

Leading collaborative learning

There seems little doubt that leadership of an autonomous institution (or classroom) with a traditional hierarchical structure, clear division of labour and well-defined and logical bureaucratic procedures is a much easier place to lead than a complex collaborative network or a community. Leadership to enable effective collaboration and secure an authentic community may need to demonstrate a range of qualities, particularly given the propensity for autonomous working found in education. In this context, effective leadership has to be about engagement and connection:

The best bosses understand and care about the social motivation of all members of the team. Bosses have to foster better connections between themselves and their team, among team members and between the team and other outside groups and individuals critical to success ... Creating this identification, this attachment to the group, is an essential component of successful leadership. (Lieberman 2013: 273–274)

Although there are numerous possible permutations of leadership styles and strategies in the context of collaborative learning it does seem that two leadership behaviours are particularly appropriate. The first is dialogue, the leader is both visible and available to engage in rich conversations in which they are able to demonstrate effective communication, explain, enthuse, help develop personal understanding and engagement. The second, closely related strategy is modelling in which the leaders in their day-to-day behaviour act as a tangible exemplar of the behaviours that are considered appropriate. Leadership for collaboration has to engage with the following principles and practices:

- The cornerstone of leadership for collaboration is respect for the dignity of every member of the community in a spirit of inclusion and equity.
- Leadership in a complex environment requires moral confidence – the ability to act in a morally consistent way and to secure understanding of, and commitment to, shared values.

- Authentic collaboration requires a high degree of empathy – the ability to understand another person on their terms of reference rather than imposing one's own interpretation on others.
- Successful leadership in a collaborative or community setting depends on the ability to build networks and cultivate multiple relationships with many different degrees of engagement.
- It would be naive to pretend that shared values and common purpose are enough to secure high performance. Leadership in this context involves consensus building, negotiation, making alliances and responding to challenges to agreed policies and strategies.
- Collaborative leadership has to be democratic, both in terms of securing inclusive participation and working through transparent and agreed procedures and protocols.
- Above all, leadership for collaboration has to be authentic, trustworthy and rooted in personal and professional integrity over time and place.

Lieberman, M. (2013). *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.