EFFECTIVE WAYS OF TRANSFORMING OUR CLASSROOMS INTO COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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There are generally two chains of thought about the purpose of our education system. One is that they exist to give students both the learning skills required to locate and digest information, and the love for learning that encourages them to constantly live on the hunt for new things. The other is more utilitarian and suggests that universities exist to provide people with the skills to then become effective members of society.

The demands of a social business probably fall between the two, but it's not a bad idea to focus today on the former and on how universities can prepare young people for the way they will work when they enter the workforce. Much has been written about various attempts to bring collaboration into the classroom, and a major element of these initiatives is to remove the boundaries that exist in the classroom and encourage students to collaborate with other people on their work. Collaboration prepares students for their futures and engage them as global citizens. By enabling students to interact and collaborate with partners in other countries, they help students develop the digital citizenship and global competence they need to be successful in an increasingly interconnected world.

This intellectual diversity is a fundamental aspect of crowdsourcing, and indeed for the strong performance of many groups of knowledge workers. Just as professionals should be open to exploring and connecting with people from different companies and industries, so too should students. This ability to locate information and knowledge from outside your immediate confines is an invaluable skill to develop. In order to work out the meaning of ''crowdsourcing'' let's refer to the article of Daren C. Brabham who defined "crowdsourcing" as an "online, distributed problem-solving and production model.'' Jeff Howe and Mark Robinson, editors at Wired Magazine, coined the term "crowdsourcing" in 2005 after conversations about how businesses were using the Internet to outsource work to individuals. Howe first published a definition for the term "crowdsourcing" in a companion blog post to his June 2006 Wired magazine article, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," which came out in print just days later:'' "Simply defined, crowdsourcing represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can take the form of peer-production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole

individuals. The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential laborers."

So, if you're a teacher looking to bring a more collaborative style to your classroom, how can you get started? Here are a couple of ideas that might get you going. Most are pretty low tech so should be possible with minimal outlay.

1. Collaborative problem solving – a lot of academic work is done in isolation so that teachers can then grade performance. Try instead to post a question and then allow students to openly tackle it, akin to how crowdsourcing challenges work. This can be achieved either in a physical environment or via something like Google Docs.

2. Collaborative learning – learning from the teacher is great, but learning from each other is much more common in the workplace. The collaborative classroom should therefore be one where students are not only helping each other with the answers, but also with the working out. Sharing notes and research can be a great way to help other students develop.

3. Collaborative research – with social media it's easier than ever before to tap into the thoughts and insights of subject matter experts. What's more, it's increasingly straightforward to coral those findings into a narrative that can be shared with others. For instance, students could follow an expert online, and then summarise their findings into Storify for their peers. Some people might have a very vague idea of this term. Storify is a social network service that lets the user create stories or timelines using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Storify was launched in September 2010, and has been open to the public since April 2011. The main purpose of Storify is to allow users to create stories by importing content from various forms of media into a timeline. Users can search for content related to their story from sources such as Youtube, Twitter (one of the more popular ones), Instagram, and Google, as well as other stories on Storify, and then drag that content into their own Storify story timelines. Users can add comments to the links that they provide within their stories, and can also embed urls in their stories. Users can also embed their own Storify stories elsewhere on the internet.

4. Crowdsourcing quantitative research – it has never been easier to produce a survey or other quantitative research tool, and then recruit participants in that research, whether that's from a platform such as Mechanical Turk or from opening up the survey to participants on Twitter via a hashtag.

5. Collaborative analysis – in #3 we spoke about following thought leaders and digesting their thoughts. It's also good practice to analyse these thoughts to determine if they remain worth following or not. This can be done collaboratively as a group exercise to train students in the art of analysingthe credibility of both information and its source.

These are five really straightforward ways to bring collaboration into the classroom.