

Encouraging collaboration among educators

Home / 2016 / May / Innovative Learning Environments / Encouraging collaboration among educators



Before education, I was employed in the wholesale industry. As part of a small team, I played my part in ensuring customers — retailers in this case — were achieving the best they possibly could with our product. I wasn't, however, on my own. I wasn't allocated a certain number of customers who I was responsible for from start to finish. What did happen is each of my colleagues played their particular role, be that order processing, marketing, sales etc. Each of these roles came together to create the overall customer experience and business functionally. We couldn't have operated without one of them, and one of them could not have operated on their own. We worked collaboratively with one another.

Fast forward to my introduction to Education. A world where it seemed like my constant communication and contact with colleagues was drastically reduced, and all of a sudden, it was required that I perform all the roles needed to ensure the customers — students in this case — achieved the best they possibly could with our product: education.

I have since, however, found joy in developing my collaborative practice more and more to a point where I feel like all those wonderful things I missed from business were back. I have had the pleasure along the way of meeting some wonderfully brilliant educators who possess incredibly high-level collaborative skills. These individuals don't see themselves as individuals alone, but rather, a vital part of a high-functioning supportive team.

So, what changed for me? How did I begin to collaborate as an educator?

This was brought about by a shift in school layout and team makeup. As a school, we shifted from single-cell classrooms to Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs). As a group of individuals, we very quickly saw the need to become a team, to work as one. While it was, at times, a tough and rocky journey, the benefits have ensured that I would now never wish to go back to functioning on my own. The collegial support, sharing of workloads, differing strengths and interests, ability to learn from one another, and the increased support for learners are benefits that provide support for staff and learners alike.

“Teachers who work together collectively, collaboratively to understand their impact are probably the single most important factor in this business” — *John Hattie (2013)*

We cannot assume, however, that all educators are eager to share their practice in such a way. To some, the idea of collaboration can be quite scary. It can be seen as a loss of autonomy, a pressure to have others view and critique your work. More meetings, and an increased workload.

So, how might we ignite this positive mind shift into collegial collaboration? Here are a few suggestions:

- Ask educators to challenge their own and each other's thinking.
- Propose ‘why’ and ‘what other way’ questions.
- Draw out what is challenging about operating alone, and find ways to ease these challenges using colleague support.
- Identify the barriers, and seek out solutions to these.
- Find a starting point that works for your educators.
- Explore the positives and benefits of collaboration.
- Discuss successful collaborative environments: other schools and businesses.
- Build positive staff relationships, get to know each other, spend time together.
- Ask yourself how collaborative am I myself?

It is an exciting time to be in education, and a pertinent time to start making these changes that can prove so valuable to what we are all so passionate about. So, what steps will you take today to improve your own and others collaborative capacity.



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[Kate Friedwald](#) is a Future Focused Education Facilitator for CORE Education. Kate was an early adaptor to innovative learning environment concepts. Seeing the positive impact it had on students, Kate then collaborated as part of a team to create such an environment across the entire school. Kate also has a passion for e-learning. She designed, piloted, and implemented a BYOD initiative for a mid-size school and has been sort after for her skills in this area.