"Leaders who position themselves as co-learners communicate to all members of a learning community that they value learning and are willing to take risks. They acknowledge all ideas are improvable, maintain an open mind to different pedagogies that may meet the needs of all students, and welcome diversity in thinking. From this position of trust, leaders are able to create environments in which Collaborative Learning and shared leadership can occur."

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Abstract

This paper will explore international, national, regional and school data that explicitly demonstrate that if collaboration is seen as purposeful, relevant, and a valuable use of time - then classroom practice is transformed and students learn. An investment in time to collaborate connects the causal pathways for teachers that increase students' achievement. As Hart (2015) stated, collaborative work results in better learning outcomes for students. Questioning issues of practice, as co-learners, causes teachers' to reflect on changing practice that then results in increased student achievement (Sharratt, 1996). Hargreaves & Fullan (2013) concur when they write that enacting authentic collaboration at every level achieves sustained improvement in student outcomes. In this research paper, it is clear that developing a sense of collective agency and efficacy, described as co-laboring, increases students' achievement. It will be discussed how intentionally embedding thinking critically, communicating clearly, and learning to collaborate will directly and powerfully impact positively on students' achievement. We define empowering excellence as modeling collaboration that impacts teaching practices and in turn increases students' achievement. Planning for and implementing collaborative inquiry enables students to own their own improvement to become interdependent stewards of everyone's learning. The evidence that collaborative practices make a positive difference to increasing student achievement is clear and empowering in this research.

Introduction

In this paper, drawing on our recent research (Sharratt & Planche, 2016), I make the case for spending purposeful time during the school day to collaborate—co-labor—at every level of the system in order to increase all students' achievement. Six examples of hard-data impact follow.

Case One: Provincial/State Impact - Ontario, Canada

With about 5,000 schools in 72 school districts, the highest population in Canada and the highest proportion of immigrant students, the Province (State) of Ontario has jumped the improvement curve. For example, in PISA 2014, Canadian 15-year-olds ranked fifth among 44 countries—beaten only by Singapore, Japan, Korea, and four regions of China (considered one country)—on the new PISA assessment of "creative problem-solving skills." In the Pan Canadian Assessment Program 2010, Ontario was the only province above the Canadian average in reading, math, and science. High school graduation rates have increased from 68% to 82%; low-performing schools are down by 75%; 95% of students are at "competence" and students in Levels 3 and 4—the Literacy/Numeracy Top 2 Bands—increased from 54% to 70% (Dr. Mary Jean Gallagher, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Government; personal communication, June 2015).

These inspiring results didn't happen by good luck or by hoping for improvement. Instead, a collaboratively planned, comprehensive approach to improvement was carefully thought out, implemented, and monitored across the province. Interdisciplinary approaches, systems thinking, and Collaborative Inquiry into issues of practice are increasingly the norm in Ontario schools, strongly supported by the work of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, the Student Success/Learning to 18 team, and other units in the government all aligned to the core work supported by a nonpunitive, collaborative approach. Among the enabling conditions embedded was a consistent vigilance to establishing *collaborative*

professionalism, not seen anywhere across the globe in similar diverse and large educational communities.

This -improvement allows us, as practitioners in Ontario and authors of this text, to summarize the impact of collaboration on student learning in the following ways:

1. Enacting authentic collaboration at every level achieves sustained improvement in student outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).
2. Developing a sense of collective agency and efficacy, des-cribed as co-laboring, increases students' achievement.
3. Embedding thinking critically, communicating clearly, and learning to collaborate will directly and powerfully impact on students' achievement.
4. Modeling collaboration impacts teaching practices and in turn increases student achievement.
5. Planning for collaborative inquiries enables students to own their own improvement to become interdependent stewards of everyone's learning.

Case Two: System Impact - York Region District School Board, Canada

Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) write, "International evidence suggests that educational reform's progress depends on teachers' individual and collective capacity and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning. Building capacity is therefore critical. Capacity is a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning, organisational conditions and culture, and infrastructure of support. Put together, it gives individuals, groups, whole school communities and school systems the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time."

Similar beliefs about the power of teacher and leader capacity building have been foundational in the York Region District School Board (YRDSB). With school board leaders, we worked on -establishing a community focused on learning across the 200 schools in York Region from 2002 to 2012 as superintendents of curriculum and instruction. This was a collaborative effort within the whole system. As well, the district established partnerships with researchers from the Ontario

Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), with leadership and change expert Dr. Michael Fullan, and with school teams from across neighboring school districts. Our belief was, and still is, that the focus on learning together in teams, with a common purpose, increases all teachers' capacity for quality assessment and instruction. When leaders and teachers learn alongside one another like this, students benefit.

This sustained emphasis on supportive collaboration in the YRDSB has steadily improved literacy results in EQAO. Student achievement in Ontario is assessed through standards-based assessments for all children in Grades 3, 6, and 9 conducted by an independent agency, the Education and Quality Accountability Office (EQAO). For example, over 10 years from 2003 to 2014, the number of Grade 3 students in expected levels 3 and 4 (the top 2 bands) has increased in Reading 14%, and in Writing 18%. Similarly, the number of students in expected levels 3 and 4 (the top 2 bands) in Grade 6 Reading has increased 19% and in Writing 22%. Likewise, results of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), a diploma-bearing assessment, indicate that since its inception in 2002, the number of students passing has increased 19%, from 71% to an outstanding 90% in YRDSB. The work of teachers and leaders in this district has been both intentional and collaborative; it points to the importance of creating system- and school-wide cultures of Collaborative Learning that positively impact students' learning. We know that impact is tangible; for example:

1. If collaboration is seen as purposeful, relevant, and a valuable use of time, then practice is transformed and students learn.
2. An investment in time to collaborate connects the causal pathways for teachers that increase students' achievement.
3. Collaborative work results in better learning outcomes for students (Hart, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).
4. Questioning issues of practice, as co-learners, cause teachers' to reflect on changing practice and result in increased student achievement (Sharratt, 1996).

Case Three: System Impact - Parramatta Diocese, New South Wales, Australia

Parramatta Diocese is the perfect example of how system leaders influence students' achievement by being results oriented, paying attention to detail, modeling collaboration, and being "present" in the work—every day and in every way. Its three high-impact strategies for collaborative improvement are co-constructing Data Walls, co-leading Case Management Meetings, and co-conducting Learning Walks and Talks. Its results show that the work of creating a culture of learning over three years with Sharratt and Fullan has caused a steady rise in achievement. The system focus has been on Literacy and Numeracy, K–2, in every one of its 77 schools, and their results have been impressive. For example, shown in Table 3.5 (Sharratt & Planche, 2016) in Kindergarten, students have more than doubled their progress in Reading Comprehension in four months during 2015; in Year 1, the percentage of students at the expected levels in Aspects of Writing has more than doubled during the same four months of 2015; and in Year 2, Text Reading has improved with 10% more students reading at the expected text levels by June 2015.

Table 3.5 Improvements in Literacy Performance in Parramatta Diocese, 2015

Year Level	% of Students at Expected Level in Feb. 2015	% of Students at Expected Level in June 2015	Description of Expected Practices to Which Support Was Given

Comprehension - K	40.89	87.4	All classes have implemented a daily two-hour balanced Literacy program that includes Shared Book, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, and Reading to Students for Pleasure. Students also have the opportunities to respond to texts.
Aspects of Writing-Year 1	22.67	46.10	All classes have implemented a daily two-hour balanced Literacy program that includes Modeled Writing, Guided Writing, and Independent Writing.
Reading Texts- Year 2	76.28	87.99	All classes have implemented a daily two-hour balanced Literacy program that includes Shared Book, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, and Reading to Students for Pleasure.

This has occurred because of the clear direction--setting, articulated expectations, support, and collaborative structures put into place across this diocese.

Case Four: Networked Impact - Heads of English Faculties as Leaders of Learning

The impact that school leaders working alongside teacher-leaders can have is profound. Collaborative Inquiry leads to different kinds of conversations and actions (M. Robinson et al., 2010). Both teaching practice and student outcomes improve when Collaborative Inquiry is aligned with individual student achievement results that become school improvement goals.

For example, Sharratt has been working in Diocese of Parramatta for three years directly with secondary English coordinators, principals and assistant principals, superintendents, and central office staff in a collaborative project that focuses on improving practice together. Specifically, they learn what is needed to embed high-impact assessment that drives instruction in reading, writing, and critical thinking skills across all content areas (Sharratt and Fullan, 2012, Parameter 13).

Impressively, the following learning gains have been experienced in Grade 9 when leaders and teacher-leaders share practice and collaborative inquiries together. Writing gains in Grade/Year 9 have exceeded the New South Wales' results by +11.60; Year/Grade 9 Literacy scores have exceeded the NSW's results with a gain of +6.70; and Year/Grade 9 Reading results have gained +4.90 over NSWs' results.

As a summary of this work, Sharratt and Planche (2016) believe:

1. Schools where teachers are encouraged to work across curriculum departments, with a focus on critical thinking and problem solving, have increased student achievement.

2. Student achievement is accelerated in a culture of Colla-borative Learning.

3. The work of the leader and teacher-leader is to build collaborative processes centered on student work as evidence that will open conversations, change practice, and increase students' achievement.

4. School leaders working alongside teacher-leaders understand and bring together collaboration and increased student achievement efforts as being a reciprocal process that demands implementation together.

5. Leader and teacher collaboration regarding assessment practice is predictive of achievement gains in both reading and mathematics (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015, p. 506).

Case Five: System Impact - North Queensland Region, Australia

Analyses of survey and interview data from teacher-leaders provides further evidence that "collaboration among teachers paves the way for the spread of effective teaching practices, improved outcomes for the students they teach, and the retention of the most accomplished teachers in high-needs schools" (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2009). Sixty-four percent of the respondents to the Teachers' Network survey said that they joined their local collaborative networks primarily because they "wanted a professional community" of other teachers with whom to exchange ideas and best practices for their classrooms.

This is certainly reflected in the work we do with systems and schools. For

example, North Queensland Region (NQR), Australia, has focused on all students' learning by bringing teachers and leaders together to work collaboratively with system leaders on intentional capacity-building in assessment and instruction.

Their laser-like focus on increasing all students' achievement through collaborative structures has paid off. They collect data regularly as feedback on how they are progressing. In comparing results from 2014 and 2015, the number of students achieving level 8 (expected level) or better by the end of kindergarten/Prep has increased by an additional 862 students; the number of students achieving level 16 (expected level) or better at the end of Grade/Year 1 increased by 774 students; and the number of students in Year/Grade 2 achieving level 20 (expected level) or better increased by 470 students.

NQR leaders and teachers know that increased collaboration ensures that teachers support each other to change practice and students learn as a result. Thus we (Sharratt & Planche, 2016) believe that the following can be stated:

1. When teachers set Learning Goals and Success Criteria when co-learning, they model their own classroom contexts and consciously improve student learning.

2. Collaborative Learning for teachers builds a sense of collective efficacy and the shared belief that students can and will be successful (Klassen & Durksen, 2012).

3. Increased trust and professionalism among teachers is an outcome of building professional and social capital through collaborative work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).

4. When collaborative forms of deep learning, such as Collaborative Inquiry, are developed with other teachers and evidenced in every classroom, students learn.

5. When teachers learn alongside other teachers by solving dilemmas in teaching and learning, students' increase in achievement is measurable (Planche, 2012b).

6. When teachers change practice together, students learn (Sharratt, 1996).

7. Teachers who work in collaborative cultures improve their confidence and well-being by having their voices heard and valued, by setting focused and achievable goals, and by engaging in dialogue around both content and process (adapted from Fink & Markholt, 2011).

Case Six: School Impact - East Ayr State School, NQR, Australia

A great deal of research has shown that collaborative approaches to learning are beneficial for individual and collective knowledge growth, including development of disciplinary practices (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 35).

For example, at East Ayr State School, North Queensland Region, Australia, learning doesn't just happen. Through their focus on working collaboratively, every staff member ensures that every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving at least one year's growth in one year of schooling. How do they do that? They have a co-learning focus on precision in literacy assessment and instruction that embraces teachers' learning from each other about

- clarity and consistency (e.g., in implementing high-yield decoding strategies),
- planning in response to student reading behaviors,
- the 3 Cueing Systems,
- expected reading behaviors,
- data collection (PM Benchmarking),
- the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model,
- modeled reading— using "I" statements,
- clear expectations (for staff and students),
- their co-constructed Pedagogical Framework, and
- hosting teacher aides' Professional Learning.

This relentless focus during their initial year, 2014–2015, has resulted in students' improvement. They have doubled the number of As in Literacy/English from 5.1% to 10.3%; increased the number of Bs 8.3%, from 19.8 % to 28.1%; and decreased the number of students below standard by approximately 10%.

Their results and the research published to date allow Sharratt & Planche (Corwin, 2016) to make the following statements about the power of collaboration as it impacts on students' learning from teachers and each other.

1. When students own their own learning by collaboratively being involved in assessment and instruction with teachers and other students, they are

empowered to articulate how and why they learn, how they can improve—and they do.

2. When students and teachers co-learn, using assessment of student work based on co-constructed Success Criteria work as their guide, students learn.

3. Students learn when teachers collaborate with students to co-construct meaning, when students demonstrate their learning, when teachers use Descriptive Feedback to set improvement goals, and when student peers provide -feedback.

4. When teachers model high-impact collaborative practices such as attentive listening, open to learning conversations, and the use of relevant, cognitively demanding tasks, students are empowered to learn.

5. When teachers differentiate instruction through Collaborative Inquiries, based on data and students' interests, students learn.

The focus has gone from beyond the practical benefits of collaboration for individual learning to recognize the importance of helping children develop the capacity to collaborate as necessary preparation for all kinds of work (Barron & Darling Hammond, 2008, p. 19).

In conclusion, there is an apparent gap in the research literature; namely, there is a need for further intentional systemic research to explicitly correlate collaboration and student achievement. Nevertheless, this should not stop us from starting now to fundamentally change the way leaders, teachers, and students work together in schools as we have compelling evidence, compiled in this book, that we are on the right track.

Co-learning requires a growth mindset and a confidence that by working together we learn more than we learn on our own. A culture of open doors and collegial sharing underpins co-learning and is a good starting point for all schools. Co-learning, when teachers work with teachers, is collaboration at its best because they are charged with responsibility for their own learning and that of their peers such that they can improve their practice to ultimately improve student achievement and well-being. City and colleagues state that students are not likely to take risks, collaborate, learn together, and experience higher-order tasks unless their teachers are doing so (City et al., 2009, p. 174).

As Leithwood et al (2010, p. 248) so aptly summarize, there has to be a shared understanding and shared purpose at the core of collaborative practice. It must be a reciprocal learning process that leads to collective action and meaningful change.

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