Curriculum research: Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018)

Hargreaves, A. and O’Connor, M.T. (2018). [Solidarity with solidity: The case for collaborative professionalism. Phi Delta Kappan](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0031721718797116), 100 (1), p 20-24.

Hargreaves and O’Connor question how we can maximise the effectiveness of teacher collaboration whilst minimizing the flaws.

Overall, the findings outlining the history of research into professional collaboration in schools are positive, leading to:

* superior results in student achievement (Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989)
* links between professional collaboration and teacher effectiveness (Day et al., 2007;Leana, 2011)
* teacher motivation and retention (OECD, 2014 and Papay and Kraft, 2017)

Not all forms of collaboration are necessarily effective particularly if just sharing stories (Little, 1990) or mandated from above, ‘contrived collegiality’ (Hargreaves and Dawe (1990).

**How do schools ensure professional collaboration will suit their school’s culture and context?**

Collaborative professionalism is perceived as working together, with rigor, expertise, dialogue and open and honest feedback (Little, 1990). The authors argue that the answer is focussing on both “…the solidarity of the group and the solidity or substance of its ideas or methods” (p 21).

The authors outline five projects they have studied and contributed to. A common theme in each of these studies is that solidarity and solidity takes time to develop and will not lead to overnight success. The closest study to the use of networks for the NSW Department of Education is the Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement (NW RISE) network which consists of over 30 rural and remote schools. The focus has been on convening ‘job-alike’ groups, for example, kindergarten or English teachers to meet and plan new curriculum and instructional activities aimed at increasing student learning and engagement. Between meetings, teachers continue to meet online and report on their progress. Teachers enjoyed the solidarity or working with peers with the same frustrations and goals, but also the solidity involved in the collaboration such as being challenged by new ideas and insights. The advantage of this network appears to be the combination of the network design fitting the interests and needs of the teachers, but also being informed by research.

The authors conclude that sustainable improvement can be developed through a solid grounding in research, solidarity amongst colleagues and well-designed tools and protocols.

**Discussion and self-reflection questions**

1. Weak forms of collaboration, such as only sharing stories or gripes in contrast to strong collaboration where colleagues jointly seek to analyse and solve significant problems, can be ineffective. In addition, teachers are often critical of ‘contrived’ collaboration when decisions have already been made.

Reflect on a school or non-school situation where professional collaboration was either effective or ineffective. How could what you have learnt from this be applied so that collaborative professionalism ultimately thrives in your network?

1. The research advocates the importance of professional relationships in networks that are free from threat, and the need for the network to be informed by research into professional collaboration in order for educational problems to be jointly identified and solved.

As a network leader how would you outline the importance of these elements and how they would be developed at your first meeting?