

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

“Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn” Podcast Episode 25 – April 2020

Title: *Accountability within Collaborative Learning*

SPEAKERS

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FULL TRANSCRIPT

INTRODUCTION:

JO: We have to make sure that our students develop the skills they need. They need leadership skills. They also need skills that allow them to build trust within that group.

KM: So often we have unexpressed expectations of students, instead of just telling them up front. These are the things that I expect to see in your work, getting all of those out on the table really goes a long way into defining the quality of the work.

JA: Welcome to the “Ayers Lunch & Learn” podcast presented by the *Ayers Institute for teacher learning and innovation at Lipscomb University*, where we're all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by Edsouth, which promotes interest and awareness of higher education opportunities to students, families, and schools. Each Ayers Lunch & Learn podcast episode provides bite sized portions of professional learning.

Today's topic is “Accountability within Collaborative Learning.” We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic as well, using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchandLearn and #CollaborativeLearning. My name is Josephine Appleby and I'm a Program Director at the Ayers Institute. Participating in the conversation today is Dr. Karen Marklein, Program Director, and Julia Osteen Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute.

Julia would you like to introduce yourself.

JO: Thank you Josephine. I'm Julia Osteen and I have worked in K-12 for over 27 years, taught every grade level from kindergarten through seventh grade at some point during that time. In addition, I, for the past six years, I worked in higher education at Lipscomb University as an instructor for the College of Education.

In my work. I have seen just how important collaboration is in the field of education. It is really difficult to try to be that Lone Ranger; to be that single person trying to do our work. It's so complex that we need each other in education. And so, this is a really important topic for our conversation today.

JA: Karen, would you like to introduce yourself?

KM: Yes, thank you Josephine.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

I'm Karen Marklein and I also hold collaboration as an extremely important topic, and not only how can we get our students to do it, but how are we doing it effectively. As I taught English in the high school setting (I was an English teacher), I struggled to get my students to collaborate effectively. And so, now, I feel like I've got a better handle on it and I know what it takes so that students get the most out of the assignments that they're working on together.

EPISODE BODY:

JA: We are so excited to learn from you both today.

JO: When we talked last time, Karen, we talked about what we meant by collaboration. I think that's really important for us to discuss briefly again. Really, we're talking about this idea of co-laboring we're coming together. We're bringing our ideas. We're making those contributions and by bringing them together in meshing them together, we can really end up with something even better than what we could have done individually.

KM: Absolutely, so collaboration requires that we work together. That root word of co- of labor is so important and it's the idea that it's more than sharing. It's rich conversations where we're holding each other accountable for the end result.

JO: And you know that accountability piece is really important. I know as I've worked with a lot of different teachers and a lot of different schools and systems. That's one of their concerns is how can I hold each individual accountable for their work as they are working together. And it's more than just, "Okay get over here and get together and work in a group, and then get a group grade," necessarily. So really as we think about that accountability, it's the individual being accountable, as well as that group accountability.

So, some ways that we might can think about that is really establishing expectations and norms from the start. That's a super important thing to do. I know, that you have a favorite quote that you like to say about expectations that I think is really important here.

KM: Yes. My favorite quote is, "Unexpressed expectations are preconceived resentment." And I think so often we have unexpressed expectations of students, and we've decided when they don't do what we want them to do we're going to be mad at them instead of just telling them up front. This is what I expect. These are the things that I expect to see in your work. These are the things that I expect to see as you're working together, and just getting all of those out on the table really goes a long way into defining the quality of the work that you're going to get back.

JO: We have to really make sure that our students have the opportunity and the time to develop the skills they need in order to be successful in that accountability. They need leadership skills, if they're going to work together in a group. They have to figure out how to lead each other. They also need skills that allow them to build trust within that group. So, we need to give them time to do that. And how are they going to manage conflict when conflict happens in a group because it's not if conflict happens, it's when conflict happens.

KM: Right. And that idea of the "not the if, but the when"— if you don't allow students to take the time to establish norms, then unwritten norms emerge. And we haven't agreed on them, but they're really guiding the work that we're doing anyway.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Another reason individual accountability is so important is when we don't build-in individual accountability we have really miss-communicated that not all students have to contribute equally. And that adds to that idea of, "Well if I'm just here in this group and if I'm just quiet and I behave myself then I'm gonna get a good grade." And then just one person does all the work.

So, increasing the individual accountability then allows for students not to be able to free ride and to get that grade that the group is getting, just because they're associated with these other two or three students.

JO: I think one of the things that I did whenever I was teaching sixth and seventh grade was, you know, oftentimes when kids work in collaborative groups is over a period of time. So, it's not just for one day, it's often this is a project we're working on which is going to take us some time to do it. However, one of the things that I found to be really helpful to really get this idea of individual accountability home to the students was that at the end of a class period require each person to individually reflect on what did I learn from the work our group my group did today.

And so, having those individual assessments reflections and the students understanding those are coming that they're going to be held accountable by me, to do that sort of reflection was super important to kind of get that point across.

KM: And to add onto that even, the addition of a daily log of this is what I contributed to my group today. So, these were my contributions and through those contributions this is what I learned today. Then we have that ongoing conversation with the students about what they're giving to their group, but also what they're getting from their group. And so, they can see that it's a real reciprocal relationship.

JO: You know one of the ways that we can really set our students up for success with this accountability piece is the really being cognizant aware of the number of kids that we're putting in a group together. We need a lot of research will tell us that optimal amount is a maximum of four to five kids in a group that when you get any more than that then there is room for people to be unproductive, to be non-participative with that group work. Whereas, if you have no more than four or five maybe even three then there's no place really for them to hide they have to pull their weight. They have to do their part, and it's very obvious when they don't.

KM: So that group size— Yes. You want to look at the total number of students that you have in your course or in your class, but also think, you know, optimum time, optimum size for optimum participation. You don't want it to be too large, but you also don't want it to be too small. So maybe two is too small. Partner work doesn't always have the benefit that a group of three or four might have.

JO: And I think that's very true as kids go through our educational system as they get older, but I'm thinking back to the days when I taught in a kindergarten classroom, and a group of two was what worked at that level. So, it's really going to be different almost for the different levels that you're teaching, so you have to consider your own students with that. Where are they developmentally? That's an important piece, as well.

KM: And also what you know about them, you know, if you know your students well enough, you've developed those relationships, then you do know what that optimum size would be. But also just the group composition as a whole. Do you put them in groups? Do you allow them to get in groups? How do you use the knowledge that you have of your students to form those groups so that they can work to their maximum capacity?

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

JO: Another thing that occurs to me is, you know, at the end of a project when they get to the end of working on a particular thing as a group, then really having assessments that can be triangulated is very important. So, students assessing themselves, their own work having to present evidence. This is where I fall on the rubric, my work with this group and here's why. Here's the evidence for that. And then having each student evaluate the other group members, here's what they did, here's where they fall on the rubric. And this is why here's evidence for that is super important, so that the teacher really has their own assessment. They have everybody's self-assessment, and then they have everybody's assessments of their group members. And if things don't jibe with those then that's an important time to have conversations with kids.

KM: And if things don't jibe I think that's why that daily log is so important. If there is a gap between how the students are evaluating themselves or how the teacher has given an evaluation of mastery- how does that compare to whatever that daily log is of this person contributed this and learned this? And there should be some measurable outcome to each of those things. You know the triangulation of the assessment is important.

But even before we get to the triangulation of the results. We need to think really deeply about how meaningful is this task. And so, I know you have a real strong opinion on the importance of that task design.

JO: Well I think it's important that students really see the need for collaboration, and that comes in the task design really. So complex activities that we think about having these multi-layered kinds of activities and the more complex activities that's going to require an interdependence with all of the group members. And so, we need to make sure that the rigor is there that the tasks are sufficiently complex, so that they do need to collaborate together to be successful.

If an individual student can do the work that you're asking them by themselves without any benefit from anyone else, then they're not going to see that need for collaboration. And it's super important that they understand that there is a need for it.

KM: Yes. The idea that if I don't need to collaborate then why should I? So, I know that that if you were working with a teacher who is maybe dissatisfied with an outcome of a collaborative task, maybe your first question might be: how rigorous is the task? Is the task multilayered? Does the task really require a diversity of student voice or could it be just one voice that completes this assignment?

That leads into this other idea of students really need a reason to collaborate and a reason- we think a reason is a grade- but we need more than a grade to motivate students to really need to collaborate. So that is to get students to agree to reach some level of consent consensus on a topic and through collaboration, we do that really get them to be stretching themselves in what they're bringing to the group, so that they are understanding what skills am I taking away from the group time.

So, yes, the meaningful task is important, but also to give the students a real reason, a real audience, a real purpose in collaborating.

JO: And I think we can't leave this conversation today without really talking about modeling, and how important modeling is. In the accountability piece, we need to be able to model that accountability, as well, with our students. One thing I would encourage teachers with is: in what ways do the students see you being accountable to the collaborative groups that you're apart of?

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

KM: Yeah, I think so often we even the subtle messages we send to students within our classrooms about how we fit into the larger culture of a school. How are we contributing to our teacher teams? How are we contributing to whatever processes where we're involved in?

Do we come back and complain about those meetings? Do they see us, you know, valuing the process of collaboration even just being accountable to our students as a member of this learning community that we're all involved in? How am I listening to their feedback? How am I valuing their voices? How am I sending messages that, "yes your voice matters?" And if your voice matters to me then it's going to matter to your fellow students.

JO: And that really is a co-laboring together. When we do that, we really are sending our students out for authentically collaborating when we model.

CONCLUSION:

JA: Thank you Karen and Julia.

In our conversation today, Karen and Julia reviewed what is meant by collaboration and shared ways to hold individual students accountable for group work. They've given us a lot to think about and discuss with colleagues. A probing question for you and your colleagues to explore is: "Where are the opportunities to incorporate collaboration within our context?"

As we close today's episode, we would like to encourage you to continue the conversation on Practical Approaches to Collaborative Learning with your colleagues. There is a graphic organizer file available for download as you continue thinking about this topic. The graphic organizer along with links to articles cited are found on eduTOOLBOX at <https://www.edutoolbox.org>.

The Ayers Lunch & Learn podcasts are produced by Julia Osteen with technical production by Forest Doddington. Don't forget we'd love to hear your thoughts on Approaches to Collaborative Learning using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchandLearn and #CollaborativeLearning. Also follow or like the Ayers Institute and Lipscomb College of Education on Twitter and Facebook. @AyersInstitute. And @LipscombCofEd.

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