Collaborating to learn
and learning to collaborate

Donald Christie
Department of Childhood and Primary Studies
and Applied Educational Research Centre
University of Strathclyde

ESCalate Annual Conference
St Martin’s College
18 May 2007
Outline

Collaborating to Learn
• Research on collaborative learning in schools
• Studies of collaboration in Teacher Education
  – E.g. peer assessment, critical partnership

Learning to Collaborate
• New models of professionalism and professional learning
  – Communities of practice
  – Multi-professional context
  – Collaborative communities of enquiry
• Implications for Teacher Education
Collaborating to Learn
Theoretical framework

- Learning construed as a social process
- Potential of social interaction as a powerful means of facilitating learning.
- Ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky, Leontiev, Engeström, Lave, Wenger and others
  - Role of differences in conceptual understanding and 'cognitive conflict'
  - Role of relative differences in expertise, and use of such differences by the more expert to scaffold the activity of the less expert until they achieve autonomy
  - All activities can be seen as consensual practices or ways of achieving particular objectives which are shared between members of a community.
Conceptual confusion or complexity?

Collaborative learning versus Cooperative Learning

Other related ideas… Partnership, peer mediation, reciprocity scaffolding,

Key mediating role of language and importance of dialogue
ScotSPRinG Project: The impact of enhanced group work in primary classrooms


*University of Strathclyde
**University of Dundee
***Formerly Strathclyde, now at Institute of Education, London

www.tlrp.org/proj/phase111/Scot_exvb.html and www.groupworkscotland.org
Background and Funding

ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme

www.tlrp.org

• Scottish Extension Project
• Linked to Phase II Project: Social Pedagogic Research into Grouping (SPRinG) Project (Maurice Galton, Peter Blatchford and Peter Kutnick)

• ScotSPRinG focused investigation on
  – P6/P7 stage, age range 10-12
  – Curriculum area: Primary Science - general and specific attainment
  – Social relationships, attitudes and self-esteem
  – Looking at composite and non-composite classes and
  – Urban and rural school contexts
Research Design

• Initial Survey
• Two-phase intervention
  – Phase 1: Social and communication skills training
  – Phase 2: Group work in science topic studies
  – Intervention sample: 24 schools/classes (+ 3 controls); 31 teachers; and c. 600 pupils in P6/P7 classes
• Classroom observations
• Pre- and post-test battery
  – General attainment measures (PIPS tests)
  – Specific attainment measures in science
  – Attitudes, social relations, self esteem measures, etc.
In-service session
Observed v. Reported Group Work

• National survey of teachers said “group work” was a common feature of classroom practice.

• However, initial observations showed in most classrooms children were unfamiliar with skills and processes of collaborative group work (children working in a group but not as a group).

• Quality of interaction and amount of collaborative dialogue significantly improved from Time 1 to Time 3.
Teacher Perceptions

Teachers rated all aspects positively:

- Value of the in-service training provision
- Quality and value of materials and resources provided
- Impact of intervention on their practice
- Impact of intervention on the children’s learning
Findings of ScotSPRinG Project

In the cognitive domain:
• Collaborative group work provides an effective framework for learning in wide range of school contexts
• Gains made attributable to the quality of collaborative dialogue in groups (explanations/propositions)
• Successful group work in is associated with tasks that emphasise children sharing, discussing, agreeing and recording.
• Successful group work is also associated with a non-directive, supporting role on the part of the teacher ("guide on the side").
More ScotSPRinG findings

In the social and affective domains:
• High quality preparation for/implementation of group work yields benefits in social relationships
• And some small but measurable effects in self-esteem

Overall conclusion:
• Good planning, preparation and implementation of collaborative group work enables it to yield socio-emotional as well as cognitive benefits
Collaboration in teacher education


- Student pairs on placement scaffolding each other’s thinking and professional reflection
- ‘Collaborating’ in critical partnership with more experienced practitioner yielded gains in professional understanding
- Establishing working relationships challenging and concerns over equity within critical partnerships
Harnessing peer learning and assessment in Initial Teacher Education

E.g.

- Collaborative group activities together with self and peer assessment improved attainment as measured by examination performance in B.Ed. Educational Studies (University of Strathclyde)

Collaboration and professional socialisation

- Professional socialisation:
  “Complex, interactive, negotiated, provisional” (Lacey, 1977, p. 22)
- Teaching still typically portrayed as essentially an individualistic process;
- Need to challenge such cultural assumptions if teaching is to become a collaborative practice

(Ávila de Lima, 2003, p. 216)

Learning to Collaborate

Requires…
• commitment,
• shared purpose,
• social and communication skills
• common tools (esp. language)
• organisation
New models of teacher professionalism

...Collaboration with, and influence on, colleagues
The Chartered Teacher should demonstrate the capacity to:

• contribute to enhancing the quality of the educational experience provided by the school and to the wider professional context of teaching

For example, by:

• acting as a source of advice to colleagues on particular aspects of teaching and learning
• contributing to school development and to strengthening its capacity for self-evaluation through analysis, sharing and dialogue with colleagues, and modelling good practice
• contributing to the school's in-service and CPD activities
• working as a leading member of a team, inside and outside the classroom, to share good practice, improve teaching and learning and develop resources for use in the school

(Standard for Chartered Teacher, Scottish Executive, 2003)
‘Reflective practitioner’

Reflection on action      Learning about practice
Talking about practice    Learning and working

A community of practice

Reflection in action      Learning in practice
Talking through practice  Learning in working

An innovation network

(David H. Hargreaves, 2007)
Extended teacher professionalism entails collaboration

• Strong drive towards multi-professional approaches in the “caring professions”
• “Full service schools” serving children, their families and their communities
• Demands collaboration
  – with other teachers
  – with other professions
  – with parents
  – with community groups, agencies and businesses
  – BUT ALSO with children and young people themselves

(See Daniels et al. Learning in and for interagency working, www.tlrp.org )
Research and enquiry as collaborative activity

Community of Enquiry
  Collaborative enquiry creates new knowledge AND new models of applied research (Cassidy, et al., 2008)

Entails collaboration
  – with other practitioners,
  – with policy makers,
  – with HEI researchers,
  – with all stakeholders, including:
  – children as co-enquirers/co-researchers
Why collaborate in research?

**Sound theoretically and ethically**
- Social learning
- Cultural capital/Social capital
- Respectful, participatory, inclusive

**Sound methodologically and pragmatically**
- Facilitates capacity building in broad sense
- Potentially more ecologically valid
- Pooling expertise increases capability within any given project

**Sound economically and politically**
- Scarce resources better used
- Policy imperative: “joined-up” research for “joined-up” policy
Collaboration – how?

Some points to consider:
• Negotiate and agree purpose/focus
• Share perspectives and assumptions
• Take time to reach consensus, but value differences
• Think about practicalities and structures for meetings and communication
• Develop trust
• Consider forms of interaction in order to facilitate genuine dialogue
• Engage with, and in, action
Implications for Teacher Education Institutions

• Engagement in new collaborative partnerships involving schools, pupils, parents, community groups, local authorities, other professions and other agencies
• Equip students to be collaborative professional enquirers and curriculum developers
• Celebrate opportunity to bring our research, our teaching and our CPD portfolios into closer alignment.
Some questions for discussion

- Is teaching usefully to be described as a collaborative professional practice?
- If we see teaching as a collaborative practice, how should we prepare our student teachers?
- In designing student learning activities, how can we ensure students work collaboratively AS a group, not merely IN a group?

donald.christie@strath.ac.uk