

Collaborative Professionalism

Improved professional learning is the goal of most mentoring and coaching initiatives. With the quality and the abilities of teachers commonly cited as the most important factor in student achievement and educational improvement (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hattie, 2012; Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Strong, 2011), educational researchers have begun to turn their attention to better understanding the key characteristics of effective professional learning. A recent *Learning Forward* study by Campbell et al, (2016) called the *State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* highlights 3 key components: quality content, learning design and implementation, and support and sustainability. As noted in the summary chart below, collaborative learning experiences “are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools and wider professional networks.”

Table 1:
Features of Professional Learning and Key Findings from *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study

Key Components and Features of Effective Professional Learning Identified in Review of Research Literature		Key Findings from Study of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada
Quality Content	Evidence-informed	Evidence, inquiry, and professional judgement are informing professional learning policies and practices
	Subject-specific and pedagogical content knowledge	The priority area identified by teachers for developing their knowledge and practices is how to support diverse learners' needs
	A focus on student outcomes	A focus on a broad range of students' and professionals' learning outcomes is important
	A balance of teacher voice and system coherence	The appropriate balance of system-directed and self-directed professional development for teachers is complex and contested
Learning Design and Implementation	Active and variable learning	There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to professional learning; teachers are engaging in multiple opportunities for professional learning and inquiry with differentiation for their professional needs
	Collaborative learning experiences	Collaborative learning experiences are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools and wider professional networks
	Job-embedded learning	Teachers value professional learning that is relevant and practical for their work; “job-embedded” should not mean school-based exclusively as opportunities to engage with external colleagues and learning opportunities matter also
Support and Sustainability	Ongoing in duration	Time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators' work lives requires attention
	Resources	Inequitable variations in access to funding for teachers' self-selected professional development are problematic
	Supportive and engaged leadership	System and school leaders have important roles in supporting professional learning for teachers and for themselves

Collaboration among professionals have been gaining serious traction within schools and other work contexts since the late 1980s and early 1990s with researchers seeing its potential as an alternative to individualism and isolation (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b). Large scale studies examining its role in education have also confirmed professional collaboration linked to increased teacher effectiveness (e.g., OECD, 2014). However, as professionals in various contexts, we can likely attest to the fact that not all collaboration is equally effective- nor does it always lead to improved professional practice.

How can we make professional collaboration more effective? What role does mentoring and coaching play in improving professional learning?

These are questions that guide how I explore mentoring and coaching in professional contexts. I find the concept of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) a useful framework to better understand how mentoring and coaching can be used as an effective collaborative approach for professional learning.

So....what is collaborative professionalism? This is outlined in greater detail in the Collaborative Professionalism book (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), but this is a great article found here: [Collaborative Professionalism \(Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018\)](#)

Here is how one of the authors, Dr. Andrew Hargreaves, defines the term:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BZCPnw8rGQ&feature=youtu.be>

For Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018b), collaborative professionalism requires “better tools and deeper trust, clearer structures and stronger cultures, expertise and enthusiasm, knowing what to do and how to be with each other- both solidity and solidarity.” The authors found effective collaborative professional learning had these fundamental features: rigour, dialogue, competency, and open and honest feedback. As a researcher examining effective mentoring and coaching fellowships, I would also add the importance of collaborative and respectful relationships based on trust, empathic listening, safety, mutual respect, curiosity, and confidentiality.

I also find this brief video useful in outlining things to consider when starting:

<https://youtu.be/G2L6c5FJFDI>

Peter DeWitt also offers a great blog post to round out this discussion found [here](#).

Heeding Campbell et al's (Learning Forward, 2016) call that “time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators’ work lives requires attention” (p.12), the lens of collaborative professionalism is a great framework to examine the potential power of mentoring and coaching to enhance professional learning and growth.

References

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