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TE

LEARNING TO COLLABORATE AND NEGOTIATE WITH EACH OTHER

Jostens

"Young people have not been well prepared for adult life today unless they are comfortable and well practiced in addressing collaboratively the kinds of problems and objectives that 21st century life poses."

– Kuhn, 2015, p. 51

Collaboration is a near-ubiquitous buzzword in the world of business. Workspaces are designed to foster collaboration. Software companies promote the ways their programs facilitate collaboration — often across the continent or around the globe.

Collaboration is considered one of the key skills for 21st century learning. In fact, the P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning (www.P21.org/Framework) identifies Collaboration as one of four essential learning skills (along with Creativity, Critical Thinking and Communication) for the 21st century workforce, noting that "the importance of cooperative interpersonal capabilities is higher and the skills involved are more sophisticated than in the prior industrial era" (Dede, 2010, p. 2).

Classrooms can be laboratories for collaboration — places where students learn to tap each other's strengths, contribute to shared goals, and solve problems together. In the process, students not only develop important skills for work and life but they also deepen their relationships with each other and internalize learning more fully. This month's content focuses on this important skill for all areas of life.

Students develop relationships in schools with both adults (teachers, staff, administrators) and peers. Peer relationships can be a positive resource for growth and learning that teachers can help to nurture. <u>Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework</u> provides a tool for exploring positive peer relationships. This month's content focuses on how teachers can help equip students to collaborate and negotiate with each other — core skills for life.

SOURCES:

Kuhn, D. (2015). Thinking together and alone. Educational Researcher, 44(1), 46-53.

Plucker, J. A., Kennedy, C., & Dilley, A. (2015). What we know about collaboration. Washington, DC: Partnership for 21st Century Learning. Download from www.p21.org/our-work/4cs-research-series/collaboration.

Dede, C. (2010). Comparing frameworks for 21st century skills. In J. Bellanca & R. Brandt (Eds.). 21st century skills: Rethinking how students learn (pp. 51-76). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

Learning to collaborate with peers (and others) is a skill that will be valuable throughout life. Researchers have tended to highlight the importance of collaboration for learning and for future workplace success. In addition, this relationship skill is also important in many other areas of life, including family relationships, friendships and civic participation.

What Is Collaboration?

There are many ways people work together. But what does it mean to collaborate? Researcher Friedrich Hesse and his colleagues describe collaboration as "the activity of working together toward a common goal." It includes the following components:

- Communication, or exchanging knowledge and ideas to increase shared understanding.
- Cooperation, or dividing responsibilities so that everyone is contributing their best.
- Responsiveness, which implies active, insightful participation.

SOURCE:

Hesse, F., Care, E., Buder, J., Sassenberg, K., & Griffin, P. (2015). A framework for teachable collaborative problem-solving skills. In P. Griffin & E. Care (Eds.), Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills (pp. 37-56). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Teamwork: A Key Skill to Future Employers — A Global Perspective

A global study of business leaders concluded that "effective collaboration, crucial in almost every sector, is a difficult habit to acquire as an adult." Instead, it is an essential skill that young people need to develop as they are growing up.

A survey of business executives from 25 countries, including the United States, found that they see teamwork as a top skill needed for their employees. Here are the percentages for each skill named by these leaders as one of the three "most critical" skills for employees in their organizations today. (Other options include literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy, all of which ranked lower.)



When asked what schools can do, experts interviewed for the study emphasized "group discussion, giving students the opportunity to work things out for themselves, while also learning how to respond to the differing skills and opinions of their peers."

SOURCE:

Economist Intelligence Unit (2015). Driving the skills agenda: Preparing students for the future. London, UK: The Economist. https://static.googleusercontent. com/media/www.google.com/en/redu/resources/global-education/files/skills-of-the-future-report.pdf.

Collaboration: A Key Skill to Future Employers — A National Perspective

A survey of 400 employers by the Conference Board and its collaborators found that employers say "teamwork and collaboration" is one of the four most important "applied skills" for entering today's workforce. (The other three are professionalism/ work ethic, oral and written communications, and critical thinking/problem solving.) In fact, these skills are more important to employers than basic knowledge and skills, such as reading comprehension and math.

In this study, collaboration and teamwork included:

- Building collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers
- Being able to work with diverse teams
- Negotiating and managing conflicts

Three out of four (75 percent) employers said collaboration/teamwork is "very important" for high school graduates. Almost all of them (94 percent) said it was very important for four-year college graduates. Sixty-one percent of employers indicated that new employees with high school diplomas were "adequate" in this essential skill.

SOURCE:

Conference Board (2006). Are they ready to work: Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce. Washington, DC: Author.

Collaboration: A Primary 21st Century Skill

Collaboration is often identified as a primary skill for success in the 21st century. It both involves how students learn (through working together) and an outcome of learning that prepares students to be successful in today's diverse, global society. According to proponents of 21st century skills, collaboration emphasizes:

- · Being able to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams
- Being flexible and willing to make necessary compromises to achieve a shared goal
- Sharing responsibility for collaborative work
- Valuing the distinct contributions of each team member

Cooperation Trumps Competition Promoting Student Achievement

Students tend to learn and achieve more when they are motivated with cooperative goals that involve a lot of collaboration, as opposed to goals that encourage competition or individual achievement. In a cooperative classroom, students have "a vested interest in each other's learning as well as their own." In these settings, teachers:

- Encourage students to set mutual, positive goals and rewards together.
- Creating assignments that require combining the resources of different members of a team so they recognize and value each other's contributions.
- Ensuring that each group member has a specific role.

This overall conclusion is based on an analysis of about 150 studies from around the world. This kind of collaborative learning also tends to create more positive student relationships, which also contributes to higher levels of achievement.

SOURCE:

Roseth, C. J., Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2008). Promoting early adolescents' achievement and peer relationships: The effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic goal structures. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 223-246.

Making Group Work Work

A five-year study by the University of London found that effective group work in classrooms could be effective in raising student achievement, increasing student engagement and reducing classroom management challenges. The study was prompted by the reality that "Pupils often sit in groups, but they only occasionally interact and work as groups." In addition, teachers are often skeptical about the value of group work, so they are less likely to use it.

Here are some factors that made group work effective:

- Group work builds on positive relationships. Design activities that help students develop skills for listening, sharing and respecting each other's ideas, building respect and trust, and giving helpful feedback.
- Small groups are usually best, often starting with groups of two or three. As group skills grow, groups can get a little larger, depending on the complexity of the task.
- Have groups sit close together (e.g., around a single table) to reduce the overall noise level in the classroom.
- Provide opportunities to reflect on and practice group skills, including debriefing after each session.
- Operate as a "guide on the side" for groups by asking open-ended questions, making general suggestions, and encouraging students to get the information they need independently.

Collaboration Isn't Magic

Though collaboration is generally effective in encouraging learning, researchers note that it does not benefit every student all the time. Some students learn more when working alone, at least sometimes. It is also less effective when the goal is rote learning or when one person dominates the team. It's most effective with conceptually oriented assignments, when students listen to each other, give feedback and, in the process, sharpen each other's thinking.

SOURCE:

Plucker, J. A., Kennedy, C., & Dilley, A. (2015). What we know about collaboration. Washington, DC: Partnership for 21st Century Learning. Download from www.p21.org/our-work/4cs-research-series/collaboration.

How Do Friends Help Each Other Learn?

Helping students collaborate for learning has the advantage of tapping the ways students motivate each other through their relationships. Researchers suggest that peers motivate each other academically because:

- 1. Good friends know what each other needs and can do. So they can be better at working together and pushing each other.
- 2. They can expect more from each other because of their mutual commitment and trust.
- 3. Their caring, close bonds give them confidence to take risks in experimenting and solving problems.

SOURCE:

Hartup, W. W. (1996). Cooperation, close relationships, and cognitive development. In W. M. Bukowski, A. F. Newcomb, and W. W. Hartup (Eds.), The company they keep: Friendship in childhood and adolescence (pp. 213 – 237). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.



Group Learning that Teaches Collaboration — and Really Works

Some teachers shy away from cooperative or collaborative learning methods. They point to times when groups haven't worked well. They have seen some groups (or some students in groups) not putting in much effort, relying on others to take care of what's needed. Or they've seen cases where students end up learning less, not more, than if they had worked alone.

However, researchers have learned a lot about what makes collaborative learning work best. Here are some insights from this research to try in your classrooms.

Meaningful. Simply assigning students to work together is rarely productive. The power comes in having a real problem to solve or question to answer. Collaborative learning works when students recognize that they need each other to accomplish a task.

Conceptual. Rote learning or highly structured problems with correct solutions can often be solved more effectively independently. Problems that lack a single, correct answer lend themselves to collaboration.

Build trust. Students will open up when they know it's safe to do so. Group ground rules are an important first step. In addition, structure the collaborative process to build their confidence as they start with simpler questions or problems and build to those that are more challenging, controversial or self-revealing.

Consensus. Performance improves when students are urged to work on a problem until everyone agrees with the solution, rather than relying on persuasion.

Participatory. Each and every student has something to contribute and has a meaningful role. Clarifying the roles and expectations up front makes success more likely.

Interactive. The best collaborative experience involve participants directly working together, engaging each other's thinking, and listening and responding to each other. It is undermined when participants work in parallel and ignore or dismiss each other's contributions.

Conflict. When students begin to recognize the legitimacy of other's perspectives, they tend to see conflicts as mutual problems that need to be solved for everyone's benefit. These differences in perspectives and opinions push students to think harder to reach agreement.

Scaffold. Some students may be less eager or able to contribute to a group process. For example, they may be shy or lack confidence. Set up processes that help them be successful. For example, you might offer sentence starters that help them articulate an idea to the group. Or you might use a talking stick so that others know not to interrupt.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: PRACTICING Collaborative problem-solving

For each person to have a voice in solving a problem or overcoming a challenge, you need ways to work through disagreements. In other words, how do students learn to share power with each other through collaboration and healthy negotiation?

This two-part activity introduces students to the basic nine-step collaborative problem-solving process that can be a key tool for collaboration. The two parts can be split across two class sessions if needed. It can be used in any class that includes a focus on cooperative learning and group projects. Practicing those skills in the classroom can prepare them for future education, work and family life.

Once students have tried (and refined) these steps for smaller challenges, they will be ready to try this process on other challenges or problems they face at school or in other areas of life.

NOTE: Consider writing the nine steps on a white board or poster so students can remember them.

Nine Steps for Solving Problems Together

- 1. Identity the problem
- 2. Clarify the problem
- 3. Identify contributing factors
- 4. Select a factor to focus on
- 5. Generate possible solutions
- 6. Sort ideas
- 7. Evaluate ideas
- 8. Select something to try
- 9. Try it, evaluate and refine

Part 1: Understanding a Problem

Explain that you're going to practice collaboration skills on a problem that's not too challenging or controversial. In the process, you'll identify some skills, and expectations we have for each other when we're working together to achieve a common goal.

In this case, we will focus on solving a specific, somewhat superficial problem. Then you'll have chances to use the ideas we discuss to work together to solve other problems or to examine other questions.

Step 1

Identify the problem — Form students into groups of 3-4 students each. Ask each group to think of a challenge the class faces that is small and specific, that affects everyone in the class, and that is a shared responsibility. Find a way to describe the challenge without blaming anyone or assuming a particular solution.

This problem or challenge can focus on something in the classroom or school (e.g., "The reference book collection is always out of order"), or it can relate to your course content.

Step 2

Clarify the problem — Have groups each discuss how to get clear on how they define the problem or challenge. Ask them each to restate it from their unique perspectives. Insist that they don't get into a "blame game" or assume that they have the solution before you even start. When students believe they have a shared definition of the problem, have them write it down.

Step 3

Identify contributing factors — Then have each group brainstorm at least 10 different things that might be contributing to the problem. These can include things people do, things about the circumstances and any other issues. Have them create a list. At this point, they should evaluate or debate ideas that come up. Just write them all down.

Step 4

Select a factor to focus on — Next, have each group reach consensus on one of the potential contributors that they agree is both (a) a meaningful contributor to the problem and (b) something they can influence or change in ways that would improve the situation. Have them write this contributing factor down with their problem statement.

Part 2: Coming Up with Workable Responses to the Problem

Step 5

Generate possible solutions — Have students stay (or return to) their small groups. Give students each 2-3 large sticky notes or half-sheets of paper. Have students work alone and write down 2-3 ideas of ways the class could tackle the problem — one idea on each sticky note or half-sheet. (Explain that having each person work alone on this part ensures that everyone has a chance to contribute ideas.)

Step 6

Sort ideas — Next, have students go around their small group with each person stating one of their ideas, and then placing it on the table. (The goal is for each person to share equally.) Students should not spend time describing their idea — just say a sentence about it. Other students may ask for clarification, but they should not debate the ideas yet.

After one person has shared an idea, have someone else add an idea. If it's similar to the first, they can place it near the first. If it is different, they should place it separately. Continue with students each adding one idea at a time until all the ideas are literally and figuratively "on the table." Then spend time seeing if more clusters of ideas form, hopefully ended up with 3-5 distinct ideas.

Step 7

Evaluate ideas — Have each small group work together to identify which ideas seem to have the best chance of making a difference. Combine them and refine them. Think of the pros and cons, including how likely it is that each student will actually be able to do it and stick with it. Highlight ideas that involve everyone and that everyone believes can work.

Remind students that the goal isn't to "get your way," but to come up with a shared solution that everyone is confident will make a difference.

Step 8

Select something to try — Work together to pick one or two things the group could do together (or that each person will do). Talk about how they would get started, and how they would hold each other accountable to follow through.

Debrief the exercise. Talk with students about what they learned in the process:

- Which steps were new to them, if any?
- Which were easiest and hardest?
- Which ones helped them work together the best?
- How might they do it differently the next time?
- How might they use these steps in other parts of their lives?

Step 9

Try it, evaluate and refine — Highlight that they will want to experiment to see if their solution really could make a difference. That involves trying it to see what happens. Then check in with each other to see how it's going. Adjust, if needed. You can even go back to your longer list of ideas to try something else. If you're still stuck, have another session to come up with more ideas.