Fostering a Collaborative Learning Environment
Teacher leader intentionally fosters a collaborative learning culture among teachers to improve instruction.

**Key Method**
Teacher leader fosters a collaborative learning culture by building interpersonal relationships with teachers and designing opportunities and sustainable structures for teachers to effectively collaborate to improve student learning.

**Method Components**

**Components of fostering a collaborative learning culture for teachers:**

1. Establish collaborative learning cultures by building interpersonal relationships.
   - Nurture relationships. Coaching is all about growing relationships.
     - Get to know teachers on a personal level. Talk informally with teachers about their interests and achievements both in and outside of school.
     - Greet teachers by name on and off campus.
     - Plan inclusion/team-building activities at the start of each session.

2. Improve instruction through designing opportunities and sustainable structures.
   - Start with a shared vision. Guide group to develop a shared understanding of your role as the teacher leader, the school’s vision, and how your work fits into that vision.
   - Create opportunities for problem-solving together as a team (or various teams). Consistently and frequently seek input from teachers on authentic problems facing the school.
   - Provide a safe space for people to openly share. This can be accomplished by:
     - Establishing norms.
     - Sticking to protocols and time boundaries
     - Facilitating in a purposeful way.
     - Developing small groups (3-6 people).
     - Creating a feedback loop that offers teachers choice in their learning, values the input of participants, and informs your practice.
   - Build in time for reflection (lots of it!) as well as next steps.
   - Facilitate learning walks and make sure all participants are clear that the purpose is to improve the walker’s practice and not that of the teacher being observed. It is also helpful to have a protocol in place for the pre- and post-briefings. See the Resources section.
   - Provide equal access to information and resources for all teachers. This will stimulate rich discussion as they seek to improve instruction.
   - Ensure there is a system in place for teachers to hold each other accountable for their action items.

**Supporting Research**

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The authors suggest that the results provide preliminary support for efforts to improve student achievement by providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and professional development. The authors also discuss the need for more research on the effects of different types of collaborative practices using more representative samples.

Teacher collaboration is an essential element of substantive school change which principals have responsibility for cultivating. As such, it is becoming increasingly important for school leaders to employ models of supervision that focus on the performance and improvement of collective teacher behavior. In this article, the authors present a field-tested, action-research leadership framework for evaluating the quality and improving the performance of teacher collaboration at the secondary school level.

One hundred twenty-one teachers from nine junior high schools in one town in Israel responded to the teacher efficacy questionnaire, as well as to a questionnaire assessing the extent to which teachers collaborated with one another. Results indicated that teachers who implemented cooperative learning most frequently also expressed a higher level of efficacy in promoting the learning of slow students than did other teachers. Teachers who reported a higher level of collaboration with colleagues also expressed a higher level of general teaching efficacy and of efficacy in enhancing students’ social relations than did teachers who reported a low level of collaboration with colleagues.

Talbert lists key conditions that enable professional learning communities to flourish: they must establish norms of collaboration, focus on students and their academic performance, grant access to a wide range of learning resources for individuals and the group, and demonstrate mutual accountability for student growth and success. Talbert goes on to say that creating these conditions is the most persistent challenge facing systems trying to build PLCs, especially in systems lacking in material resources, and works through the particular challenges of achieving each condition.

Resources

- Learning Walks: A Professional Learning Tool

- Developing Norms
  http://www.mcsk12.net/schools/hickoryridge.mi/site/documents/plcforms.pdf
“Community Means More Than Teamwork” by Ann Lieberman
http://learningforward.org/docs/jsd/communitymeansmorethanteam.pdf?sfvrsn=0

Inclusion activity samples by Thinking Collaborative

Teacher Collaboration Improvement Framework
http://bul.sagepub.com/content/92/2/133.full.pdf+html

Google’s Project Aristotle: Cracking the Code of Successful Teams

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria
To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1 and 3 and a “Yes” for Part 2.

Part 1. Overview question
(300-word limit)

- Please discuss the collaborative learning culture you fostered, including the details of what considerations were made to engage teachers in this culture.
  - **Passing:** Activity description is clear, with sufficient detail to know what the teacher leader did to foster a collaborative learning culture.

Part 2. Work examples/artifacts
Please submit several artifacts that were created to foster a collaborative learning culture (such as links to writing, audio, images, video, or other products) including such items as:
- Written or recorded reflections from teachers
- Agendas of professional learning sessions
- Video footage of a protocol being utilized
- A communication log, including notes from meetings with teachers

Your artifact will be assessed on the following rubric. You must earn a “Yes” on this portion of the submission in order to earn the micro-credential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence suggests that the teacher leader leverages strong relationships built with teachers in order to positively impact student learning.</td>
<td>Evidence suggests teachers may feel somewhat connected to the teacher leader and school culture, but the connection does not affect the learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Evidence suggests teachers feel disconnected from the teacher leader and school culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence shows that teacher instruction improved as a result of the collaborative learning opportunities.</td>
<td>Evidence does not show that teacher instruction improved as a result of the collaborative learning opportunities.</td>
<td>There is no evidence to show that teacher instruction improved as a result of the collaborative learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence demonstrates consistent, varied, and meaningful interactions with teachers.</td>
<td>Evidence demonstrates consistent and varied interactions with teachers.</td>
<td>Evidence does not demonstrate consistent interactions with teachers.</td>
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Part 3. Reflection
(300-word limit)
Provide a reflection on your experience, using the following questions as guidance:

- How is this collaborative culture of learning among adults impacting the school culture? What is the impact of purposeful and consistent adult learning on instruction?
- Moving forward, how might your practice change as a result of what you have learned?
  - **Passing**: Teacher leader clearly states how specific interactions have affected the school culture and student learning. Teacher leaders also clearly indicates how building relationships with teachers will shape his/her future practice.