

keeping learning going...

how can we foster ongoing collaboration and peer learning?



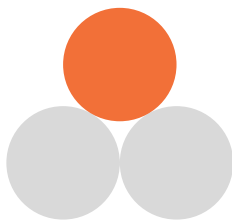
why is this important?

Teachers know how important it is to co-create resources and work together in the interests of their students. Just as all students are different, using the different perspectives that teachers all bring to a project is key to creating something that is really engaging and inspiring for students. The past few weeks have taught us all how powerful online collaboration can be. We've all started to use new online tools and we've seen that they can facilitate amazingly creative and innovative work.

Of course, face to face meetings are great and we miss chatting to our colleagues and co-designing on butchers paper and whiteboards. Or maybe that didn't happen as often as you'd have liked? Now that we're stuck at home our time might be more flexible and we probably have access to collaboration tools online. Most of us at the moment are working hard creating remote student resources that are keeping the learning going - but raise your gaze a little and you'll discover that you're experimenting with innovative platforms that we can continue to use to collaborate and co-create in the future.

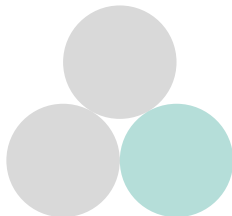
This toolkit will provide some practical advice about how we can continue to collaborate with each other and explore peer learning opportunities.

key ideas in this kit



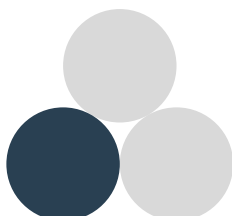
effective collaboration

Using effective tools and are key to supporting the collaboration processes we've always run.



peer and professional learning

Developing peer and professional learning processes to support collegial work now.



future ready

Planning an exit strategy so that we can take our remote learning into schools once the gates re-open.

effective collaboration

reflection

We all know the benefits of working closely with a colleague - even if it's as simple as getting them to read through a learning resource we've designed: working together makes things better. So while we're isolated, how can we make sure that we continue to work together in a way that benefits our students? And in this time of isolation, how can we up-skill ourselves in technology and techniques that will improve our collaborative ability?

Take a moment to reflect on how you were collaborating with colleagues before the switch to remote learning happened.

tools

So how can we ensure that we are effectively collaborating?

- **Promote ongoing collaboration.** It's easy to think of collaborating on a specific topic or subject, but it's also important to establish a culture of collaboration where we are sharing our daily and weekly goals and supporting each other. If you're a team leader, make your expectations of collaboration clear. Even if you're not a team leader, tell your colleagues that you want to work together regularly! Schedule daily and weekly check-ins. Share with your team what you want to achieve each day on a messaging service you're using and schedule a daily collaboration time where teams can discuss goals and work towards them together. You could also share your weekly goals on a Monday morning as a team and then report back on progress on a Friday afternoon. These calls are great opportunities to offer support if there's an area you're strong on. Value everyone's opinion. Collaboration will occur when people feel like what they say matters to the team and influences decisions.

effective collaboration

- **Use effective online platforms.** There are some brilliant platforms that teams can use to enhance their collaboration. Here are a couple that we find effective. To keep it simple, use Google Docs and Google Hangouts. Once you've got a Gmail account, these are all free to use. They enable you to co-edit documents (in real time) and to chat about it in a Google Hangout. If you have the Office 365 suite, you can also explore the "comments" functions in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. Software that supports online meetings like Zoom and Microsoft TEAMS are great. Most have some sort of whiteboard function, allow you to share documents and chat in text or voice with colleagues on the call. You'll probably already be using these with students! Trello is a great platform for project management, allowing colleagues to share clear goals and targets as teams and individuals, and to work on them collaboratively. If you're a leader, you'll be able to jump into Trello boards that are shared with you to offer encouragement, words of wisdom and to track the progress of various projects. Communication platforms like WhatsApp and Slack are adding extra functionality all the time enabling people to communicate goals, link with other software and communicate in specific groups. Use of these platforms to communicate helps avoid long email threads. No one wants to search through 37 emails to find the attachment Eduardo shared three days ago.

action

Talk with your team - even if you're not the leader - about the benefits of collaboration and how we all have to ensure ongoing collaboration during this time of isolation. Perhaps you could also investigate some online platforms that make collaboration easier and trial the use of these with a small team before you suggest everyone jumps on board. That way, you can iron out the bumps!

peer and professional learning

reflection

Despite all the craziness in the world at the moment, keeping the professional learning going is important, too! There's a lot we can learn from our peers, and the shift in workflow creates opportunities to connect and learn from the amazing collective genius we have at our schools. There's also loads of good professional learning out there, much of it free!

Reflect on the professional skills and knowledge that you would like to develop over the next few months. Perhaps some areas (like learning technologies) have made themselves clear to you in the past few weeks, or perhaps there are other areas you've always wanted to learn more about.

tools

How can we remotely develop effective peer and professional learning?

- **Peer Learning:** There are staff at your school who have amazing knowledge and skills. There are also staff with really practical skills in technology needed for the current challenges. You might like to set up a regular staff video call on Tuesday mornings - Techie Brekkie - where a skilled teacher can answer questions and present specific learning points on online and remote learning. Organise TED style talks where staff present webinars on topics they love and that could benefit the wider school community. Running these as an online TeachMeet could help you turn these talks into opportunities for social connections, too, and are a great way of building a positive staff culture. One of the benefits of online platforms is that they allow for teaching colleagues to join our classes, too! Invite your team to give you feedback about your teaching online, and in turn, support your colleagues by joining their classes and giving them feedback. It's easy to get obsessed with the technological solutions, but we all know great learning is more than the platform it's hosted on and expertly running breakout groups online. Set up a Teaching and Learning Group where you can share ideas and resources that promote great learning, whatever the format!

peer and professional learning

- **Professional Learning:** There is so much out there that you can access in terms of professional learning. Many organisations are even offering free courses and programs. Set yourself some personal learning targets. What would you like to learn during lockdown? What would you like to read? Once you have your goals in mind, hunt out the resources on platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn. Harvard University offers some great short courses in leadership and management if you're interested in gaining that sort of skill during lockdown, as do many Australian universities. If the university courses are going to blow your budget, lots of organisations and charities are running professional learning for a fraction of the price. If you haven't already, become a member of your professional organisation or union and look out on their websites for information about professional learning and courses they are offering. It's also worth checking out the websites of the Association of American Educators and the Chartered College of Teaching (UK) as they are offering a variety of webinars, many of them free. Check out the offerings of well-known online learning websites like Udemy which has great courses on just about anything, from how to make your own electronic music to expert social media marketing for your side-hustle making jewellery.



action

Consider working with leaders in your school to establish a scheduled peer learning program with regular opt-in opportunities for people to connect and learn together.

future ready

reflection

Through this period of instability and insecurity you will probably learn lots about how to effectively collaborate. You'll learn about online platforms and tools - but you'll also learn more about why collaboration is important and how much better co-authored work actually is. It's important that this professional learning is embedded in the fabric of your school. This time of growth can't just be discarded when things "go back to normal." Use it to grow and develop even when schools open their gates again.

Reflect on what you're learning and how that may be useful even when schools return to face-to-face teaching and learning.

tools

How can we use this time of growth to create a more effective and positive culture of collaboration in the future?

- **Communication tools:** What communication tools can you discover during lockdown that may be effective when we return to a more traditional schooling environment? You need to be constantly evaluating and analysing these tools and thinking about how they might work in the future. Are there online or technological solutions that you could continue to use once this period of isolation finishes? Perhaps the way you learn to communicate on WhatsApp or Slack could continue?
- **Valuing peer learning:** Once you've experienced the amazing expertise and knowledge of your colleagues you'll definitely want to continue catalysing your collective genius. Consider the processes and structures you have in place to share your knowledge and to collaborate. You might want to continue the regular staff online TED Talks or other awesome systems you've developed to share staff expertise. Start thinking now about how these can continue post-lockdown!

future ready

- **Assess the tools you've been using.** We all know how brilliant learning is when staff collaborate and co-design. It's the same with students. Assess the successes (and failures) of the collaboration tools you've used with fellow staff and with students; what's worked well, and how could they be improved? Try and gather some data to help you make these calls. Survey students and staff, and ask them questions that get to the heart of whether or not collaborative learning was effective. As you consider the move back to physical classrooms, run a simple 'Stop, Start, Keep' activity as a team, looking at all of the strengths and challenges of the new approaches you innovated.
- **Create Processes:** Create processes for team members to report back on their professional learning, and model this! Even if you took a drawing class on Udemy - share your successes! Tell your colleagues about the experience of learning and the key take-homes for you, and then encourage others to follow suit!

action

It's important to establish clear assessment tools and diagnostics to analyse the successes and failures of all the collaboration strategies you put into place during lockdown. Develop these now and use them to make sure that the strategies and tools you've used during lockdown keep working for your team in the future.

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the EC crew



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