

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

### “Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn” Podcast Episode 23 – November 2019

Title: *Practical Approaches to Collaborative Learning*

#### SPEAKERS

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#### FULL TRANSCRIPT

##### *INTRODUCTION:*

**KM:** One thing that has always stuck out to me is that people think ‘if I’m talking I must be collaborating,’ and that’s just not true. There are things that make a situation collaborative and then things that make a situation not collaborative. Just parceling out work that’s not collaboration that is sharing.

**JO:** Henry Ford is attributed with a quote that says, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." And so, it truly is that co-laboring like we've been saying.

**JA:** Welcome to the “Ayers Lunch & Learn” podcast presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation at Lipscomb University, where we’re all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by Ed South which promotes interest in 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 Practical Approaches to 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 for the Ayers Institute. Participating in the conversation today is Dr. Karen Marklein, Program Director, and Julia Osteen, Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute.

Would you like to introduce yourself?

**JO:** Yes, thank you Josephine. I'm Julia Osteen. As Josephine said, the Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute, and this topic is really important to me, as I worked in K-12 for 27 years and then now have been in higher education at Lipscomb University for six years. I have seen the importance of collaboration to our work. And so, there's a lot of information that I have learned recently and have had the opportunity of sharing at various conferences around. And I'm super excited to have this conversation today.

**KM:** Thank you. I'm Dr. Karen Marklein and I'm a Program Director at the Ayers Institute and collaboration is a topic that is near and dear to me, as a K-12 teacher for 19 years, I taught in a high school English classroom and struggled to get my students to collaborate in authentic ways. And I've seen the importance of it in my higher education classes, as well, as I work with our master's level candidates in their education classes. And then of course serving as a coach, I have seen the importance of just what

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are we communicating, when we say collaboration and how do we make sure that people are doing it in ways that are effective?

*EPISODE BODY:*

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

**JO:** Thank you. So, I think as we start Karen, and we talk about collaboration; one of the first things that comes to my mind is the fact that a lot of different people mean a lot of different things when they actually use that word. So, as we consider what collaboration means, I think one of the first things for me is that collaboration is more than just sharing.

**KM:** Absolutely, I think one thing that has always stuck out to me is that people think if I'm talking I must be collaborating, and that's just not true. There are things that make a situation collaborative, and then things that make a situation not collaborative. And so, as you said, just parceling out work and saying you do this part. I'll do this part. You do that part. That's not 'collaboration'; that is— in a lot of ways— 'sharing.' And so, we need to move beyond that in our own practice, but also guide students to move beyond that as well.

I think also it goes back to Rick DuFour's idea of the difference between collaboration and co-blaboration. And I do wish that I had thought of that myself but I have to give Rick DuFour credit for that idea. But it is so true, we've all been to co-blaborative meetings before and we've left those meetings extremely dissatisfied with what happened, maybe even frustrated by the waste of time and the lack of an outcome from the meetings. And so, we have to be very careful when we're calling something a collaborative assignment or a collaborative meeting, that we really know what we mean when we say that.

**JO:** Absolutely. And I think another piece of this is that people often will indicate that okay we're going to collaborate, and this will be so much easier. And when you're truly collaborating, it really isn't easier, because we're working hard. And we're having to consider what other people are saying and the value of those things. And how does that mesh with my own thoughts. And all that's really hard work.

**KM:** So, when I think about just the root words, you know, when you think about collaboration versus co-blaboration the root word of collaboration is labor. And we do miscommunicate to students when we say, "Oh we're going to collaborate. This is going to be easier." We're miscommunicating that collaboration makes things easier. As you said it's hard, because I do have to take in other people's ideas and then I have to combine them with my own ideas; and we have to come up with something that sounds like it's one voice, when really it could be three or four voices. So, it's really hard to do that, but it always results in excellence the end product is always better if it has been truly collaborated on.

**JO:** Because it is more excellent then there's also research that really shows us that collaboration improves learning outcomes. So, we're going to end up not only with a better product, but we're also all going to walk away from that experience with a higher level or a deeper level of learning.

**KM:** The diversity of voice, the stretching of expertise, we're going to talk more about that in a few minutes. But you know the strongest piece of evidence for me is John Hattie's evidence on teacher efficacy and if collaboration improves teacher practice then it makes perfect sense that it also would improve a student's ability to complete an assignment to mastery.

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And so, as we set the stage for the rest of this conversation, we really need to be sure that we have a strict definition of what collaboration means. It's more than sharing; it's more than the division of labor; it really is the blending of voices so that the end product is a better product.

**JO:** And it's that stepping away from isolation, it is coming together to work, and really staying together to work. You know Henry Ford is attributed with a quote that says "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." And so, it truly is that co-laboring like we've been saying, and having that definition is so important.

So, now that we've been clear on what we're meaning regarding collaboration, let's talk about some approaches to how we can set students up to be successful with collaboration.

**KM:** Well for me I think the first step in this process is to really teach students what we mean when we say it. So, this definition is for our conversation today, but it's also as you're talking to your students. What do you mean by collaboration? And to teach them the skills that they need to do that. We say okay, we want you to work together. Well what does that mean? What does that sound like? What does that look like? What's my role in this working together?

And one missing ingredient in collaboration is we often just assume that students know how to listen to one another, they know how to value each other's voices. And so, the first step is how do we, how are we setting students up to listen to each other effectively?

**JO:** Yes, and I think, you know, this is something that we assume, especially when we have older kids in our classes sitting in our classes. We think oh well they they've already learned how to listen. So, I don't need to teach them that, but I think that's just a continual thing. I know even the people that we've coached, we have really worked on was what does it mean to truly listen to someone. And we've talked about suppressing unproductive patterns of listening. So, as I'm listening to you, I don't need to be sitting there thinking about now what's my next point going to be or how am I going to respond. So, rather than listening to respond, I'm truly listening to you and taking in everything that you're saying to understand your point of view, your perspective, and your thoughts about this.

**KM:** Yes. I also think as we're working with teachers who have older students there is an assumption that I don't need to teach them how to do that that they just bring that skill set with them. But then the teachers get really frustrated with the outcome that they're seeing in the— in either the quality of the work, or the time it takes to get the work completed. And so, my question to those teachers is always, you know, how have you set your students up to do that to really listen to each other and to value what the other students are saying?

**JO:** Yes. So, as we think about those skills that they need, and we need to not make assumptions that they already come with those skills.

Another way that we really can set our students up for effective collaboration is to embed the idea of collaboration within everything that we provide them, all of our course materials, whatever that looks like for your teachers particular age group that they're working with and, in doing so, we set up the expectation for collaboration.

So, one example I wanted to give with this is when you have students coming together and they are working on writing together, setting from the start that their end product needs to sound like one voice so they have this understanding. It's not that I can piecemeal this section, you do that section, I do this section, and let's bring it together. But we have to come together and we have to work through that

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writing together so that it becomes our voice instead of just one person's voice in there. So, it needs to be unified in that writing. So, really setting that expectation from the beginning, helps students to understand that the collaborative piece is very important.

**KM:** Yes, and from my English teacher perspective, what a great lesson about point of view, and how point of view needs to be unified throughout. So, you could even embed the idea of point of view with in a collaborative assignment, so that there is one point of view from the beginning to the end.

**JO:** So, another thing that comes to my mind, when we talk about embedding the idea of collaboration is including different ways for students to communicate. And one of the things that's really important to me about this is that we want to get to really rich discussions, we want our students to have those really deep discussions regarding the content. But those rich discussions are going to happen when we really set up the stage for: "You're going to debate this or you're going, we're going to do different ideas of allowing for student voice. We'll have presentations. There may be student led discussion groups. There may be seminars that students conduct." So, really adding in those opportunities to the overall course design allows our students to understand that this is super important.

**KM:** Yes. And as you set them up for these very specific ways to collaborate: so, we're collaborating on debate; we're collaborating on a presentation; we're collaborating on some written product– they are getting more and more comfortable with sharing their own voice. And then you can see that the quality of the work is just increasing with each collaborative assignment. And so, they become more willing to participate, they become more open to participation and then everyone is improving, because everyone's working at that level of excellence.

The last really important part of how to set your students up to effectively collaborate is to ask yourself: How am I modeling collaboration to my students? We often say you know we want students to collaborate, but what are we doing to show them that we are really doing that, too.

And you know especially as we're co-teaching so often in schools, we're working within collaborative teacher teams, grade level teams, content teams. How can we take those experiences and then model for our students how we are collaborating with our colleagues within a school? And we can't expect students to do it if we don't really know how to do it effectively as well.

**JO:** I think that's a really important point. I know that in my career I've been in schools where collaboration was the norm in the culture. And so, I really understood, because it was just the norm. I understood the importance of it and how that how to go about that. But I think a lot of teachers may not be in that type of culture. And so, sometimes it's incumbent upon the teacher to understand: what do I need to do to encourage that collaboration with my colleagues? And how can that then model for my students?

A piece of this is: how am I going to answer to other people in the group? It's important that we come together as a group. But it's also important that they know they can count on me.

**KM:** Absolutely.

*CONCLUSION:*

**JA:** Thank you Karen and Julia.

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In our conversation today, Karen and Julia shared a definition for collaboration and some practical approaches to set students up to collaborate effectively. 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 we on the road to effective collaboration and how do we know?"

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.

We hope your appetite for bite sized portions of professional learning was satisfied with his podcast presentation sponsored by Ed South. Look for other episodes of the Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn and other professional learning podcasts at <http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org>.