increasingly initiated collaborative activities with each other. Through these more sophisticated practices, we have seen the value of increasing teacher capacity in collaboration, making collaboration relevant and applicable to teachers, and providing many teachers with bits of time to collaborate, rather than creating full-time coordinating positions for a few.

The first challenge of building professional collaboration, therefore, might be getting some new ways of collaborating started. Once these start to succeed though, it is important not to stop there. Keep evolving the collaboration to incorporate other aspects that help it become more sophisticated, embedded and widespread — such as introducing more and better feedback, pushing professional conversation to a deeper level, or involving students more in collaborative activities.

2. Continue soliciting critical feedback

Feedback is in fashion as one of the chief priorities for improvement in many countries.²³² But not any feedback will do. Feedback that is too harsh, or infrequent, or from sources lacking in credibility, will have little positive impact on those who receive it. However, if we solicit constructive and critical feedback in multiple forms from a range of colleagues, not just through one isolated process or structure, the feedback will not feel awkward or artificial.

Separating criticism of the lesson, the process, or the innovation from criticism of the person behind it can be done through lesson study or robust processes of peer review. It can also be achieved by giving people roles of acting as critical friends for each other in staff development processes or teacher networks. For principals and other leaders, resistance to change can also be legitimized by asking teachers to brainstorm risks and problems associated with new programs or innovations, by presenting multiple options for staff to consider rather than forcing acceptance or rejection of one, and by dividing groups randomly into those that have the task of identifying benefits of a change and those that have to list all the problems.

If teachers are to accept engagement in feedback that has critical components, leaders must also model how they value such feedback for themselves by routinely procuring such feedback, really listening to it, then acting upon it when it is presented. You won't be successful in recommending critical feedback for other people if you are not seen as being willing to engage with it yourself.

3. Keep everyone engaged with the big picture and little picture together

Collaborative professionalism means not just collaborating on a bit of the big picture you have been given, such as developing a behavior management strategy or an induction program for new teachers. It means seeing how changes such as these fit into the big picture, too. Are all staff members and, indeed, students engaged in developing the vision and mission of the school, like the teachers at Drammen? Do leaders constantly explain how specific changes or team tasks fit into this larger vision as they do in northwestern Ontario? Can teachers and students articulate that connection, as well? When asked what kind of school they are involved with, will you get the same sort of answer from teachers, students, bus drivers, janitors, parents, and administrative assistants, as well as the principal — as was very evident to us in our site visit at *Escuela Nueva*?

At the same time, are formal leaders witnesses to and participants in the little pictures of change? Do ministers, secretaries of education, or district superintendents go into schools on a weekly basis, hold some of their meetings there, and make announcements from them — not just in the top schools, or the ones on the leading edge, but in all kinds of schools in the system? Do principals regularly go to see what is happening in students' classes, interact with students and teachers, and participate in the classes themselves — not just to monitor and evaluate, but because they really want to know? The big picture makes no sense without all the dots that make up the little pictures. Conversely, without a big picture to join up those dots, people's efforts will feel scattered and disconnected.

3. What should we start doing?

1. Make students into change-makers with their teachers

If collaborative professionalism is to become more meaningful for teachers and students alike, we must find more ways to involve students in the process. Among the many global competencies that young people must develop, one is the ability to initiate and manage change — to be a successful change maker.²³³ This might mean coming up with a new idea, developing a start-up company, rectifying an injustice, or building a movement for a cause. In all of these, young people will need to learn explicitly and not just by chance how to organize, advocate, listen, negotiate, inspire, collaborate, fund-raise, build coalitions, and so on. Some of these competencies can and will be addressed

in the formally taught curriculum. But many will or will not also arise in the hidden curriculum of how the school does its work and in what part students play in that.²³⁴ How can students become change makers in their society if they are not encouraged to be change makers in their schools?

Students should not only be the objects or recipients of their teachers' ideas shared through collaboration, however well intentioned those ideas might be. Students have the right to express and share their ideas, as well, and to have the same kinds of transformative experiences that so many teachers have enjoyed. We have seen glimpses of this student engagement and even activism in *Escuela Nueva* and the NW RISE network, but there is opportunity for so much more.

Of course, faced with the prospect of student collaboration in the life and destiny of the school, teachers are sometimes apprehensive about collaborative student involvement for similar reasons that administrators worry about collaborative decision-making among teachers. If teachers have more collaborative rights, will teacher unions rule the roost over principals and school districts superintendents? If students get more collaborative input, will they make immature decisions, or irresponsible ones for communities and educators whose tenure in the school will outlast the time that many students are there? These are anxieties about loss of autonomy, power, and control that arise in all movements towards greater collaboration.

In general, people who are insecure about their own autonomy from those above are anxious about yielding it to those below. Stronger collaborative professionalism among teachers is, therefore, typically a precondition for effective collaborative engagement with students. The more confident teachers are in their own authority, the more able they will be to let go of it a little so others can have autonomy and authority, as well. In the words of the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, "Fear is an element that prevents us from letting go. We're fearful that if we let go, we'll have nothing else to cling to. Letting go is a practice; it's an art."²³⁵

2. Adduce the added value of digital technology

Some of the cases we have highlighted show clear benefits for the value of digital technology in supporting and sustaining the development of collaborative professionalism. In the rural and remote Northwest of the United States, and across the Ontario wilderness in Canada, digital and video technology is connecting teachers and students in ways that were geographically impossible or financially exorbitant just a few years ago. Teachers can plan and reflect together. Students can provide peer review on assignments. School district leaders and teachers can exchange ideas and build a vision. Rural schools in Colombia are just seeing the beginning of this. In Hong Kong as in other Asian systems, enthusiastic teachers are using a range of digital platforms to keep and share photographic records of their ideas and their impact.

At the moment, on average, the global evidence of the OECD is that countries that are implementing technology most rapidly are showing the least gains in student achievement.²³⁶ But this does not repudiate the benefits of technology per se. It is more a commentary on the indecent haste and spread of implementation that is often fuelled by the massive financial investments made by technology companies in climates of austerity where other funding for public education is otherwise in short supply.

In the heated arguments for and against more technology in schools, it is time now not to see what the average outcome is, but to figure out what are the best results for students with and without technology and to discern where technology can distinctively add value to collaborative professionalism that cannot be added any other way. Technology can enable students and teachers to give and receive challenging feedback that might be harder to cope with from colleagues in their own small school with whom they work every day. Technology can connect teachers who have similar interests and grade levels when those colleagues do not exist nearby, and it can give them online tools for collaborative planning and review. Technology platforms can sustain relationships and professional interactions on a month-by-month basis that have been established and consolidated face-to-face just a couple of times a year. Technology also offers ways to circulate and share great ideas and their impact in real time with other teachers, the principal, and the student's parents.

But technology is not and should not be the answer to everything. In Norway and other countries in that region, teachers and students derive great value in terms of knowing each other better by playing, having shared adventures and undertaking activities outdoors in nature together. Too much time on data analysis can become distracting and divert teachers from the whole child and from undertaking fulfilling projects because the teachers are gathered round screens and looking at dashboards to an excessive extent.

Digital technology is one of the newest aspects of and opportunities for building collaborative professionalism. We must learn fast and learn well about its benefits without presuming what the end game should be. Ultimately, what matters most is that children learn well and that their teachers learn well, too. We must therefore assess carefully where investments of money and time in digital technology will add value to things that are of high educational and professional importance without significantly subtracting value from other things of equally great or even greater significance such as physical and emotional wellbeing.

3. Build more collaboration across schools and systems

Organizations flourish or flounder from the head down. If teachers want students to learn cooperatively, then, like the teachers at Drammen, they should model how to work together cooperatively themselves. Principals who want teachers to collaborate with other teachers should themselves be ready and willing to collaborate with principals in other schools — like the district-wide professional learning community in northern Ontario, or the principals who worked with other principals in the NW RISE network. What message does it send when principals and superintendents urge their teachers to collaborate, but their stance with neighboring schools or systems is to compete?

In our original design for this study, we were eager to investigate examples of systems that worked closely with other systems. It turned out, though, that two of the sites we examined were too preliminary or temporary in nature to warrant inclusion. But in earlier work, we have studied how school districts in Ontario worked together to implement the province's vision for special education by developing solutions that were responsive to the needs and diversities of their own communities, yet shared and communicated with each other in a culture where all the systems took collective responsibility for each other's success.²³⁷ We have also previously reported on local authorities or school districts in England where state schools and systems that were in a competitive relationship for student numbers helped each other even when they struggled. The result was that all the schools in the authorities improved and more parents kept their children enrolled there. Everybody benefitted. Not only were schools strongly urged by senior leadership to collaborate, but provision of assistance to other schools was also specified in the school leaders' contracts.²³⁸

Wherever possible, therefore, systems should find ways to collaborate with other systems and for their schools to collaborate with each other, even when they are in a competitive relationship. We can train educational leaders in the benefits of cooperation, even with competitors. We can also consider incorporating responsibilities for collaboration and its outcomes in principals' contracts. Indeed, if your school is doing well and you want to know what to do next, one answer is to help another school.

4. Last Words

Nothing in the world is entirely individual. Olympic medalists, Academy Award winners and teachers of the year have undoubted talents and accomplishments, but they also benefit from years of experience, training, leadership, mentoring support, and even competition that enables them to grow over time and become the best they can be. Collaborative professionalism is about group achievements that actually enhance individual accomplishments and contributions of many kinds in countless ways.²³⁹ Strong groups foster shared decisions, but they also underpin, inform, and enhance individual professional judgments. When law enforcement officers are confronted with a threat, when doctors have to make a life and death decision, or when teachers make one of the hundreds of judgments a day that characterize their classes, these autonomous judgment benefits from the weight and the strength of collaborative professionalism behind them.

Collaborative professionalism benefits the individual and the group, it develops the student and the teacher, it expresses solidarity in the face of adversity, and it embraces collective as well as individual autonomy based on shared expertise. Collaborative professionalism welcomes rather than fears feedback, critique, and improvement. In the past quarter century, teaching has made great strides in building more *professional collaboration*. It is now time for this to progress into *collaborative professionalism*, rooted in inquiry, responsive to feedback, and always up for a good argument. Are you a collaborative professional? Are you ready for this kind of challenge? For this—collaborative professionalism—is one of the next big step changes we can and should now make in the global movement for educational innovation and improvement.

Appendix

Purposive sampling was used to identify the seven initial systems and sites in terms of their geographic distribution, cultural variation, and representation of different collaborative designs.²⁴⁰ The sampling was also guided by the researchers' knowledge of and familiarity with the sites, or by recommendations from knowledgeable insiders familiar with the systems. Once each site was determined, purposive and snowball sampling were used to choose the specific schools, teachers, and administrators who were invited to participate in the study. To be considered, a system or school had to be willing to allow for and help arrange observations of the collaborative activity, interviews with participants and stakeholders either participating in or supporting the collaborative activity, and reviews of artifacts relevant to the collaborative activities.

To build each of the cases, we collected multiple forms of data over a period ranging from three to five days including observations of collaborative activities, classroom observations, interviews, focus groups, and artifact reviews, including documents and website information in the public domain. Interview and observation hours varied depending on the particular visit, but an approximate average per case is eight interview hours and twelve observational hours. To strengthen cross-validation, three sites were visited by both of us at the same time. Detailed field notes and photographic records were collected using laptops, iPads, and iPhones. Field notes focused on the collaborative activity under study, as well as the environment, surroundings, interactions, and relationships to provide a thick description of each site.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded using audio recorders and laptops. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes to gain a deeper sense of the participants' background, participation in the collaborative activity, and feedback on their own participation. After each site visit, we constructed initial analytic memos to begin developing themes and to highlight key elements of the case.²⁴¹ The key questions we investigated were simply what kind of collaboration was occurring, what purposes did it serve, how had it evolved over time, what other kinds of collaboration was it connected to, how was it connected to other schools and system beyond it, and what was the perceived impact.

Data analysis began by listening to audio recordings of each interview or focus group multiple times and then transcribing key quotes that were relevant to the particular collaborative activity under study in relation to the guiding questions. Data were analyzed through multiple rounds of coding using constant comparative analysis and a process of ongoing analytic memo-writing.²⁴² Codes were used to develop patterns. Pattern and axial coding were utilized to move from individual or cluster codes to themes.²⁴³ Analytic memos became an essential element of considering how findings and themes related back to our initial questions about collaboration, especially across contexts

and cultures. Further information was sought from public record information and from other prior relevant research undertaken by the investigators to clarify and provide context for what had been learned from the site visits.²⁴⁴

The case studies were written based on the orientating questions and emerging categories that applied to all cases, but also in relation to the intrinsic narrative that was inherent to each particular case. Upon completion of the cases, we conducted member checks, sending quotes and initial case write-ups to participants for confirmation, correction and feedback.

Once the seven cases were written, we developed our argument for deeper collaborative professionalism – beyond the original formulation from government and academics in Canada. Two of the cases turned out to be too preliminary or temporary to qualify. One case of district peer review of quality standards as a way of establishing accountability in a system was still in a pilot stage. Another instance of district-to-district collaboration had existed briefly but had not persisted due to lack of external funding or policy prioritization. These other examples of collaboration therefore do exist, but the cases we explored were not sufficiently developed or sustained to merit inclusion. In a study extending beyond the one-year term of this project, we would have substituted alternate examples.

Ethical concerns were considered throughout the planning and conducting of data collection to ensure that study participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the study, had an opportunity to ask questions, and then deny or accept participation. All participants completed an informed consent document, as did the particular site (usually the school or system) granting knowledge of the study and a willingness to participate. As noted above, member checks were conducted to check for validity and accuracy, and to be transparent in communicating the purpose of the data and report.

Additionally, we, the researchers, used cross-validation techniques to avoid the unintended effects of bias that could influence or harm the data analysis and interpretation. Though these steps were taken throughout the study, it remains true that our own perspectives, experiences, and worldviews informed our work through the data collection process and writing of the report. We are grateful to WISE and our two report reviewers for also holding us accountable and providing thoughtful feedback.

About the Authors

Andy Hargreaves is the Brennan Chair in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. He is President of the International Congress of School Effectiveness and Improvement, Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Professional Capital and Community, and Adviser in Education to the Premier of Ontario and the First Minister of Scotland.

Andy has consulted with the OECD, the World Bank, governments, universities and teacher unions worldwide. Andy's more than 30 books have attracted multiple Outstanding Writing Awards – including the prestigious 2015 Grawemeyer Award in Education for Professional Capital (with Michael Fullan). He has been honored with the 2016 Horace Mann Award in the US and the Robert Owen Award in Scotland for services to public education. Andy has been ranked by Education Week in the top 10 scholars with most influence on US education policy debate. In 2015, Boston College gave him its Excellence in Teaching with Technology Award. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Michael T. O'Connor is the assistant director of the Providence Alliance for Catholic Teachers (PACT) program at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, USA. In this role, Michael teaches Master's level courses, provides supervision and instructional coaching to the program's teachers, and offers support to the program's partner Catholic schools in the New England region. A former middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and instructional coach, Michael received his Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus in literacy from the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. While working on his doctorate, he worked with Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley on the Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement (NW RISE) network project, which included supporting the work of the ELA group. His dissertation explored secondary students' language choices in authentic, community-based writing activities and the ways in which teachers collaborated to support student writing across rural contexts.

About Boston College



Boston College is a Catholic and Jesuit university, and one of the foremost universities in the United States, with a coeducational enrollment of some 14,000 undergraduate and graduate students drawn from all 50 states and 80 countries. Boston College is guided by its founding Jesuit mission to offer students a transforming educational experience; to help them develop both their intellect and their character, and to encourage them to lead lives of faith, integrity and service to others.

The Lynch School of Education at Boston College endeavors to enhance the human condition, expand the human imagination, and make the world more just. This is achieved through excellence in teaching, research, and service both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. To learn more about the Lynch School's mission and its programs, visit www.bc.edu/lynchschoo.

About WISE



world innovation summit for education

مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في التعليم

An Initiative of Qatar Foundation

The World Innovation Summit for Education was established by Qatar Foundation in 2009 under the leadership of its Chairperson, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. WISE is an international, multi-sectoral platform for creative, evidence-based thinking, debate, and purposeful action toward building the future of education. Through the biennial summit, collaborative research and a range of on-going programs, WISE is a global reference in new approaches to education.

The WISE Research series, produced in collaboration with experts from around the world, addresses key education issues that are globally relevant and reflect the priorities of the Qatar National Research Strategy. Presenting the latest knowledge, these comprehensive reports examine a range of education challenges faced in diverse contexts around the globe, offering action-oriented recommendations and policy guidance for all education stakeholders. Past WISE Research publications have addressed issues of access, quality, financing, teacher training, school systems leadership, education in conflict areas, entrepreneurship, early-childhood education, and twenty-first century skills.

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Many other people have made this work possible and enabled us to bring it to fruition.

First, there are the classroom teachers, their students, school principals, and system level leaders of the five schools and networks that made it into this report, and also the five school districts in two countries that didn't eventually make it because their work was not yet developed enough for us to include it here. They all eagerly responded to our requests to observe them in action and welcomed us with open arms — exemplifying the very spirit of collaborative professionalism that we had come to see.

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Some of the argument in Chapters 1 and 2 builds on a paper that we, the authors, wrote as part of our preparation for this report. We are grateful to Emerald Publishing for permission to draw on our original article, which appears as the following in our references: Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2017). Cultures of professional collaboration: Their origins and opponents. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 2(2), 74-85, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-02-2017-0004>

We are also appreciative of the work of our two reviewers, Amanda Datnow and Ann Lieberman, who gave us invaluable feedback on the ideas and evidence in this report and, not least, on how to get it down to the requested length.

We work in a field where, for more than twenty-five years, we have been fortunate to interact with, learn from, and sometimes be direct collaborators in research, writing, and development on professional collaboration. These immediate collaborators, in alphabetical order, include Mel Ainscow, Brenda Beatty, Alan Boyle, Henry Braun, Maria Brisk, Carol Campbell, Amanda Datnow, Chris Day, Lorna Earl, Dean Fink, Michael Fullan, Corrie Giles, Ivor Goodson, Alma Harris, David Istance, Corrie Stone Johnson, Susan Lasky, Pak Tee Ng, Beatriz Pont, Pasi Sahlberg, Michelle Schmidt, Dennis Shirley, Allison Skerrett, and Peter Woods.

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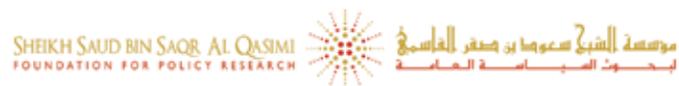
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