

Inside the Collaborative Classroom: The Core Principles

**In the Collaborative Classroom, we believe that
how we teach matters as much as what we teach
and we use research to inform our practice.**

The Four Principles of the Collaborative Classroom:

The social and academic curriculum are interdependent and integrated.

Teachers in Collaborative Classrooms integrate social development into the fabric of their work in the classroom. The very success of our instruction hinges on students being able to work together and push each other's thinking. Research tells us that social and emotional competencies not only prepare students to be productive contributors to learning experiences, but that they also increase students' capacity to learn (Durlak et al., 2011). Yoder (2014) suggests that teachers should help students understand the ways that their emotions influence their classroom interactions. Students must explicitly learn social and emotional competencies to interact with others in ways that foster meaningful learning (Jones and Bouffard, 2012) and develop a sense of connectedness. When students develop these skills, they are more capable of seeking help when needed, managing their own emotions, and problem solving in difficult situations (Romasz, Kantor, and Elias, 2004).

Teachers must also incorporate authentic ways for learners to collaborate in order to deepen learning and promote intelligent discourse (Elias, 2004). Prior to doing so, however, teachers must ensure that students are equipped with the social skill sets needed to support classroom discourse. Students must be able to extend their own thinking and expand on the thinking of their peers. In addition to having the skills necessary to hold a substantive discussion, students must have enough content knowledge to build upon the thinking of others. This highlights how the academic and social curriculum are inextricably linked.

Fostering caring relationships and building inclusive and safe environments are foundational practices for both the student and adult learning community. A

Collaborative Classroom is a safe place where caring relationships support learning, risk taking, and the development of a child's authentic self. Research and experience have informed us that it is crucial to actively create a caring, inclusive community

(Ainsworth, 1964, 1967; Bowlby, 1969; Deci and Ryan, 1991). Strong social bonds help children to develop a sense of self-worth and a readiness to learn. Further, we know that when students feel a “sense of connectedness” to their school, they perform better academically, are more motivated to achieve, and exhibit helpful behaviors toward others (Resnick et al., 1997; Schapps et al., 2004). Fostering caring relationships helps students feel connected and cared for in their classrooms and schools.

We also believe that what is true for students is also true for adults. Building the adult learning community is an essential building block of a healthy school. Adult learners thrive on collaborative and constructivist approaches to professional growth. Teacher practice is extended as a result of shared vision and purpose, collaboration, and reflection.

As members of professional learning communities, teachers read and discuss professional literature regularly. They continuously monitor what is and is not working in their classrooms and make adjustments accordingly. Teachers use principles of lesson study to collaboratively plan, observe, reflect on, and improve instruction. They seek opportunities to expand their professional networks and engage in collegial conversations with others about their practice. Teachers in this community exhibit a growth mindset through their desire to learn and embrace challenges. They persist in the face of setbacks and learn from feedback and reflection.

Classroom learning experiences should be built around students’ constructing knowledge and engaging in action.

Collaborative Classrooms are active, engaging places where instruction centers on student thinking. Collaborative Classroom teachers are skilled facilitators who use evidence-based practices to support student development. Lessons in these classrooms provide rich opportunities for students to work together, grow ideas, revise their thinking, and construct meaning.

Lessons in the Collaborative Classroom usually begin with students constructing knowledge. A lesson might start with students working on a shared problem, analyzing a piece of text, or drafting an idea. Then, once the students have worked and

struggled for a bit, the teacher might model strategies, or share alternative ways of thinking. This is the reverse of the usual paradigm in classrooms where lessons begin with the teacher modeling and doing the thinking before the students have had a chance to struggle with the problem and construct knowledge first.

Teachers in the Collaborative Classroom also recognize that in order for this rigorous learning to take place, students must be engaged and motivated. Schools can't make students learn. We can only establish the appropriate conditions for the learning to occur. In the end, students have to do the work, and in order to do the work, they have to have experiences that are motivating and engaging.

Honoring and building on students' intrinsic motivation leads to engagement and achievement.

In every learning context, students make choices about how they will engage and what they will learn. The impact of students' intrinsic motivation must not be understated, and this basic notion should be at the center of every lesson and learning experience. Students have a natural desire to learn and grow that can be nourished by attending to their curiosity and interests. When students are personally invested in an activity or topic, they will direct their engagement toward learning, which results in higher performance (Renninger, Hidi, and Krapp, 1992).

The goals that students bring to the classroom have a strong influence on their motivation and affect in the classroom (Thrash and Elliott, 2001). Students who are focused on learning goals with a growth mindset believe that their abilities, talents, and intelligence can be nurtured with hard work and effort. They are therefore more likely to use errors to improve performance, be satisfied when investing effort and improving, seek out challenges, and use strategies that promote deep learning (Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan, and Midgley, 2002; Pintrich, 2000).

Adults in the learning community should also demonstrate a growth mindset through a belief that every student can and will succeed. Research suggests that teachers who hold such process-oriented beliefs in the classroom are more likely to promote

positive student attitudes such as high self-concept and self-efficacy (Kaplan and Maehr, 2002). Teachers can also support students' intrinsic needs for competence and autonomy in the classroom by helping students set achievable goals. When students know what they are working toward and how to monitor their progress toward meeting their goals, they are more invested in the learning process (Carr, Borkowski, and Maxwell, 1991; Covington, 1987).