

Creating a School

Five Concepts for School Design

- Cooperation
- Community
- Collaboration
- Courage
- Caring

Cooperation

*“If you want to be incrementally better: Be competitive.
If you want to be exponentially better: Be cooperative.”* – Author Unknown

Cooperation – the act of people working together to accomplish a common end – is as old as humanity. Modern humans are social creatures that evolved in cooperative groups; the propensity to cooperate with one another is bred into our DNA. *Homo sapiens'* success as a species can be attributed in part to our ability and proclivity to live in cooperative groups. This instinct to work together has enabled us to achieve feats far greater than any individual could accomplish alone. For most of human history, cooperation took the form of small bands of individuals living, hunting, gathering, and migrating together.

At the dawn of modern civilization around 10,000 years ago, cooperation took on a more complex meaning. Small bands and tribes began settling and grew into cities, which developed into stratified metropolises, then states. At the beginning of settled civilization, concepts of cooperation became codified in the first legal systems and philosophers began to articulate the meaning of this essential human trait.

Plato, a founding father of Western philosophy, described human beings as starting out in life naturally cooperative with one another. Modern psychology bears this out showing that toddlers have a strong tendency to cooperate with one another. Plato also championed a political philosophy based on the cooperation of conflicting interests in society. The 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes had a distinctly contrary view of cooperation; in his opinion, humans are naturally oriented to conflict and competition and must be compelled by a higher authority to cooperate. While both philosophers may disagree as to the inherent tendency in humans to cooperate, both acknowledge the importance of cooperation for a functional society.

Cooperative learning, broadly defined, is active education in which students work in small groups to achieve common tasks. Scholars report many advantages to cooperative learning over individual learning. For example, some benefits to cooperative learning include academic improvement, positive race relations, and increased social development.[1] Brady & Tsay found that students who fully participated in cooperative learning environments had a higher likelihood of increasing their scores at the end of the course.[2] The theory and practice of human cooperation is investigated by a variety of fields:

- 1) Anthropology: Focus on human evolution, social norms, group formation and complexity, kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and history.
- 2) Economics: Focus on cooperatives, competition vs. cooperation, game theory, rational choice theory, and social norms.
- 3) Mathematics: Focus on game theory, Prisoner's Dilemma.

- 4) Neuroscience: Focus on biochemistry associated with love, altruism, social connection, and stress.
- 5) Psychology: Focus on altruism, competition vs. cooperation, group dynamics, team building, and motivation to cooperate.
- 6) Sociology: Focus on social stratification, social norms and mores, conflict, competition, economics, and social movements.

Scholars have developed five basic elements of cooperative learning[3][4]:

- 1) Positive interdependence: All students must participate; each student must have a role in the group and feel responsible for the group's success.
- 2) Face-to-face promotive interaction: Students promote one another's successes and explain to one another what they've learned, helping each other complete tasks.
- 3) Individual/group accountability: Each student must demonstrate competence in assignments and is accountable for his or her individual work.
- 4) Social skills: Students must learn communication and interpersonal skills, including trust-building, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills.
- 5) Group processing: Groups must evaluate their effectiveness and determine how they can be improved. (Brown & Ciuffetelli Parker 2009 and Siltala 2010)

Example: Cooperative learning techniques can be used at all grade levels and in various subjects. The following video illustrates ways in which language teachers can use cooperative learning techniques to improve language learning. The video demonstrates how students learning a new language benefit from being able to work in groups. Small groups allow students to practice their language skills in a more natural environment. Group learning enables students to practice social skills, conversational and real-life teamwork skills, and ensures that students are accountable for their progress.

Videos: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15djwsGc4Wg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tdt-b4yMp-M> (Does 'Group work' work?)

[1]Brown, H., & Ciuffetelli, D.C. (Eds.). (2009). *Foundational methods: Understanding teaching and learning*. Toronto: Pearson Education.

[2]Tsay, M., & Brady, M. (2010). A case study of cooperative learning and communication pedagogy; Does working in teams make a difference? *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(2), 78-89.

[3]Siltala, R. (2010). *Innovativity and cooperative learning in business life and teaching*. University of Turku.

[4]Siltala, R., Suomala, J., Taatila, V. & Keskinen, S. (2007). *Cooperative Learning in Finland and in California during the innovation process*. In Andriessen D. (Eds.) (2007). *Intellectual Capital*. Haarlem: Inholland University.

Community

“The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession.” – Mark Twain

All individuals belong to some form of community; it is an intrinsic characteristic of the human species. “Community” can refer to a geographic region in which people live in common. For instance, a village, city, state, or country could all be considered communities, and all contain communities within them. Cultural communities contain individuals with shared languages, histories, and traditions.

Community can also refer to groups of people who share some particular trait like a belief system in common, but who may be geographically disparate. For example, a religious community can span political and geographic boundaries binding people from across the globe into a cohesive community with shared beliefs, customs, rituals, and histories.

Similarly, communities form in various types of groups. For example, businesses, governments, nonprofit organizations, and other groups contain communities. These organizations can also form communities made up of these entities; for example, the “international community” consists of a group of officials representing governments of the world’s countries – and peripherally industries and civil society – who meet to discuss and solve transnational problems.

With the Internet improving the ease of communication between individuals belonging to diverse cultures and geographic locations, virtual communities have sprung up around the world binding members with shared interests.

As with cooperation, community is a sprawling topic with many various fields of inquiry studying the concept. Different disciplines view community from diverse perspectives. Areas with a significant focus on community include the following:

- 1) Anthropology: Both anthropology and archaeology study human communities. Anthropology generally studies communities through ethnographic fieldwork, directly observing the communities that form in traditional societies and diverse cultures. Archaeologists often reconstruct historical social communities based on the shared material resources used by a group of people, such as pottery and architecture.
- 2) Psychology: Rather than focusing on the forms and elements of communities as anthropologists and sociologists do, psychologists focus more on how individuals perceive, understand, and feel about the communities in which they live and work. Community psychologists seek to define the “sense of community” that one feels being a part of a community. D.W. McMillan and D.M. Chavis lay out a theory of “sense of community” that includes four factors: a) membership (which requires boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging/identification, personal investment, common symbol system); b) influence by members on the group and by the group on the members; c) integration and fulfillment of needs; and d) shared emotional connection.[1]

- 3) Sociology: The study of community in sociology follows two main tracks: social capital and Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft.
- a. Social capital, at its simplest, refers to the benefits derived by members of a group from the cooperation between individuals and groups. Social capital can be built in various environments, such as civic institutions and informal groups. Although social capital is difficult to quantify, recent research suggests that increasing social capital in the form of community and social networks has a positive effect on the physical health of individuals.
 - b. Gemeinschaft, translated as “community,” and Gesellschaft, translated as “society,” distinguish between two modes of human community. Gemeinschaft more frequently refers to groups in which the individual’s will is oriented as much or more to the group as to its own self-interest. Families, kin groups, and religious communities are examples of this kind of community. Gesellschaft, by contrast, refers to communities in which the self-interest of the individual remains paramount over the interest of the group. A modern corporation is an example of a Gesellschaft type of community in which individuals generally have less loyalty to the organization and instead work for their own self-interest.

In education, place-based learning (<https://www.promiseofplace.com>) involves utilizing resources in a school’s local community to educate students. A locality’s unique history, geography, ecology, cultural resources, civic institutions, and economy can all play a role in teaching lessons in various subjects. There are many wonderful examples of community as established in innovative educational practice. What is imperative is that the students engaged in community have the ‘voice and choice’ to shape that community.

This video -- created by a team of students -- is a wonderful example of middle school students feeling connected to each other, to the learning itself, and to the community they call home. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCDsUDsryU8>

This video, created by students as well, focuses on a prairie restoration project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzzG01WEPyc> Notice the deep understanding of the science articulated by these students and the level of engagement. This is the best of place-based learning!

See how Highland Community Middle School is using place-based and project-based education to create a lasting and meaningful learning experience for students. Notice the dozens of community elders and experts vital to the learning at hand. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwUTZeYAzB4>

[1]McMillan, D.W., & Chavis, D.M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6-23.

Collaboration

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” – Helen Keller

Collaboration – literally “to work” (from Latin “laborare”) and “together” (from Latin “col-” a variant of “com-”) – is a process of two or more individuals working together on a common project: it is the practical application of the concept of cooperation.

Collaboration takes place in many spheres of modern society. Market economies rely on collaboration between various parties, from partners that run a company, to customers and businesses, to suppliers and the industries they supply, to government regulators and the entities they regulate. The history of trade, from the origins of humanity to today’s complex economies, is based on collaboration between many groups.

Governments also depend upon collaboration between various agencies and branches. In the US, the three branches of government collaborate on creating, enforcing, and interpreting laws, while many agencies collaborate to solve problems. A vivid modern example of the concept of collaboration in government is the collaboration between intelligence and national security agencies in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Collaboration can be found in a multitude of other arenas, from academia and science, to art and entertainment, to medicine and technology.

In education, collaborative learning is gaining popularity. Collaborative learning is different from traditional individual learning, in which students generally work independently and listen to lectures, by encouraging students to work closely with one another and with teachers to make learning a more social experience. The term “collaborative learning” is often used synonymously with “cooperative learning,” but some scholars distinguish between the two concepts. Whereas in cooperative learning the teacher remains a central figure in lessons, in collaborative learning the instructor empowers students by removing him or herself as an authority figure and giving more open-ended assignments. Rockwood suggests cooperative learning is more effective for foundational knowledge while collaboratively learning is more effective for higher education.[1]

A general collaborative method, which can be applied to various organizations, including businesses, agencies, and schools, includes several “rules” that maximize the effectiveness of collaboration. Professor Muneera Spence lays out seven basic guidelines for improving collaboration [2]. Below is a summary of his guidelines:

- 1) *Seek common ground: find shared values and shared personal experiences, seek out feedback, be open to differences in opinion and approaches*
- 2) *Learn about others: consider the perspectives and needs of other group members and allow for free expression*
- 3) *Critique results rather than individuals: avoid hostility and personal criticism*

- 4) *Cultivate respect: be empathic and respectful of all opinions, be confident and open to emotional communication*
- 5) *Go slow: evaluate each idea one at a time; ensure comprehension of each idea before moving on.*
- 6) *Communicate clearly: be forthright with ideas and feeling, use vocabulary that all can understand*
- 7) *Use five "Cs" of communication: clarity, completeness, conciseness, concreteness, and correctness (Spence 2006)*

Katzenbach and Smith also provide tips on how to achieve optimal collaboration in a team setting [3]:

- 1) *Small numbers of people—typically less than twelve*
- 2) *Complementary skills in team members*
- 3) *Common purposes for working*
- 4) *Specific performance goals that are commonly agreed upon*
- 5) *Shared working approaches*
- 6) *Mutual accountability amongst all members" (Katzenbach and Smith 2003)*

In these two videos notice the level of cooperation evident in an interdisciplinary learning environment. Interdisciplinary learning brings diverse content together as it simultaneously brings diverse students together. Truly generative – the interdisciplinary pedagogy, evident in these videos, brings out the best of optimal collaboration in a variety of team scenarios.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM11PGrag>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjsU1cPU2Ek>

[1] Rockwood, H. S. III (1995a). "Cooperative and collaborative learning" The national teaching & learning forum, 4 (6), 8-9 / Rockwood, H. S. III (1995b). "Cooperative and collaborative learning" The national teaching & learning forum, 5 (1), 8-10.

[2]Spence, Muneera U. "*Graphic Design: Collaborative Processes = Understanding Self and Others.*" (lecture) Art 325: Collaborative Processes. Fairbanks Hall, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. 13 Apr. 2006.

[3]Katzenbach, Jon R., and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003.

Courage

"One must develop skills that stretch capacities, that make one become more than what one is..." - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Courage is the engine of change. And change means learning, for as Csikszentmihalyi asserts above, "One must develop skills that stretch capacities."

The challenge of the task at hand is always correlated with the ability ---- the capacity ---- to meet those challenges. Balancing each – challenge and ability –is the single most important factor in a successful school. A challenge that is unachievable breeds anxiety; whereas an ability that is unchallenged will breed boredom. Courage is that yearning forward to tackle challenges and that passion unrestrained to grow the skills to tackle those challenges. There is a long litany of literate practitioners of courage that we can draw upon in this inherently challenging work of creating innovative and responsive schools.

First, a personal sharing of courage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jllHxjj36vA>

Quotes:

"Courage is the most important of all virtues, because without it we can't practice any other virtue with consistency." - Maya Angelou

Zorba came upon an old man planting an apricot seedling and asked why he, an old man, was planting a new tree. "I live as though I would never die," was his reply. "And me. I live as though I might die tomorrow," said Zorba, "which one of us is right?"
 - Nikos Kazantzakis

"The uplift of a fearless heart will help us over barriers. No one ever overcomes difficulties by going at them in a hesitant, doubtful way." - Laura Ingalls Wilde

"Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example." – Mark Twain

"Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow." - Mary Anne Radmacher

"The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving." – Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained." – Marie Curie

Caring

“In caring, the other is primary; the growth of the other is the center of my attention. In caring for the other, in helping it grow, I actualize myself. The writer grows in caring for his ideas; the teacher grows in caring for his students; the parent grows in caring for his child. Or, put differently, by using powers like trust, understanding, courage, responsibility, devotion, and honesty I grow also; and I am able to bring such powers into play because my interest is focused on the other.” – Milton Mayeroff

Learning works when caring is a daily experience appearing as incremental acts of kindness and empathy. CARING is THE umbrella value; the organizing philosophy of how members in a learning community choose to treat each other, it is the VERB that activates the Nouns (learning conditions) of

- Trust
- Understanding
- Courage
- Responsibility
- Devotion
- Honesty

The Action of Caring is defined by how you approach the learning and your students. Substantial caring is evident when questions like the following tend to pop up each day in the many dynamics of creating and sustaining a vibrant learning community.

- Authenticity: Does this matter?
- Vulnerability: Can we trust each other?
- Acceptance: Do we tolerate differences and difficulties?
- Presence: Am I paying attention?
- Usefulness: Are we all involved in an important way?

It is the incremental acts that are the biggest contributors to a caring learning place. This TED talk by a middle school teacher is a visual affirmation of caring acts.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCI_hKc76hc