

Collaborative learning

Collaboration: chances and challenges

As the concepts of Lifewide Learning and Lifelong Learning highlight, learning happens inside and outside of school. Indeed learning is not just about acquiring knowledge according to the official curricula! Every participative process in which people get in contact with new subjects is – at least potentially – a learning process.

Check if you are already well prepared for creating great collaborative projects and otherwise learn what you need!

Estimated time

1h 40'

If you go through this unit, you will

- reflect about the chances and challenges of collaboration and develop strategies how to foster the chances while overcoming the challenges

Learning goals

- increase your tool kit for fostering collaboration also off-line

Warm-up

Visualize the young people you work with collaborating with each other. What do you think they could gain and what challenges could they face?

Take some paper snippets (possibly of two different colours) and a pen each. You have 90 seconds to write down all chances that come to your mind. Write a key-word on every snippet which you speak out loud when it comes to your mind. If you have snippets of two colours, use only one of them, in the next round you will use the other colour.

Done? Then put them aside and put your timer on 90 seconds again and take the other snippets: this time it is about the challenges that the teams you have in mind could face.

Done? Then let's go back to the chances: look at them together, cluster them and see if you recognize different dimensions. When you are done, do the same with the challenges.

What do you see? **Does anything surprise you?** Discuss with your buddy. In case you get new ideas while talking, write them down and insert them in your conceptual map.

Learn

Phases of a learning process and related goals:

- 1. Create the right atmosphere:** time to get to know each other; strengthen group feeling; loosen up
- 2. Give orientation:** time to get into the topic/sensitise for its relevance; share the agenda/goals
- 3. Activate knowledge:** time to check what they know already; repeat the contents on which you are going to build
- 4. Give access to knowledge:** time to absorb knowledge; create knowledge
- 5. Let's elaborate knowledge:** time to use what you learned, to check its quality, to evaluate its relevance; to build new knowledge upon it
- 6. Check the process and the results:** time to question knowledge, to reflect on the learning process, to exchange feedback

For every phase you can mix following social forms: individual work, work with others (buddy or in a group), direct instruction with/without interactive elements.

Draw a table and write in the left column the 6 phases. Considering the different goals related to each of them, think together of methods you could use to reach them, while fostering collaboration. You can write down methods you know and/or invent new ones.

This information could stimulate your memory and imagination: even if we generally speak of collaboration, some make a **distinction between collaboration and cooperation**. Collaboration happens when team-members work together on the tasks they have in order to reach their goal. Cooperation happens when each team-member takes on a different task in order to reach a common goal in a synergetic way.

Transfer

If you want your group to process and retain information (Phase 4) while building their communication skills, the cooperative method "jigsaw" is excellent. Give each participant different material to read, watch, listen to, analyse... Then ask them to exchange their information in small groups. All groups will then present their knowledge to everyone. In this process, participants first learn about a small part of a topic in detail, and while presenting this to others in a small group, they deepen their understanding on the subject. When participants have to make a presentation in a small group, they learn how to sort, select, and highlight information whereby they strengthen their understanding of the subject as well. With some creativity, jigsaw can be used in any age group, on any subject and context.

If you want them to develop critical thinking, to use the knowledge they have and to build up new knowledge (Phase 5) you could try out the **World Café!** At different tables there are different questions. On each table is a big sheet of paper (flipchart) and markers. One person is the host, stays at the same table and collects the results of every discussion round, while the others mix at the other tables at every round.

Create

Now think of a learning process which must be developed in the **digital context**. Active participation online is even more important than offline, as it is more difficult to keep concentration.

Considering that people participate when they feel comfortable, it is important to foster trust among the participants, that means that Phase 1 is particularly important. Use the same table and develop it further considering methods and tools which foster collaboration online.

Just a small tip for your online sessions: **Cameras on** are a must as on the one hand people distrust the ones who have it off (except if they've explained why), on the other hand the non-visible ones are at high risk to be forgotten and therefore ignored.

Reflection

Plan your next activity, if you want you can make a plan using a table in which you have, starting from the left column the **total time** (e.g. 10'; 35'; 1h 5'), the **time you need for every phase** (e.g. 10'; 15'; 30'); the **specific goal you pursue**; the **contents**; the **method**; the **material you need** (e.g. flipchart, markers).

Show the plan to each other and decide when you will meet to talk about how it has worked out: what was great? What was challenging? What could/should you do differently next time?