

Best Practices for Collaboration

School-wide improvements in student learning accrue in schools whose work cultures are collaborative. Yet, the historical underpinnings of North American schools have created a work environment in which isolated teachers, without expectations or training for rigorous collaborative work, toil alone in their classrooms valiantly trying to make a difference in the lives of the students they serve. These cultural norms of autonomy, individualism and teaching as private practice are increasingly not resilient enough or sufficient enough to face up to current conditions and the needs of today's students.

The growing body of work on the power of collaborative adult professional cultures in schools offers a positive and productive means for organizing the work of on-going school improvement. In such cultures, professionals learn to talk about the hard-to-talk-about details of learning, teaching, assessment and the cumulative effects of their work with students. Louis, K. S. (1996) "Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools." *American Educational Research Journal*.

Shares a collective responsibility for student success	“When teachers operate in professional communities and take collective responsibility for student learning they produce school-wide gains in academic achievement.” (Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996)
Selects team members/ Decision Making Cycle	Based on the school’s list of categorized student needs, individual teachers target an area of focus. Groups of 3-5 people, who share a common area of focus, are formed and they develop an Action Plan. (Murphy and Lick, 2005)
Transforms classroom practices	"In collaborative working environments, teachers have the potential to create the collective capacity for initiating and sustaining ongoing improvement in their professional practice so each student they serve can receive the highest quality of education possible." (Pugach , 2002)
Develops trust	“Assume that conflict and disagreements are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change. Any collective change attempt will necessarily involve conflict.” (Fullan, 1999)
Challenges attitudes and beliefs	“While some schools are content to lie at anchor and accept things as they are, and other schools simply drift from fad to fad, the members of a learning community will stay the course. They will recognize that they must overcome their history and respond to future problems that they could not possibly anticipate. Yet, they will set forth because, like Oliver Wendell Homs, they will have concluded that “what lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are insignificant compare to what lies within us.” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998)
Develops efficacy	“Successful people accept responsibility for their lives. They are self-motivated; above all else, they have a sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. They believe that they can achieve their goals and improve their situations through their own efforts, even when presented with obstacles or personal difficulties. Instead, they persist in their efforts (Sternberg, 1996). What is true of individuals is also true of organizations. No factor is more significant in a school’s change process, according to Sagor (1997), than the faculty’s sense of self-efficacy. (DuFour, 1998)
Inspires action	“The synergy of a group is the combined cooperative action in the group that generates additional energy beyond that consumed by the group and produces a total outcome beyond what could be obtained by the individual members. In a truly synergistic group, people energize and inspire each other, and the diversity of ideas and openness to them provide the basis for new creative ideas and approaches.” (Murphy and Lick, 2005)
Uses protocols	“Purposeful conversations require structure. Groups tend to avoid hard-to-talk-about topics when they lack protocols for structuring data-driven dialogue and discussion. External structures maximize efficient use of time and increase safety for individual group members. (Wellman, 2003)
Reflects on the work/record keeping	“Productive groups learn from experience by setting goals for themselves, monitoring their performance and reflecting on their practice. Experience by itself is not a reliable teacher. By focusing only on the tasks at hand, groups may complete that task but do not expand their capacities for doing harder or more sophisticated work.” (Wellman, 2004)
Shared Leadership	All members are equally responsible for the success of the group by sharing responsibility for resources and for keeping the group moving toward its intended results. This sense of joint responsibility for the work of the group builds interdependence within the group. When every group member feels equally responsible for the success of the group, there is a higher level of commitment. (Murphy, 2001)