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The Power of Teacher Collaboration



By [Lily Jones](#) | July 18, 2014 12:20 pm



Teaching is simultaneously one of the hardest and one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. We often say that students make it worth it, but there's something else that can make or break your happiness as a teacher: your colleagues.

In this article, "[Research Shows Teacher Collaboration Helps Raise Student Achievement](#)," researcher Carrie Leana writes about the missing link in school reform: teacher collaboration. In her study of over 1,000 4th and 5th grade teachers in New York City, Leana found that, "students showed higher gains in math achievement when their teachers reported frequent conversations with their peers that centered on math, and when there was a feeling of trust or closeness among teachers."

Collaboration begins with finding time to connect with colleagues, to share thoughts, and provide support. Here are 3 tips for successful collaboration:

1. Build Relationships: Teaching is emotionally draining, and the best colleagues can be there for you in all types of situations. A student erupted in anger? Go next door at lunch time and get a hug. A student said a wildly funny thing in the middle of class? Pop your head into a colleague's classroom and let your laughter loose.

Remember to ask your colleagues to share their trials and triumphs with you, too. Sometimes just asking fellow teachers how their day is going opens up the doors for productive and bonding conversations.

The relationships you build with colleagues aren't just good for your mental well being; they're also the foundation of collaboration that can result in increased student achievement. Just like building relationships with students lays the groundwork for academic success, building relationships with colleagues lays the groundwork for effective collaboration.

2. Find Time to Collaborate: Shared planning time allows teachers to collaborate during the school day. With shared planning time, teachers are able to make strides in planning rigorous and appropriate lessons for their students.

Ideally, your school provides you time within the school day to collaborate with colleagues. If this is not possible, consider lobbying to use some of your school's professional development time for grade level or department teams.

Consider ways that you can collaborate both in and outside school. Sneak a few minutes before or after school to check in with colleagues. Think about collaborating virtually using Google Docs, Skype, or email.

Watch these videos to see examples of collaborative teams in action:

[Teaching as a Team Sport](#) (Video Playlist)

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About This Author

Lily Jones taught K/1 for seven years in Northern California. She has experience as a curriculum developer, instructional coach, teacher trainer, and is also a contributing writer for Teaching Channel.

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3. Share Responsibility: The best teacher teams complement each other. Share the responsibility for planning by dividing tasks based on your strengths and interests. When deciding how to share responsibility, consider these questions:

- What do I enjoy planning? What does my colleague enjoy planning?
- How much time do we have?
- What makes sense to plan together? What could we plan separately?
- How can we share our plans and get feedback from each other?

Successful collaborations happen when teachers work together to share the workload instead of doubling their efforts. From the delegation of tasks, teachers are also able to learn more from each other as they come back together to review and assemble their separate assignments into a cohesive lesson plan.

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Collaboration, Common Core | 2 comments

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Daniel R. Venables Aug 19, 2016 6:27am

#3 is a tricky one. While sharing the responsibility is essential, having teachers perform different pieces of a task and then meeting back to quilt them together is not collaboration. And even though the intent might be to discuss each person's contribution in a collaborative way, in most cases it doesn't really work that way. People accept each piece without much discussion and present theirs in turn.



anuesca baly May 1, 2016 9:31am

Very interesting.



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