Edited extracts from the opening chapters of Collaborative Professionalism – When Teaching Together Means Learning For All by Andy Hargreaves and Michael T. O'Connor

The Case for Collaborative Professionalism

Collaboration is the new chorus line for innovation and improvement. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 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.

Collaborative professionalism is 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, 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 professionalism 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 labour or work together rather than only talk, share, 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."

The 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism

Analysis of the case studies points to 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism that distinguish it from earlier versions of professional collaboration:

1. **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.** The belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what.

3. **Collaborative inquiry (CI).** Teachers routinely explore problems, issues, or differences of practice together in order to improve or transform what they are doing. CI is embedded in the everyday work of teaching. Teachers inquire into problems before rushing into solving them.

4. **Collective responsibility.** People have a mutual obligation to help each other and to serve the students they have in common. Collective responsibility is about our students, rather than my students.

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.** Difficult conversations can be had and are actively instigated among educators. Feedback is honest. There is genuine dialogue about valued differences of opinion about ideas, curriculum materials, or the challenging behaviour of students. Participants are often protected by protocols that insist on clarification and listening before any disagreement is brought forth.

7. **Joint work.** 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 artefacts (such as 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. It addresses and engages with 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.

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 **between** 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, in overseas schools, in international research, in online interaction, or elsewhere?

- What support does the system provide **beside** the specific collaborative design in government grants, official allocations of time, or wider professional networks?

Moving towards collaborative professionalism

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. In collaborative professionalism, we want deeper collaboration in stronger relationships of trust, support, and solidarity.

We also want more professionalism involving good data and good judgment with:

- 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

In the final chapter, we look at what practitioners, leaders, and policy makers 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 destroys cohesive cultures

- keep evolving the complexity of collaborative professionalism beyond conversations or meetings to deeper forms of dialogue, feedback and inquiry

- continue soliciting critical feedback from peers from 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 and

- build more collaboration across school and systems, including and especially in broader environments of competition.

Designing collaboration

Professional collaboration today can 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 next big question, then, is what's the best way to collaborate? What else do schools need as a good design or protocol? How will working collaboratively fit into the wider culture or community? What's best? What's next?

How do teachers collaborate? How do schools, professional organisations, 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, because of what their system requires them to do or as a professional development workshop?

The British educational theorist Basil Bernstein argued that in schools, formal educational knowledge was realised through three message systems that conveyed what was important for students to learn. They were as follows:

- **Curriculum** – which defines what counts as valid knowledge.

- **Pedagogy** – which defines what counts as valid transmission.

- **Evaluation** – which defines what counts as valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught.

One way of classifying collaborative practices is to see what they focus on in relation to these message systems.

- If they concentrate on curriculum, then they may take the form of collaborative curriculum planning or review.

- If they focus on pedagogy and pedagogical transformation, they might concentrate on culturally responsive pedagogy or cooperative learning strategies, for example.

- 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.

These categories are not watertight. Networks that bring together teachers of writing, for example, address issues of curriculum and pedagogy, but this also entails reviewing curriculum workbooks and other materials. But pinpointing where the prime focus of collaboration is in relation to these three messages systems is a useful way to think about where to start or go next on its collaborative journey.

Questions

Are you a collaborative professional?

Are you ready for this kind of challenge?