

Working collaboratively and respectfully with management, colleagues, parents and guardians, technicians and other members of the education community

Principal VI

Principal's basis

The concept of collaboration has been gaining strength since the beginning of the 20th century to become a trend in the 21st century. The reason lies in recognizing the richness that collaborative work provides compared to individual work (cf. Marjan Laal, MD.; Mozghan Laal, Msc., 2011). Current society requires that the problems and emerging topics are approached from interdisciplinary angles, where different points of views can converge in order to give a solution or a response to highly complex problems. Now, what do we understand by collaboration?

From the distinction between collaborative learning and cooperative learning, some authors have established some differentiation that may prove relevant. Cooperation consists of a type of interaction among people that, working together, would have as an end purpose the achievement of a goal or product (cf. Panitz, 1999). Collaboration would distinguish itself from cooperation by adding an essential element: the construction or creation of consensus through cooperation, respect, responsibility and reciprocity. Thus, collaboration would amount to “[...] a philosophy of interaction and a personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, which include learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers” (Panitz, 1999, p.3).

In this context, collaboration involves knowing how to interact with others and knowing how to work and to learn with them. It involves respecting the members of the group and valuing their research and contributions. Coherent with this line of thought, Johnson et al. (1990) identify 5 basic elements of collaborative learning: positive interdependence -the members of the team must trust one another in order to achieve the objectives-, individual and group responsibility -they are all responsible for their part and for the whole work-, considerable and stimulating interaction -the members of the team must help and encourage one another-, social abilities -such as trust, leadership, decision making, communication and

conflict management- and the groups' self-evaluation -the members of the group constantly evaluate the work done on the basis of the goals set. In this sense, collaborative work, although it implies working together to solve a problem or to reach a given goal, it also implies that the participants confront “challenges both social and emotional as they listen to different perspectives, and are required to articulate and defend their ideas” (Marjan Laal, MD.; Mozghan Laal, MSc., 2011, p.491).

Respect, for its part, is a concept broadly used in everyday language and with multiple meanings. In 1977, Darwall distinguished two ways of understanding respect: appraisal respect and recognition respect. Appraisal respect consists in an attitude of positive appraisal towards a person for having a number of characteristics or qualities. As such, it is only presented to certain people -to those who count with those attributes, which can be certain personal qualities, or else behaviors which can be considered notable or meritorious. Recognition respect, for its part, and in line with Kantian ethics, consists in the disposition to take people seriously and to appropriately weigh, in our own decisions or deliberations, the fact that it is people we are dealing with, therefore, they need a certain type of consideration simply on the grounds of being people. As such, it is categorical, given that it does not establish differentiation among individuals. They all deserve and require respectful treatment. This perspective coincides with what was suggested by Trujillo and collaborators (2013), who assert that respect for others implies “a dignified treatment of your neighbor”.

In synthesis, respect consists in the recognition, in the attention and the consideration I have towards others, in particular when it comes to the treatment, the appraisal and dignity that the other has just for being a person. According to this, it is not possible to establish a gradation or to set levels of respect, inasmuch as respect is not subject to personal qualities or attributes nor to the bonds or the emotional ties that we have to others. Hence the gravity of the lack of respect. Not respecting others is to deny their dignity. “The lack of respect, though less aggressive than a direct insult, can adopt an equally hurtful form. With lack of respect, we are not insulting others, but neither are we acknowledging them; we simply do not see others as integral human beings whose presence matters” (Sennett, 2003, p.17).

Both collaborative work and respect gain relevance if we remember that each educational institution is formed by an education community, composed of all the actors that take part in it: management, parents, students, technicians and other members. They all, without exception, fulfill a relevant role in the training and learning of the students, and in the promotion of their well-being. From there, it is relevant that each member of the education community feels recognized as such and that everyone's participation is encouraged. Thus, what is particular about an education community, relates to what Sergiovanni (1994) denominates “community of meaning”, which involves the creation of strong links among the actors through the commitment towards common goals, ideas and/or values. The construction of an education community is not generated from a mere contractual relationship, but requires important affective relationships, and the sharing of meaning and values. For this, collaborative work becomes fundamental, one that promotes dialog,

reflection, that appreciates the contributions of each, and keeps an attitude of respect and an open approach to changes and proposals.

Relevance of this principal

On an educational policies level, both the concept of collaboration and that of respect have been gaining strength and prominence. This becomes clear in different documents and in diverse educational proposals that prevail to this day.

The concept of collaboration has a particular relevance today, since it is considered one of the skills for the 21st century. The *Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21)* framework, groups the skills for the 21st century into 3 categories¹, being the best known those which refer to learning and innovation skills, usually known as the “4Cs”: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration. Under the *New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL)*² framework, and under the direction of Michael Fullan, “6Cs” are established: creativity, communication, citizenship, critical thinking, character and collaboration. For its part, the University of Cambridge established, in the year 2020, 6 competencies for life (*Cambridge Life Competencies*)³. Among them, we also find collaboration.

On a national level, the Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education (FGT PE) also recognizes the relevance of collaboration. In relation to the teacher's role, it indicates that “collaboration with different actors of the community allows to create a professionalizing institutional environment conducive to well-being; furthermore, it enriches the context and favors the diminution of the barriers to learning” (p.55).

The Standards for the Teaching Profession Framework for Good Teaching (STP-FGT), for its part, highlights the concept of collaboration, recognizing that the collaboration among different actors and support networks (internal and external to the educational establishment) is fundamental to be able to respond to the “[...] needs of the students and to address early, in close connection to the families and organizations around, risk factors that lead towards educational exclusion and health problems, both physical and emotional” (p. 14). It also points out the importance of collaboration with peers and other professionals in order to be able to adjust evaluation strategies, diversify the learning and evaluation strategies; and to articulate the different types of knowledge. Furthermore, it portrays the relevance of the teacher's commitment to and bond with the school community, pointing out that this is manifested “through participation in initiatives of development and

1 Learning and innovation skills; Skills linked to information, media and technology: and life and career skills.

2 See <https://deep-learning.global>

3 These competencies are: creative thinking, critical thinking, learning to learn, communication, collaboration and social responsibility.

continuous improvement of the educational establishment, assuming a shared responsibility with the students, teachers, managers, families and parents for the achievement of the institutional goals” (STP-FGT, p.17). This way it is recognized that the task or educational role involves a joint effort with the community for the achievement of goals or objectives and, mainly, for the development of abilities and skills that make this work possible. As such, collaboration arises today as a key concept in the educational field.

The importance of respect, for its part, becomes also explicitly evident in the FGT PE and the STP-FGT. Both documents recognize it as a value, as it contributes to an harmonious coexistence and to the construction of a friendly environment, in which the differences and rhythms of each student are appreciated, in which they are treated with dignity, in which trust relationships and interactions are generated, in which every student is attentively and actively listened to, in which consideration and mutual appraisal is promoted, and in the creation of a culture that safeguards the respect among students and among students and adults. Being a citizen and a world citizen requires certain ways of moving around and of carrying oneself in different scenarios. This involves, in the first place, appreciating and respecting diversity, watching over the safeguarding of human rights and of people's dignity. But respect is also manifested in the interactions that are generated within the community, in the communication and the treatment that occurs both inside and outside the classroom.

This way, current educational policies assume the challenge of educating in collaboration and respect, taking as a basis the fact that diversity constitutes a wealth that is necessary to recognize and appreciate. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to work collaboratively and respectfully with management, colleagues, parents and guardians, technicians and other members of the education community?

How to work collaboratively and respectfully with management, colleagues, parents and guardians, technicians and other members of the education community:

- **Look after the community's relationships contributing to and promoting a positive work environment:** it means to be concerned about and taking charge of the relationships with others. A positive work environment must be constructed and is only possible provided each member of the community cultivates their interpersonal skills daily. Establishing healthy professional relationships, based on respect, trust, generosity, the promotion of well-being and of high expectations contributes to the establishment of a pleasant work environment and promotes a culture in which the other is relevant.
- **Establishing affective interactions:** affective interactions are not limited to the achievement of goals or results. They are based on a way of communicating and relating to one another that contributes to maintaining healthy environments and relationships

and that allows to overcome the inherent difficulties in human relations. They are established through attentive, active and respectful listening; and through empathy and the ability to put yourself in others' shoes. It is about establishing ways of working together, which involve commitment and support.

- **Actively contributing with the education community members participating in development and continuous improvement initiatives:** it involves inserting yourself and knowing the community in which you work, with the aim to identify needs, problems and areas or spheres of improvement. This allows to visualize collaborative work opportunities, assuming and promoting different roles, taking responsibility for their own contributions as well as for the joint work.
- **Adhering to the Institutional Educational Project and actively participating in the activities that pursue its attainment:** inserting yourself in an education community involves a commitment with said institution. This means working towards the same principles, purposes and goals, respecting and promoting its values.
- **Appreciating the education community members' opinion, while respecting diversity:** appreciating and respecting diversity involves recognizing diversity's wealth and the contribution it means for the community. A different opinion or look at things opens possibilities for understanding and for problematizing over themes that could be debatable or controversial. This invites us to conversation, to argumentation, to the evaluation of diverse perspectives, which enriches interpersonal relationships and gives greater support to personal stances.
- **Expressing dissent with respect:** thinking differently does not constitute a problem in itself. Difficulties arise, usually, from the way in which those differences are expressed. It is important to understand that, as long as the fundamental rights of human beings are not violated, all opinions can be more or less valid based on the support they have. Nonetheless, it is always relevant to discuss and critique the ideas and not those who (re)-present them.
- **Abstaining from making comments that may hurt or harm the image of a member of the community:** independent of the type of relationship or bond that is kept with the education community members, it is important to be careful of the comments that are expressed about others or others' work. Before making any type of comment it is important to evaluate the veracity of what is to be said, and its kindness and/or utility. If we are not sure about these criteria, it is best to abstain from making the comment.
- **Abstaining from criticizing or censoring a community member in public:** it is important, in order to safeguard people's integrity and dignity, not to expose them to situations that could be difficult and/or hurtful. For this reason, if it is necessary to provide feedback for others' work, suggest improvement actions, give criticism over certain behavior or over certain fault, the best thing is to do it in private. Along with this and

with the purpose of keeping respectful environments, it is suggested not to publicly discredit others' position or work, be it censoring or belittling it. It is also relevant to be clear regarding the focus of our criticism. Sometimes we tend to criticize the person or their characteristics when the focus of our worries really is a specific action or behavior and not the person itself.

- **Abstaining from making public statements that discredit the profession and the institution:** the way in which we position ourselves regarding our profession and our institution affects the way in which we are seen and regarded by others. If there is no appreciation or respect from the community members towards themselves and towards those who form part of it, we can hardly expect respect and appreciation from those who do not know us.
- **Establishing reciprocal relationships with families, getting involved and communicating symmetrically:** fundamental to the educational field are the parents, guardians and families' role. In that sense, not only is it relevant to keep constant and fluent communication with them, with the aim to inform, if not to potentiate the collaborative work. This requires respect and consideration, as well as horizontality. It is also important to keep a bond and communication that allows us to understand each other, jointly analyze and reach agreements and consensus. For communication to be symmetrical, it is required that both parties (community member and parent/guardian/family) stand in an equivalent or similar position, such as for instance, that they speak according to the same codes (formal/informal language) and handle the same information.
- **Considering and incorporating the family's traditions, values, customs and interests, highlighting its role as the primary educator:** respecting the individuality and the uniqueness of the child and of his or her family involves considering that the educational process must incorporate those elements that, from their origin, are relevant for their formation (traditions, values, customs, interests, etc.). It is important to remember that the family imparts the kid's primary socialization and, as such, constitutes itself as the primary educator.
- **Working together with families with the aim to strengthening their participation in children's education:** it is known that children's performance and results at school are better and higher provided the important people in their lives who have shared goals with them and fulfilled support and collaboration roles (Epstein, 2013). In that sense, encouraging families to take part in pedagogical processes, considering them when defining expectations, working methods and the required support, makes it possible to come to agreements and to create the commitment to get involved, in a co-responsible way to all members of the community.
- **Assuming the responsibility that collaborative work entails:** as teachers we are always challenged to develop common tasks that suppose the need to work collaboratively.

This collaborative work does not mean dividing the work into as many members as the team has. Collaborative work requires active participation in the task, assuming different roles and responsibilities, both on an individual and on a group level. Thus, when it comes to collaborative work, the final result is more than the mere sum of its individual parts, given that it constitutes a coherent whole, endowed with meaning.

- **Assuming an active role in collaborative work:** assuming an active role in collaborative work means to work towards the attainment of the task and to secure the process towards the goal. This involves, nonetheless, identifying and solving problems, managing the division of tasks, assuming and distributing responsibilities and challenges, and managing human relations and the difficulties that could arise in the process.
- **Working on active listening and empathy:** all collaborative and respectful work sustains itself on the basis of recognition, acceptance and appreciation of those with whom we work. This involves developing competencies that allow for communication, respect for differences and for the ability to come to agreements. For this, attentive listening is fundamental, being receptive to others through an openness towards that which allows us to communicate and connect with what they are feeling. It is important to pay attention to what the other is saying, without immediately judging. In its turn, empathy consists in the ability to recognize others' emotions, connecting with and understanding their feelings, even when they would not directly refer to them.
- **Promoting instances of reflection after collaborative work:** it is important to create instances that allow to reflect over the collaborative work done, identifying difficulties, challenges and improvement opportunities. All collaborative work involves learning instances, both individual and in groups, in a way such that counting with these reflective instances could enrich future collaborative work.
- **Prepare ourselves individually for collaborative work:** it is important to assume the responsibility that collaborative work entails, and that involves preparing and predisposing ourselves to work with others. As such, it is required that the teacher can plan out the collaborative work, analyzing the context and considering the characteristics of those people with whom he or she is going to work. It is also important to anticipate and prepare the work to be done.

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