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Foundations of Collaboration

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The use of collaboration in learning and decision-making is increasingly popular. Advocates present these processes as friendly, supportive, motivational and achievement-oriented (Slavin, 1989-90; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). However, a positive group dynamic thrives only if those participating have at least one common goal, share explicitly expectations of group participation and performance, and hold the values necessary for collaboration.

One goal of all collaborators is to achieve together. Learners must know why they are working together as they reach for new knowledge and decision-makers as they work through disagreements. The knowledge that together they can accomplish that which cannot be done alone must be frequently reinforced (Avery, Auvine, Striebel, & Weiss, 1981). Effective groups have one common attribute—knowing the expectations for group participation and performance. Those using collaboration must be explicit about norms, rules, disagreements, inclusiveness, time, and output. Essential to the success of novice collaborators is knowledge of the values and framework that create the collaborative structure, process, and climate.

Collaboration simultaneously emphasizes community and attentiveness to the individual as a member of the group. This focus requires valuing that which contributes to group function and participating in ways supportive of the collaborative process. Successful collaborations occur among those who understand and

work well in what is a value-laden, socio-political process.
The complexity of collaboration is the reason many employers seek graduates who are practiced in group work. They want persons attuned to collaborative values and comfortable in building and supporting the frameworks of collaboration. Both businesses and institutions of higher education can utilize collaboration as they acculturate individuals into communities that work for improvement. This essay provides a basic framework for collaboration.

Values for Collaboration Collaboration is grounded in a specific set of values. These values are indispensable, and participants who do not embrace them derail collaborative learning and decision-making. Consequently, a teacher or leader must be confident that all share the values required for participation. The common values are as follows.

Community: The individual exists as a group member and development occurs through socialization. Collective knowledge and experience is a synthesized reflection of the previous experience of group members, catalyzed by their interactions. All members have equal access to power; and accordingly leadership may, and can be expected to, shift as the process unfolds.

Search for knowledge and truth: We learn and find truth by combining what we know with what others know. This is the basis for the evolution of ideas and collaborative learning. The quest for knowledge is dependent on group attitudes and behaviors, which may both expand and constrain what evolves (Bruffee, 1993).

Unity: Effective interdependence is achieved through the belief that the group can identify and promote a common good. Unity is maintained because discord and disagreement are operationally tolerated and considered beneficial to group process and goals.

Respect: All in the group belong and are worthy. Fostering this in the group process requires linguistic flexibility, attentiveness to interdependence, gentleness, and love of others. When members know others will respect them, it is likely trust will develop. Thus, respect is essential to building trust among group members who venture to contribute their perspectives.

Effective collaboration, including deliberation for consensus, requires us to consistently hold and express these values. The burden and reward of this requirement becomes readily apparent when the tone of discussion becomes emotional.

A Framework for Collaboration Collaborative pedagogy allows various approaches to group work. Consequently, the group is responsible for creating what is needed for them to collaborate. Since collaborators must evolve the structure, processes, and climate necessary to their success, a simple framework for exploring collaboration is provided below.

Through collaboration, knowledge is socially constructed and participants become socialized to the group linguistics, values and issues (Bruffee, 1993; Dewey, 1909; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Whipple, 1987). Overall, collaboration is based on a common goal, synthesis of ideas, equal access to power, group ownership of ideas, mutual trust, respect for others, mutual responsibility, unity, and attention to process. The approaches to collaboration range from informal to formal. Informal collaboration requires participants to design the collaborative process, negotiate the rules of collaborating, meet deadlines, and be accountable. Formal collaboration, such as consensus decision-making, requires groups to follow defined procedures. For example, achieving consensus means everyone found the decision acceptable enough to support the group in choosing it and that the decision did not totally violate any individual's value system (Avery, Auvine, Streibel and Weiss, 1981). It does not mean everyone was satisfied.

Both informal and formal collaborators can create an environment conducive to group work if they focus on the following:.

Desired climate: Participants exhibit the values necessary to collaboration.

Purposeful groupings: Participants either self-select or are assigned to a heterogeneous group.

Goal continuity: At least one goal unites the group.

Leadership: Equal access to power is achieved through shifting leadership. Member roles: A facilitator, time keeper, devil's advocate, and encourager attend to group process (Avery, Auvine, Streibel, & Weiss, 1981).

Rules of interaction: The group designs rules necessary to support group interaction and productivity.

Meaningful discussions: Participants have purpose, communicate to test and tune ideas, make forward progress, and achieve goals.

Decisions: Techniques are used to manage participation, disagreement, and idea development.

Time: There is a common understanding of the behaviors expected when there are time constraints.

Implementation: The group takes action on decisions.

Evaluation: The group assesses both process and output.

Failure to effectively use collaboration may indicate that the players do not hold the necessary values or are not proficient at the process or that the methods are not yet fully developed. Attentiveness to why collaborations fall short of our expectations is necessary for us to develop ourselves and the process.

Ideologies Embracing Collaboration Implementing a collaborative pedagogy is impacted by the relationship of collaboration to ideologies. A facilitator must anticipate dogmatic support of, or resistance to, requiring collaboration of students or of those led. For example, the Quaker dogma, in part, includes unity of judgment (consensus) (Jones, 1965) and along with other religions advocates the use of collaborative skills, such as critical thinking, self-discipline for the good of the group, and constant definition of self in relation to others. This process may be acceptable to some but alien to others.

Ready participation may be expected from those who define learning as a social process. The ideology advocated in the *Theory of Education* (Dewey, 1943), Constructivist Psychology Theory

(Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998), and Cooperative Learning Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1983), is rooted in the assumption of the social construction of knowledge, which correlatively assumes that students bring ideas and experiences to learning situations that advance and enrich the understanding of others. Success in learning this way is achieved by those who have the authority to share their ideas and experiences. Those who feel unready will shift the leadership of learning to (a) person(s) believed knowledgeable and experienced.

Those who integrate easily into collaborative communities have a socio-political ideology of shared governance, equal power, and mutual respect. Among those with this egalitarian ideology are feminists and environmentalists who support collaboration and consensus to create a harmonious and balanced world (Sturgeon, 1997; Wheeler & Chinn, 1991). This is, however, not the only goal of feminism or environmentalism, and it is the other facets of those movements that cause some to wonder if a specific socio-political ideology is required of collaborators.

Collaborating is held by some, not all, as an ideal, and we should not be surprised by questions or resistance. Both the pedagogy and the ideological roots of collaboration run contrary to the American ideology of self-sufficiency, independence, privacy, upward mobility, and individual material reward.

Summary Collaboration builds knowledge of and experience with appropriate group interaction and productivity. If others do not act as we expect, we should consider some reasons for their actions. Do all know why the group is together? Does the group focus, and re-focus, on its common goal(s) as diverse opinions are heard and incorporated? Is there appreciation for the member who may share many of our values, but not our ideology or worldview? Are some working without knowledge of collaborative values or processes? If we expect collaboration, we must understand and work to support its individual and group requirements.

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