

Integrating Collaborative Learning in Policy and Practice

CO-LAB's Conclusions and Recommendations



Erasmus+

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www.ncca.ie



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Foreword

This recommendations summary report is divided into two parts. The first part starts with a general description of the project, the methodology, definitions and linked resources and reports, including the Code of Conduct for Effective Collaboration in European Projects and the CO-LAB Final Evaluation Report. The Final Evaluation Report includes the detailed set of recommendations linked through to the data analysis.

The recommendations are shared in Part Two of this report.

What has become increasingly apparent in the project, as it has progressed, is the importance of considering collaborative learning in education as an 'ecosystem', covering the inter-related aspects of policy, school, teacher training and classroom activities. To mainstream collaborative learning and teaching, this approach needs to be integrated into the wider change programme linked to 21st century learning priorities, at pan-European and national/central level, as well as at school and classroom level. To embed collaborative learning within schools, the backing of the head teacher supported by a collaborative culture within the school itself is needed. This collaborative culture, in turn, supports teachers to experiment and adapt their teaching style to include collaborative learning as part of their pedagogy. Of critical importance to all in this 'ecosystem' is a shared vision and understanding of what collaboration and its goals are. Equally important is the realisation that collaborative learning is a process, involving the development of skills and competences, for both teachers and learners, not only in its implementation, but also in the assessment.

Readers of the summary report are encouraged to refer to the CO-LAB website for further details and publications.

CO-LAB - collaborative learning project



1.1. Project description

CO-LAB is a forward-looking project coordinated by European Schoolnet and co-funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme (December 2015 – January 2018). The project's partnership consisted of Ministries of Education, teacher training organisations and research institutes from Austria, Belgium - Flanders, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal.

The project focused on understanding what makes collaborative teaching and learning a reality in the classroom. Stakeholders at all levels (teacher trainers, student teachers, teachers, head teachers, and policy makers) participated in the project, receiving training and discussing in country workshops the implementation of collaborative learning and the conditions required to mainstream collaboration.

1.2. Project methodology

CO-LAB followed a 'bottom-up and top-down' approach, with each national partner playing a central role. The bottom-up component formed part of a capacity building process, equipping teachers with the practical competence to implement collaborative learning and its assessment in the classroom. Three country workshops were organised by partners to support and discuss with participants the implementation of collaborative learning. Teachers designed and implemented learning scenarios in their classrooms, with their experience feeding back into the following discussions. The workshops provided a platform for dialogue between practitioners and policy makers to discuss the conditions for policy and regulatory frameworks, to support implementation and mainstreaming of collaboration practices and assessment at school and system levels.

This open dialogue among the stakeholders, promoted through the country workshops, was also integrated by a learning activity, the CO-LAB MOOC (Massive Online Open

Course), *Collaborative Teaching and Learning*¹, which provided teachers with the opportunity for peer exchange on making collaborative teaching and learning a reality in the classroom, also drawing on practical resources and examples.

1.3. Collaborative learning definition and OER resources

Being able to collaborate effectively is a valuable 21st century skill, yet teaching about or through collaboration remains uncommon in schools because of a lack of understanding of what real collaboration in an educational setting means, and because existing policy conditions do not always enable it to flourish. The project gave practitioners the dedicated space and time to experiment, discuss and better understand what collaborative teaching and learning is in practice in educational settings.

Central to the discussion were some key questions.

- What is collaborative learning?
- How can I carry it out effectively in my classroom?
- What tools can I use to assess it?
- How can I collaborate with fellow teachers to facilitate it?

At the start of the project, CO-LAB partner and research institute IBE carried out a literature review on the topic, looking at existing research and definitions. This review highlighted the definition used by UNESCO², together with the OECD TALIS 2013 study³.

As an operational definition, CO-LAB adopted the one promoted by the 21st century collaborative learning design rubric⁴, and collaboration expert Professor Deirdre Butler (Dublin City University, Ireland) worked with teachers to develop their understanding of this approach, both in terms of lesson design and assessment.

With the help of the rubric, teachers worked through the four major questions proposed, to reflect on how to design a collaborative activity.

1. www.europeanschoolnetacademy.eu/web/collaborative-teaching-and-learning_2nd-edition/course

2. UNESCO, International Bureau of Education, <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/c/collaborative-learning>

3. OECD (2014), TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, TALIS OECD Publishing

4. 21CLD Learning Activity Rubrics, Microsoft Partners in Learning, 21st Century Learning Design, 2012
<https://education.microsoft.com/GefTrained/ITL-Research>



- **Are the students working together?**
- **Do they share responsibility?**
- **Do they make substantive decisions?**
- **Is their work interdependent?**

These four questions prove an effective way to understand whether the student work is collaborative or not. Professor Butler also demonstrated how the same rubric can be used to inform the assessment of collaborative learning.

The assessment component was further explored with the contribution of Professor Luis Valente (University of Minho, Portugal), who designed the *CO-LAB Guidelines for Assessing Collaborative Learning*⁵.

The Open Educational Resources used in the project are available on the project website⁶.

1.4. Collaboration in European projects

A parallel activity looked at the wider field of collaboration within partnerships and the results of this reflection are published as *Code of Conduct for Effective Collaboration in European Projects*⁷. The code provides insights on the self-reflective practice carried out within the project and can be of inspiration to existing or future collaborative learning networks. It illustrates how networks can be enhanced or strengthened and it provides a useful basis for professional development activities linked to collaborative networking.

5. Valente, L., *CO-LAB Guidelines for Assessing Collaborative Learning in the Classroom*, CO-LAB project, 2016

6. CO-LAB learning resources - <http://colab.eun.org/co-lab-tools>

7. CO-LAB *Code of Conduct for Effective Collaboration in European Projects*, Educonsult, January 2018 - <http://colab.eun.org/projects-collaboration>

1.5. Evaluation research

The evaluation research of CO-LAB was led by the Educational Research Institute (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, IBE) from Poland. The study began with a literature review, which was used to inform the surveys that were taken by the project's and online course's participants, both at the beginning and at the end. The cross-analysis of the survey data was combined with the feedback on the experimentation and on the discussions at the country workshops. The *CO-LAB Final Evaluation Report*⁸ provides an analysis of the data, highlighting changes in teachers' practice, obstacles and enablers to change, including inputs from head teachers and policy makers participating in the workshops. The evaluation report provides also a set of conclusions and recommendations developed from this analysis, which complement the summary provided in Part Two of this publication.

The main results of the study are outlined in the following.

Learning in groups has a positive impact on students' achievements (Hattie, 2009). The majority of CO-LAB participants agreed with this and they even more often believed that collaborative learning helps develop social competences. After CO-LAB, participants' understanding of collaborative learning improved, and they became more likely to accept students' responsibility for this process and some liberty to organise learning.

The majority of participants were satisfied with the MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) and the workshops. After CO-LAB, teachers reported, on average, increased confidence and abilities to use collaborative learning, and 39% declared they used group learning more often. Over a half of the teachers did more activities where students coordinated group learning (55%) and worked interdependently (52%). Teachers also made changes in assessment: they more often considered students' individual contribution to group work (49%), and used more of students' self-assessment (42%) and peer assessment (39%).

After the online course, participants became more aware of such challenges as ensuring that each student in the group is active, or of the time constraints to the use of collaborative learning. The vast majority of teachers agreed that, with all the curriculum requirements, they do not have enough time to use collaborative learning. Nearly a half of them thought that curricula include competences that are best developed through collaborative learning, but some underappreciated the curriculum flexibility to use less conventional methods. Yet, as many as 54% of teachers used in the classroom what they learned in CO-LAB, thus proving that collaboration may be used to implement the

8. CO-LAB *Final Evaluation and Recommendations Report*, IBE, January 2017 - <http://colab.eun.org/final-evaluation>

curriculum even in short lessons.

Several enablers were observed by project partners or project participants. As regards the teachers, the enablers include acceptance of student-centred education and the ability to facilitate group processes and help students develop collaborative skills. Moreover, some examples were identified of how technology can help teachers to use collaborative learning methods and to collaborate with other staff, but for some teachers ICT skills and access to technology are an issue.

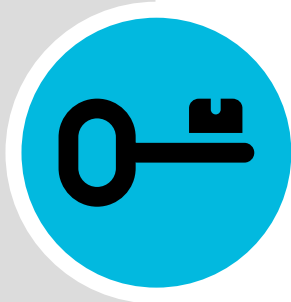
However, it seems that collaborative culture, supportive of collaborative learning and teacher collaboration, is the essential enabler. A positive school climate, which includes openness, discussion and collaboration among staff, is related to teacher efficacy and to students' achievements (see e.g. TALIS 2013). Teacher collaboration varies: from none, through discussions and exchange, to more advanced, which may include peer observation and feedback, peer learning and joint teaching. CO-LAB teachers shared experiences with different levels of collaboration, while the project workshops showed that participants liked to collaborate and were more satisfied, if they exchanged experiences in small groups. After the course, 40% of teachers reported that they collaborated with other teachers more often. They also became more aware that, if they want to teach students to collaborate, they too need to work together.

CO-LAB participants and partners noticed the essential role of the head teacher in creating a collaborative culture. There were examples of head teachers' good practice, such as encouraging teacher collaboration, ensuring time for it, and openness to teachers' innovative methods and to flexible classroom settings. Of the head teachers who took part in CO-LAB, two-thirds made changes inspired by the project. These most often included discussions about the implementation of collaborative learning, teacher training and resources, and more flexible classroom spaces. However, head teachers did not tackle the time constraints by reorganising timetables.

Some CO-LAB participants wanted to learn about collaborative learning to mainstream it in schools and policy, but the course answered these needs to a lesser extent. For some, the workshops allowed them to understand better the opinion of different stakeholders (policy makers or practitioners).

Involving policy makers was not easy in some countries, due to their low interest and the focus of the MOOC on practice. Yet the project had a positive impact on policy makers too. They gained inspiration and knowledge, and some already used it, usually in the development of teacher training, but some also in curriculum development.

CO-LAB's Conclusions and Recommendations



Key message



Main statement



Actions



Extra content

Part 2

Recommendations for mainstreaming collaborative learning



Embedding collaborative learning within the education system is a process, which takes time. CO-LAB recommendations aim to provide a systemic approach to support the widespread implementation of collaborative learning across schools, at all levels of the system: policy, teachers' training, school and classroom.

The recommendations are based on the experiences of the project partners in Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Portugal.

Practical ideas from each of the countries are highlighted alongside the recommendations with examples and quotes.

For the full details of the national experiences and recommendations please read the Country Reports¹ and the Final Evaluation Report².

Policy level



1. Prioritise collaborative learning at national/central level



Align collaborative learning within your overall national/central level priorities for 21st century skills and educational change, making explicit reference to collaborative learning as a priority and part of this vision. In order to change classroom practice, this vision needs to be supported by well-defined and clear policies and by changes to school inspection, cascading down through the curriculum and assessment methods.

1. <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

2. <http://colab.eun.org/final-evaluation>



- Improve consistency between the top-down and bottom-up approach. For collaborative learning to be widely implemented, a clear and explicit priority needs to be stated from national/central level policy, down through curriculum and assessment, and supported by inspection. The bottom-up approach is supported by this clear policy and direction, coupled with the support of the school management team, embracing collaborative learning within the school plan.
- Develop a shared vision with all educational stakeholders, combined with a common language on collaboration, and encouraged by a collaborative culture across all the different system levels (policy, teachers' training, school, and classroom).
- Emphasise social and citizenship competences and collaboration in core curricula, establishing clear links between general objectives (including social competences) and subject-related learning outcomes.
- Make explicit reference to collaborative learning within your national/central level education policies – as part of your policy of what you want your students to know and be able to do at the end of the school system.
- Develop a timeline to take into account the time necessary for students to learn effectively the expected knowledge and collaborative skills.
- Highlight the changes required to the 'teacher identity' and role in moving to implement collaborative learning (e.g. teacher as facilitator).
- Involve and share information on collaborative learning across your education policy team, including school inspectors. Find an opportunity to get teachers and students face to face together with members of your policy team, to get their voices heard to nurture the dialogue.
- Build collaborative learning into the curriculum including the framework for assessment, reviewing the examples of policy implementations as exemplified in the CO-LAB Country Reports for Ireland and Portugal to inform your plan.
- Build the strategic links between other national/central level and international projects, as well as on-going initiatives (e.g. eTwinning), to create a 'joined-up' and sustainable approach, encouraging on-going dialogue and a platform to exchange knowledge, ideas and support on collaboration.



Policy-led approaches – evidence from CO-LAB partners

A shared vision is required, combined with a common language of collaboration and a collaborative culture across the different system levels (policy, training, school, classroom), as the key foundation blocks to under-pin the widespread adoption of collaborative learning.

This approach can be seen in Ireland and Portugal.

Ireland

Collaborative learning is embedded in the Irish Curriculum. Collaborative learning is a stated principle of the Irish Primary Curriculum and it is embedded in post-primary education through the Key Skills framework. Students are encouraged to take on participatory and collaborative roles in learning, and these roles and practice are incorporated in all stages of education. Even with this national level priority, the scale of implementation of collaborative learning in the classroom varies. The assessment of collaborative skills is considered challenging, with a recent project, The Collaborative Assessment Alliance, focusing specifically on this area.

Read more in the Country Report - Ireland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

Portugal

The educational system in Portugal is undergoing great change, with the introduction of a new student profile. This profile intends to draw guidelines for students when they reach the end of upper secondary education. The National Project Promotion for School Success is a challenge made by the Ministry of Education for schools and headmasters to implement innovative measures to increase student success. This has led to a pilot of about 200 schools (25%), which have been given the freedom to change pedagogical practices. The methodology of collaborative teaching in the classroom is integral to this change.

Read more in the Country Reports - Portugal: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>



2. Engage head teachers in collaborative learning as part of change



Activate your head teachers to encourage and support the implementation of collaborative learning in their schools. Even though in most countries head teachers have the freedom to introduce collaborative learning, they need to be motivated and stimulated to change. Consider collaborative learning as part of your investment in high quality educational leadership.



- Get head teachers to treat collaboration as part of their change process, incorporated and aligned to their school vision and plan. Collaboration should support the democratic concept of the school, involving all stakeholders including board of governors and the school management team.
- Engage head teachers in your communications and through training, workshops, conferences, to increase their understanding of collaborative learning and its alignment with national/central level priorities, as well as with the core curriculum, providing them with examples and resources.
- Create a school pilot, inviting schools to participate and act as the innovators, to inspire and provide examples to lead the change and cascade to other schools.
- Team-up schools who are already active with schools who are taking their first steps and create small school clusters or hubs to support and encourage widespread change.
- Prompt schools to combine and enhance the curricula with collaborative learning activities.
- Support and provide targeted intervention to these schools to keep them on track, visiting the classrooms and speaking with head teachers, teachers and (importantly) the students themselves, to understand the challenges on the ground, using the feedback to inform and shape on-going policy plans.



Example of considerations on collaborative learning by head teachers in Portugal

Read more in the Country Report - Portugal: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

The 2nd CO-LAB workshop was considered excellent by most of the participants, also since, among them, there were 25 head teachers and directors of teachers training centres, who have a fundamental role in the implementation and dissemination of these

new methodologies. The head teachers were asked to elaborate a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) on the collaborative work, and their opinions are summarised in the table below. The Ministry of Education, with its new measures, which facilitate and promote changes in the classroom, in particular in the implementation of more active methodologies, gave to head teachers a space to manoeuvre to promote these changes.

<p>Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication 2. Pre-willingness to participate in change 3. Sharing of reflections among teachers 4. Peer learning 5. Developing 21st century skills 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Physical conditions and equipment of schools 2. Curriculum extension and subjects 3. Rigidity of curricula and school curricula 4. Resistance to change 5. Lack of physical spaces
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication among teachers 2. Reflection amongst teachers 3. Empathy 4. Cohesion 5. Teacher's training 	<p>Threats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Departmentalisation of the school 2. Instability of educational policies 3. Refusal to adopt ICT in teaching 4. Some lack of focus in elements of CL work 5. Lack of engagement with parents to get their support for this CL methodology

“The extent of ‘teacher belief’ is either an enabler or an obstacle. If teachers and school leaders support and believe in collaboration as being important, then ‘time’ becomes less of a problem as ‘time’ can be allocated for this type of learning, and therefore ‘time’ becomes less of an obstacle.”

Read more in the Country reports - Ireland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>



3. Engage key stakeholders in collaborative learning as part of change



Work with universities, training institutions and curriculum experts to review the role and method of implementing collaboration within teaching and learning, including the assessment component.



- Appoint powerful advocates from universities, as well as teacher training organisations and teacher associations, to champion collaborative learning at a national/central level.
- Bring together teaching universities and training institutions, to agree on the approach, and plan to work closely together to include collaborative learning in initial and on-going teachers' training.
- Encourage an approach where initial and continuous professional development (CPD) involving 21st century skills includes collaborative learning, seen as part of the wider set of competences of the future teacher.
- Develop the skills and competences of the teachers to cover both implementation and assessment of collaborative learning, with particular attention to managing and assessing the process.



Skills and conditions needed for teacher collaboration

"They need knowledge; they need attitudes around wanting to collaborate. They need to have the skills like communication, for working with others, for dealing with conflict. They need to have motivation. There has to be something there that motivates them to want to work together. So the ethical dimension is around: Do you have the skills to be a good team member? Are you going to contribute in a positive way to the work of the team?"

Majella Dempsey, Maynooth University, Ireland:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQqq42pfk7o



4. Create accessible sources of collaborative learning materials



Create and disseminate repositories of accessible examples and resources to exemplify collaborative learning at all levels – policy, training, school, and classroom.



- Use the CO-LAB OER resources: collaborative learning scenarios, assessment guidelines and the training videos from the online course (MOOC).
- Build repositories of practical examples, over time.
- Promote existing learning resources, ready to use in the classroom (e.g. scenarios and rubrics), ensuring that they have a clear reference to the specific objectives of the curriculum and that they are peer reviewed.



“A recent feature of curriculum development at primary [school] has been the development of Teacher Toolkits, which provide guidance as to appropriate approaches and pedagogies for teaching and learning. Support materials aim to present the ‘how to’ of effective teaching and often have a strong alignment with the aims of collaborative learning.”

Read more in the Country Report - Ireland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

Teacher training



5. Integrate collaborative learning training for key stakeholders



Bring together all the different stakeholders in joint workshops (policy makers, school inspectors, head teachers, teachers, pupils) emphasising the top-down/bottom-up approach required to support the widespread implementation of collaborative learning in schools.



- Align the training within national/central level priorities with the aim of building the understanding of collaboration at all levels. Introduce collaborative learning as part of the new methodologies.

- Showcase examples and facilitate discussion among the different groups.
- Verify that collaborative learning is covered by initial teacher education, as well as in on-going teacher professional development, increasing the continuum between the two.
- Include collaborative learning in the Continuous Professional Development training plans going forward for all the different stakeholder groups.



“Teacher training on collaborative learning and group work assessment should be on Continuous Professional Development institutions’ agenda.”

Listen to a teacher trainer at Maynooth University (Ireland) explain the skills required by teachers to work collaboratively, as well as the conditions needed for teacher collaboration in the school environment. She also discusses the importance of leadership and how we might address sceptical teachers.

Majella Dempsey, Maynooth University, Ireland:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQqq42pfk7o

Read more in the CO-LAB Final Evaluation Report – Section 9 Recommendations:

<http://colab.eun.org/final-evaluation>



6. Build skills over time



Adopt a very practical approach for teachers, delivering training in short ‘bursts’, building up confidence and skills in short steps, with ready to use examples and periods for trialling and reflection.



- Start with building the understanding of what collaborative learning is, what makes an ‘authentic collaborative activity’, the process and the assessment of collaboration, and the importance of giving and receiving feedback.
- Provide teachers with practical advice and resources supporting the implementation of collaborative learning, recognising the challenges of time. Use ready-made examples they can follow, starting with a collaborative activity within existing lesson structures and building over time. Make use of CO-LAB practical resources to support the training (translating as required).
- Establish effective peer learning in a school and between schools, so that teachers can learn without formal, external Continuous Professional Development.

- Facilitate peer exchange of experiences online (e.g. Facebook groups), or face-to-face both within and between schools.
- Include examples and reflections by teachers of how to overcome the most common challenges related to collaborative learning, such as implementing collaboration activities within the school timetable, facilitating the development of psychological group processes, ensuring that each student is involved and putting in place active assessment of individual contributions.



"It is recommended to train head teachers and teachers on how to establish collaboration, in particular effective peer learning between teachers within a school and between schools, so that teachers profit from sharing experiences even without external training."

Read more in the CO-LAB Final Evaluation Report – Section 9 Recommendations:
<http://colab.eun.org/final-evaluation>



7. Motivate teachers to experiment with collaborative learning



Incentivise teachers to take part in online collaborative learning training to increase their motivation.



- Consider making the online training blended, enabling the teachers to exchange and discuss experiences face to face, in small groups. This blended approach might encourage more people to share their experiences and can link with the 'buddy system'.
- Introduce official recognition for online training that is undertaken through open courses, acknowledging the value of open digital badges awarded by these courses.
- Support content co-creation and showcase results.
- Consider introducing small competitions and a prize for the best collaborative learning activity that is showcased.



"I find collaboration leads to enthusiasm and more motivating activities for the students and it is inspiring. Feedback from other teachers is so useful and a valuable learning experience."

CO-LAB MOOC, Teacher participant from Austria



8. Create collaboration culture within school itself



The role of the head teacher is critical to the adoption of collaborative learning across the whole school. Integrate collaboration in the broad educational strategy of the school. Position collaboration alongside 21st century skills framework as part of the innovation/development of the school.



- Think about collaboration as part of the culture of your school, encouraging collaboration across the learning community involving teachers, administrators, technical staff and parents, as well as wider stakeholders from e.g. local education authorities.
- Include collaborative learning as part of your school development plan linked to the school's vision (e.g. innovation, 21st century skills etc.), and linked to programmes such as student well-being and digital citizenship, to support the development of soft skills required in collaboration (e.g. working in groups, presenting your ideas, giving and receiving feedback).
- Develop your plan for collaborative learning alongside your technical infrastructure, learning spaces (classroom setting/arrangement), education programme to deliver the curriculum and timetables, to introduce the flexibility and space to support the phased adoption of this approach.
- Ensure dedicated time and opportunities for teacher collaboration (e.g. regular school meetings, encouraging peer learning and feedback).
- Put collaborative learning on the agenda of regular school meetings and peer learning.



Example of best practice - Head teacher in Poland


The director of a school in Poland stresses the role of school principal in creating a collaborative atmosphere, both between teachers and among other groups that make up the school community (students, parents, administrators and school staff). He emphasized the importance of all groups forming a school, not only in the didactic but also in the administrative sphere.

Presenting his experiences as a leader, he pointed out that the most important school person is the student. The teacher should follow the student and, behind the teacher, the school principal. In order to follow the student, the teacher with all his talents and limitations must be competent in many areas, not just in the subject he teaches. The school principal is open to the teachers' initiatives and innovative methods, and if he wants to evaluate the teacher's work, he does not observe the lesson, but looks at the progress and achievements of their students

Read more in the Country Report - Poland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

9. Integrate collaborative learning as part of change

Implement collaborative learning, as part of a change programme in your school.

-  • Identify and value the 'change agents', the innovators, and appoint collaborative learning leaders to inspire others. Encourage a culture of openness for innovation and sharing experiences.
- Put in place a 'buddy' or mentor system, teaming together expert teachers with those new to collaborative learning, to help beginners to structure their teaching. This mentoring approach can be applied within the school itself or facilitated within a cluster or network of schools.
- Encourage a buddy system amongst the students themselves. Get students to work as coaches/tutors for their peers, as well as to coach younger students. This approach has the added benefit of supporting and promoting well-being at school.
- Introduce a collaborative learning pilot to inspire others in the school. The pilot could be done by selecting a specific subject or by promoting an example of a cross-curricular project approach to deliver the curriculum.
- Actively support the teachers implementing collaborative learning, providing them with the space and time to introduce it, endorsing and recognising their additional efforts, speaking with the pupils to learn from their experience and showcasing their results in the school.
- Create communities of practice to share resources and best practices. This needs to be supported by appointing one reference teacher or a small collaboration team, in charge of coordinating these activities in the school.

“The next presentation showcased a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) room in a primary school, where students come to collaborate on activities ranging from Be Bots, programming drones and coding to other artistic and creative activities. The focus is on a culture where collaboration is central to successful completion of projects, and where students are free to experiment with concepts, ideas and share their thinking, knowledge and skills.”

Read more in the Country report - Ireland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>



10. Engage parents



Including collaborative learning as part of the briefing to parents on the school vision and development plan, getting them on board and supportive of the plans, explaining to them the positive impacts of these skills on student motivation and for their future work.



“CO-LAB teachers worked in the project with the Schulgemeinschaft (SGA) – which is a cooperation between students, teachers and parents. This is also what the Ministry of Education in Austria wants to encourage as part of its eEducation initiative (www.eeducation.at). The SGA provides a mean of bringing stakeholders together. Teachers and schools should become aware of that, otherwise projects do not last long and have no influence for future processes.”

Read more in the Country report - Austria: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>



11. Collaborate with other schools



Sign-up the school to join innovation networks at regional, national/central and international level (e.g. eTwinning), to support the exchange of best practices, knowledge and resources at all levels.



“Additionally, some teachers pointed out that eTwinning program is similar, because it is also related with cooperation and collaboration (eTwinning is currently quite popular in Estonia).”

Read more in the Country report - Estonia: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>



12. Implement collaborative learning in 'small' steps



Plan your implementation of collaborative learning as a series of small steps, allowing time to change (for both yourself as the teacher, as well as for your students), develop, reflect and build your confidence over time, gradually adding collaboration into the mix of your teaching practice.



- Sign-up for training (in school, with peers, online, at national/central and international level), to build your understanding of collaborative learning and to learn how to use the rubrics and example activities, to design authentic collaborative tasks and to plan for and assess collaboration as a process, not as a product.
- Reflect on what this change means for your role as a teacher and your teaching style, adapting your style to facilitate more student-centred collaboration methodologies.
- Reflect on what this change means for your students and their learning style: the development of new skills and competences to support working in groups; taking on different roles; the inter-dependence of tasks; providing feedback to their peers as part of the collaborative learning process; understanding and contributing to the assessment, both at group and individual level.
- Break down the implementation of collaborative learning methodologies into a series of manageable, small and practical steps. Start with simple tasks, moving up the continuum over time.



"You have to help teachers reimagine how they teach their subjects... supporting teachers in their changing identity...work across subjects...think of it, as being teachers of students, not just the subject."

Read more in the Country report: [Ireland http://colab.eun.org/country-reports](http://colab.eun.org/country-reports)

"You are not just changing the lesson plan, you are changing the process of learning [...] Team-teaching is very helpful to support this change, with teachers acting as coaches to other teachers...peer feedback is very important"

Read more in the Country report - Austria: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

"Two years ago a group of different teachers decided to create a Beyond Learning classroom, based in multi-disciplinary projects and collaboration between teachers from different subjects, local organisations, and teachers from other countries. It gave us the know-how to implement different collaboration work between peers and now we are involving students also. We feel a great difference among teachers, there's a better collaboration environment and students are starting to benefit from this way of work."

CO-LAB MOOC Teacher participant, Portugal



13. Focus on the process



Think of collaborative learning as a 'process' and not a 'product' and, when planning a collaborative learning activity, include the assessment component.



- Involve your students in what you do, discuss the introduction of new collaborative learning methods and the change in their roles, and work with them on the rubrics to design and to assess learning activities.
- Teach them how to create their learning portfolios to capture the evidence of the collaborative learning process.
- Develop their skills of working in groups with different roles.



"You have to put the learning of the student in the centre [...] Social competences including collaboration, are amongst the key competences they need [...] Use collaborative learning to define the environment for the student to learn."

Read more in the Country report - Belgium-Flanders: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

"As teachers became more confident in collaborative learning methodologies, their approach to assessment changed. Many of the teachers involved were used to assessing product rather than process. During this project, as teachers applied the collaborative learning rubric to tasks, they came to realise that for assessment to be valid it must include measurement of collaboration as well as knowledge. The teachers expanded the assessment of cognitive domains to include metacognition, and also included assessment within the affective domain; this was the first time many of these teachers had considered metacognition or the affective domain in assessment."

Read more in the Country report - Ireland: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

"Here, in Portugal, we are experiencing a new program called MECPA, where we review the student's results from the former year and results from standardised tests and diagnostics to establish the skills that we have to reinforce. Teachers meet to establish plans to lead students into satisfying those areas so they can achieve the goals that are designed for them [...] Teachers' collaboration and integration is pivotal in the process."

CO-LAB MOOC, Teacher participant, Portugal



14. Team up with other teachers



Team-up with a 'buddy' and peers to help and support you with the planning, implementation and assessment of collaborative learning, including peer review and reflection.



- Consider team-teaching or working with other teachers on cross-subject projects.
- Access and use collaborative learning resources available to support you: learning scenarios, rubrics, practical examples that you can adapt and pilot to help you with the change³.
- Learn from your peers' practical ways to help implement and assess collaboration.



Practical implementation advice from collaborative learning expert teacher in Austria

"Put up a sign on classrooms engaged in collaborative learning activities 'noise is OK, today we do collaborative learning' [...] Turn off the school bell, during collaboration periods [...] Use corridors, library, school open spaces and encourage their use to support collaborative learning activities."

Read more in the Country report – Austria: <http://colab.eun.org/country-reports>

3. CO-LAB learning resources - <http://colab.eun.org/co-lab-tools>

Practical implementation advice from collaborative learning expert teacher in Belgium

"It works best when time is actually built into the working week where genuine collaboration can take place. This provides opportunities to plan, assess and evaluate together. It challenges old thinking and really encourages teachers to provide the best learning experiences for children at all times. In my current school, I collaborate vertically with the teachers in my section, and horizontally with the teachers who teach at the same stage as me. This is always positive: even when ideas are challenged and when ideas clash. As long as we all focus on what is best for the children, then we work well."

CO-LAB MOOC teacher participant from Belgium

Practical implementation advice from collaborative learning expert teacher in Poland

"The rubric method determines the activity of the students. Determine whether pupils work in pairs or groups, whether they share responsibility or make substantive decisions about whether their work is interdependent. Answering these questions, the teacher can determine the level of student interaction. I think this is an interesting proposition, especially for young teachers. It can help them to prepare interesting and valuable lessons. I was also interested in the interesting form of learning scenario divided into different phases of group work (dream, explore, map, create, ask, process, show). This is a valuable tool that can help you plan your activities in a clear way."

CO-LAB workshop participant from Poland

Assessment of collaborative learning – practical advice from Professor Deidre Butler (DCU) during Q&A with participants of the CO-LAB online training course (MOOC), first edition

Watch the video online : www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOArqjUhqQk

"Assessment is only fair providing the people know what they are assessing and why. Only if the students have the ability and skills to peer assess, is peer assessment a valid measure. Gathering evidence is important, through e.g. building a portfolio"

“Assessing different levels of social/interpersonal skills in the group is difficult. You have to monitor closely, focusing on a different group at different times of the day, and, to be systematic, going round all groups. Try students in different groups and see how they interact and enable lots of different ways to interact.”

“You have to be very conscious of the special needs of your students. For example, if giving feedback, you could do a screen grab and leave a voice recording, to assess the level of understanding. It should be up to the learner to give feedback in the way they want, to use the technology to support a variety of different ways.”

“Use the 21CLD rubrics to create and assess your collaborative learning tasks. Did you have an opportunity to make substantive decisions? If so, what were they? Think of the content you are engaging with. What way did I engage with that content? Did my understanding increase through collaboration and in what way? You can use the same rubric for each type. Students have to be prepared in advance for peer-assessment/self-assessment. You need to give them skills such as feedback.”



References

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Racz B. et al., October 2017

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CO-LAB Final Evaluation and Recommendations Report

IBE, January 2018

<http://colab.eun.org/final-evaluation>

CO-LAB Code of Conduct for Effective Collaboration in European Projects

Educonsult, January 2018

<http://colab.eun.org/projects-collaboration>

CO-LAB learning resources

<http://colab.eun.org/co-lab-tools>

21CLD Learning Activity Rubrics

Microsoft Partners in Learning, 21st Century Learning Design, 2012

<https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/ITL-Research>



CO-LAB

CO-LAB (<http://colab.eun.org/>) is a forward-looking project co-funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme, focused on making collaborative teaching and learning a reality in the classroom.

Being able to collaborate effectively is a valuable 21st century skill, yet teaching about or through collaboration remains rare in schools because of a lack of understanding of what real collaboration in an educational setting means, and because existing policy conditions do not always enable it to flourish.

Practitioners and policy makers need a dedicated space and time to experiment and better understand what collaborative teaching and learning means in terms of policy and practice.

CO-LAB provides these stakeholders with that opportunity.

For more information, please contact info@eun.org

CO-LAB Partners



Network of 34 European
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