

Collaborative Professionalism

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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world innovation summit for education
مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في التعليم

An Initiative of Qatar Foundation



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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:

- 1.0 **Emergence** — professional collaboration is an alternative to individualism where research demonstrates its positive impact on student learning and achievement.
- 2.0 **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.
- 3.0 **Design** — specific models of professional collaboration are created in the form of professional learning communities, data teams, collaborative action research, and so on.
- 4.0 **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.
- 5.0 **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 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.

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 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 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?



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