

# THE BENEFIT FOR STUDENTS WHEN TEACHERS COLLABORATE

by Jane Kennedy



## In this article you will learn...

- That when teachers engage in a collaborative experience that includes designing a lesson together, observing lesson delivery, and debriefing with affirming and constructive reflection, then insights are gained, skills are refined, and students benefit.
- The purpose of collaborative planning and reflection is to support each teacher in designing a student-centered lesson, assessing the success of that lesson, and articulating their own decision-making before, during, and after the lesson.
- Questions to drive collaborative planning and reflection.

**Categories:** [feature](#), [Teaching](#)

**Tags:** [collegial collaboration](#), [focused learning model](#), [learnership](#), [lesson planning](#), [metacognition](#), [phases of a lesson](#), [roles in learning](#), [student ownership](#)



Reading Time: 7 minutes

Research shows us that students who own their learning are more motivated, and students who are more motivated actually learn more and at a deeper level. But student ownership is almost impossible to develop without teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in empowering students to own their learning. The teacher is the key decision-maker for delegating the authority, capacity, and responsibility of learning to the students. Still, teachers can't do it alone. They need collaborative support from each other.

## Why Collaboration?

*Collaboration* comes from the Late Latin form *collaborare* which means "to labor together." In other words, educators who collaborate are literally co-laboring and it is this shared work that research has shown leads to enhanced teaching skills which, in turn, leads to increased student achievement.

Studies focused on the specific benefits of teacher collaboration show that schools with induction and mentoring programs that emphasized collegial support had lower turnover rates. ([McClure, 2019](#)) Another study found positive correlations between teacher collaboration and student achievement.

*"Positive effects for teachers were found in improved self-efficacy (cf. Puchner and Taylor, 2006), increased teaching effectiveness (cf. Graham, 2007), and improvement of instructional quality. (cf. Jackson and Bruegmann, 2009; Hochweber et al., 2012)." ([Mora-Ruano, Heine, and Gebhardt, 2019](#))*

Additionally, teacher surveys show time and time again how impactful a collaborative environment is on their profession and their students.

All of this goes to show that **when teachers engage in a collaborative experience** that includes designing a lesson together, observing lesson delivery, and debriefing with affirming and constructive feedback, then **insights are gained, skills are refined, and students benefit.**

## How Students Benefit from Collaboration

Let's take a look at the impact of teacher collaboration through the lens of a student.

*Imagine being a student in a middle school classroom where the teachers all collaborated and intentionally planned together so that instruction from class to class was knitted together with common skills and strategies...*

What if, for example, the skills of gathering and citing textual evidence to support an argumentative claim were introduced and taught in an English-language arts class through a literature study and then immediately reinforced and practiced in a Science class during a lab? What if those skills were then carried into a Social Studies class for further practice and application? What if the same instructional strategies were also carried from class to class so they became a routine that students could apply the skills immediately without requiring new instruction on them in each classroom?

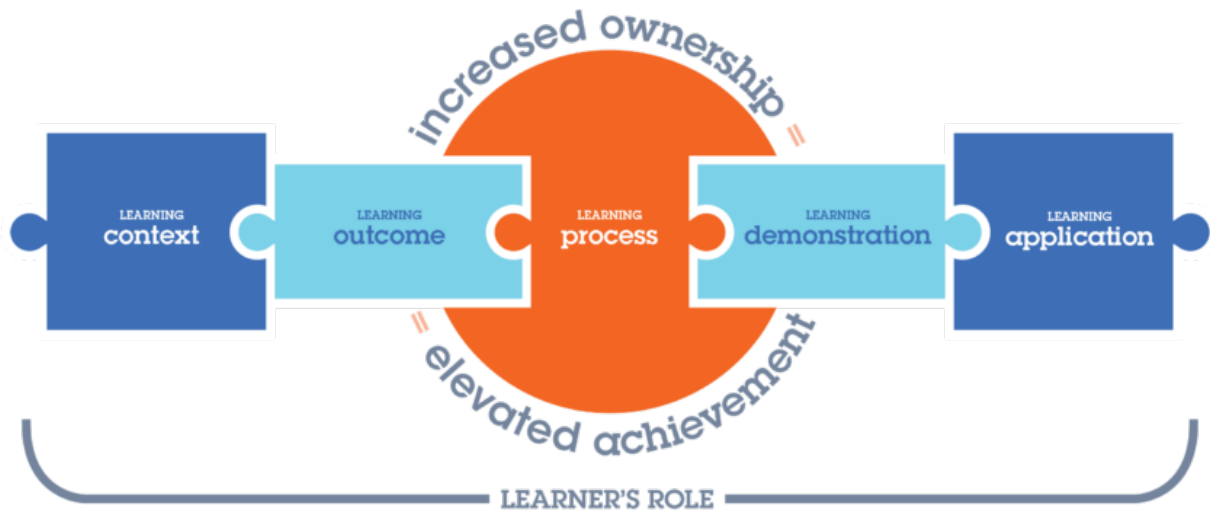
If you were to ask a student, "What are you learning?" what would that student say? If that student was benefiting from this type of collaboration, you would probably get a response like this:

*"I am learning to gather and cite textual evidence to support claims. Right now, in this class, I am completing my Argument Developer Skill Builder with evidence I got from my primary sources. This Skill Builder helps me organize my reasons and evidence to support my claim. I like that I get to use this same Skill Builder in my other classes. I don't have to learn a new way to do the same thing and I get extra practice gathering and citing evidence."*

This is an example of a student empowered to own their learning because of teacher collaboration.

## **A Focused Learning Model that Supports Collaboration**

A key to constructive teacher collaboration is having a common understanding, framework, and language when designing, delivering, and reflecting on a lesson. One of the most effective frameworks to use in this endeavor is [Elevated Achievement's Focused Learning Model](#). The reason why it is so effective is that it is driven by the learner and provides a focused lesson by answering the question—What does a learner need to know in order to better own their learning? The *Learning Model* is made up of five student-centered phases: setting the *Learning Context*, stating the *Learning Outcome*, engaging in the *Learning Process*, producing the *Learning Demonstration*, and implementing the *Learning Application*.



As we said before, teachers that plan together have more opportunities for reflection and intentional decision-making. They can use the following questions as they work to plan and reflect on a lesson using Elevated Achievement's *Learning Model*.

## Questions to Drive Collaborative Planning

The purpose of these planning questions is to support teachers in reflecting on their own decision-making, in other words, supporting them in articulating, “How will you decide what to do?” The overarching question for each decision is “How did you make that decision?”

Begin your collaborative planning by asking each other:

- What will the students focus on in this lesson?

Then, together, reflect on and plan the phases of the lesson using these questions.

LEARNING  
context

**Learning Context:** *Why is the learning important?*

- Why will the students learn this?
- How will today's learning connect to previous and subsequent learning?
- What is the student's role in the *Learning Context*?
- How will you share this information with your students?

LEARNING  
outcome

**Learning Outcome:** *What will the students learn?*

- What skill will the students learn?
- What will the students do to show that they have learned this skill?
- What is the student's role in the *Learning Outcome*?
- How will you share this information with your students?

LEARNING  
process

**Learning Process:** *How will the students learn it?*

- What strategy will you select to teach the skill?
- How will this strategy support the outcome and the demonstration?
- How will you structure student-to-student communications?
- How will you address the differing needs of your students?
- How will you check for understanding?
- What is the student's role in the *Learning Process*?
- How will you share this information with your students?

LEARNING  
demonstration

**Learning Demonstration:** *How will the students show that they have learned it?*

- What will the students do to show that they have learned this skill?
- How will this demonstrate that they met the learning outcome?
- What is the student's role in the *Learning Demonstration*?
- How will you share this information with your students?

LEARNING  
application

**Learning Application:** *How will the students continue to use what they learned?*

- How will today's learning connect to subsequent learning?
- How will your students use this learning in the future?
- How will your students own this learning in the future?
- What is the student's role in the *Learning Application*?
- How will you share this information with your students?

## Questions to Drive Reflection

The purpose of a set of reflection questions is to support teachers in assessing the success of a lesson and their own decision-making. This helps them answer, “What did you decide to do?” and, more importantly, “How did you decide that?”

Begin your collaborative reflection by asking each other:

- What were the students learning?
- What did the students do to show that they had learned?
- Was the lesson successful?

Then, together, reflect on the phases of the lesson using these questions.

### Learning Context: *Why is the learning important?*

LEARNING  
context

- Why were they learning this skill?
- How does today's learning connect to yesterday's and tomorrow's?
- What was the student's role in the *Learning Context*?
- How did you share this information with your students?
- How did you decide the answers to these questions?

### Learning Outcome: *What did the students learn?*

LEARNING  
outcome

- What skill were the students learning?
- What did the students do to show that they learned this skill?
- How did the students know the learning outcome of the lesson?
- What was the student's role in the *Learning Outcome*?
- How did you share this information with your students?
- How did you decide the answers to these questions?

### Learning Process: *How did the students learn it?*

LEARNING  
process

- What strategy did you select to teach the skill?
- What was the student's role in the *Learning Process*?
- How did you share this information with your students?
- Was the strategy effective? What is your evidence?
- How did you decide the answers to these questions?

### Learning Demonstration: *How did the students show that they have learned it?*

LEARNING  
demonstration

- What did the students do to show that they learned the skill?
- What were the results?
- What was the student's role in the *Learning Demonstration*?
- How did you share this information with your students?
- How did you decide the answers to these questions?

### Learning Application: *How will the students continue to use what they learned?*

LEARNING  
application

- How does today's learning connect to subsequent learning?
- How will your students use this learning in the future?
- What was the student's role in the *Learning Application*?
- How did you share this information with your students?
- How did you decide the answers to these questions?

End your collaborative reflection by asking each other:

- What was the impact of this lesson?
- Were you pleased with the instructional decisions you made?
- What would you replicate in future lessons? What would you do differently?

## A Final Word on Collaboration

When teachers collaborate and plan together, the benefits are clear. Collaboration allows them to have strong collegial conversations around student learning of specific skills and strategies. Teachers become better decision-makers by articulating their intentions and thinking before, during, and after the lesson. In turn, their students get immediate practice and application across a variety of content areas. Their time becomes more efficient with the use of shared strategies and routines.

What might the students see as the benefits to them? When asked, imagine getting a response like this:

*"I think my teachers work together. I get to use the same things in each class. It makes it easier for me to know what I need to do. I like how I get to practice the same thing lots of times. I never saw before how each class connected to the others. But now it all connects and I am learning more."*

So, get started collaborating and you too will see that impact of teacher collaboration is powerful. Not just for you, but most importantly, for your students.

### Continue the Learning

Check out these articles and resources to continue your learning about this topic...

- [Our Article, "Question-Driven Feedback: How to Ensure Individual Metacognition"](#)
- [Our Downloadable Resources for Reflecting on the Impact of a Lesson](#)
- [Our Book, \*Developing Student Ownership: Supporting Students to Own Their Learning through the Use of Strategic Learning Practices\*](#)

## The Learning Brief

In this article you learned...

- That when teachers engage in a collaborative experience that includes designing a lesson together, observing lesson delivery, and debriefing with affirming and constructive reflection, then insights are gained, skills are refined, and students benefit.
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