

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

At a Glance

This case study highlights the power of collaboration through Educate's coaching approach in K-12 classrooms, emphasizing an agentive collective and constructivist learning.

Kyle and Ms. Rose: A Dynamic Duo. Meet Kyle and Ms. Rose, the driving forces behind this case study. Kyle, an Educate coach, and Ms. Rose, a dedicated teacher, join hands to elevate learning experiences. Their partnership embodies the essence of Educate's coaching model, showcasing how collaborative efforts can ignite meaningful change.

Challenges

- Isolation in K-12 Classrooms
- Lack of Collaborative Learning
- Need for Professional Development

Key Metrics

- **Enhanced Learning:** Students actively engage, explain, and learn collaboratively.
- **Teacher Agency:** Educators like Ms. Rose confidently experiment with teaching methods.
- **Peer Support:** Improved reciprocal teaching and peer learning.
- **Alignment with Goals:** Coaching aligns with school objectives.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Educate's coaching fosters collaboration and community growth.

Solutions

- **Bringing in Coaches:** Educate introduces coaches to classrooms to provide context-embedded assistance and support to teachers and students.
- **Constructivist Approach:** Educate employs a constructivist approach that encourages collaborative learning and meaningful interactions.
- **Agentive Collective:** Coaches and teachers form an agentive collective, where everyone contributes and learns from one another.
- **Reciprocal Teaching:** Coaches encourage strategies like reciprocal teaching, where students explain concepts to each other for deeper understanding.

Helping Each Other

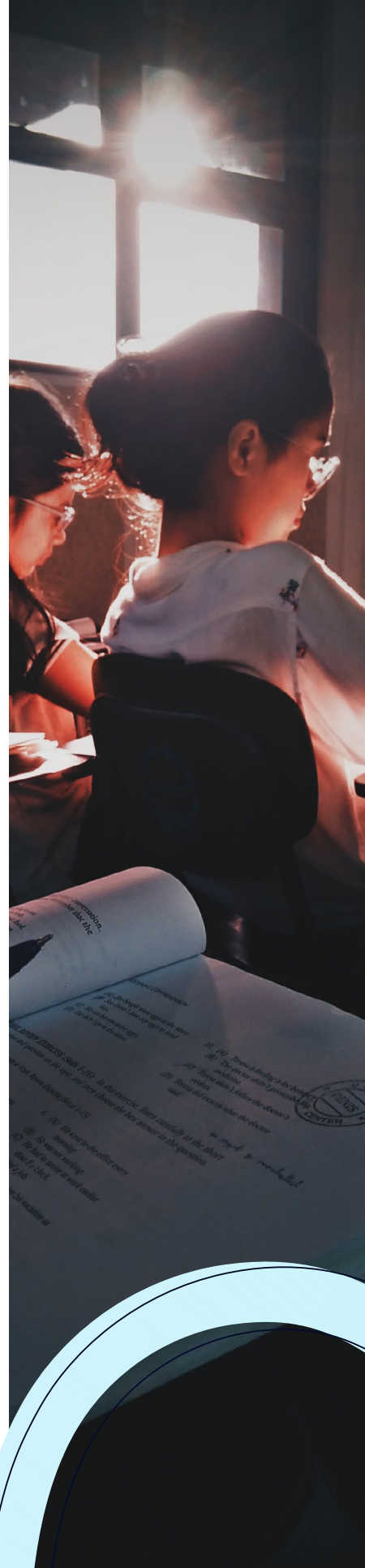
A SPRINGBOARD FOR LEARNING

In typical K-12 classrooms, teaching and learning often happens in isolation. Teachers diligently strive to help their students learn yet do not have the opportunity to collaborate about their teaching craft with other educators. Educate seeks to disrupt that isolation, bringing a coach into the classroom to support teachers as they endeavor to better meet the needs of their students. This case study highlights the power of an agentive collective and a constructivist approach to learning, two core concepts in Educate's theoretical framework. Kyle, one of Educate's coaches, partners with Ms. Rose* to elevate teaching and learning, fostering collaborative efforts among students, teacher, and coach.

Capturing Moments of Learning

The hum of student voices filled the classroom as students tackled math concepts in their mixed ability pairs. The initial design of the activity asked an advanced math student to assist their partner in understanding a math concept. One pair caught the coach's eye as Jorge*, a multilingual student, began explaining the math concept to a classmate, Andrei* who spoke fluent English. Jorge nervously struggled to find words to explain the concept in English. Andrei responded with encouragement and helped Jorge as he worked to use English. Kyle noticed this exchange and walked over to Jorge saying, "Great job explaining your solution and thought process to your peer" and then said to Andrei "Can you try to explain back to him your understanding of the problem and solution now that you heard it? That will really show how well you picked up on it and give you a chance to practice explaining as well."

As the students engaged in this new conversation, Kyle pulled Ms. Rose aside for a quick coaching huddle: "Ms. Rose, can I show you something? Notice how the student who was being shown the solution is now teaching it back. You can shift student pairings like these to be more reciprocal teaching where both students have the opportunity to explain their thinking to each other." By asking Andrei to explain back the math concept to Jorge, Andrei's understanding of the concept was made visible and allowed him to model more fluent English for Jorge. The pairing of Andrei and Jorge presented the chance for both students to contribute strengths and help each other learn.



Job-Embedded Professional Development

This snapshot captured how coaching within a classroom setting allows for powerful context-embedded assistance to foster growth. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) asserted that when children are stretched by a task or text just beyond what they are independently capable of and provided assistance, they will reach a new level of independent development. The mixed ability math grouping of Andrei and Jorge exemplifies a contemporary application of Vygotsky's theory (McLeod, 2018) and research shows the benefit of using reciprocal teaching to provide peer assistance (Pilten, 2016; Yassin et al., 2018). What is true of Jorge and Andrei is also true of Kyle and Ms. Rose. Professional practice is developed through "activity settings in the classroom that maximize opportunities for co-participation and instructional conversation" (Tharp and Gallimore, 1989, p.23) between teacher and coach, and among teaching peers. This example of powerful learning in a social context is rooted in a constructivist approach to meaning making and highlights the power of an agentic collective.

Kyle's "coaching at the elbow" described in the classroom vignette transformed what could have been simply a coach intervening directly with students into a more powerful meaning-making moment that fostered agency in Ms. Rose. The brief huddle spotlighted the possibilities for reciprocal teaching, growing observational awareness that may change what Ms. Rose notices in her students whenever they work in pairs or groups in the future. Kyle's assistance to Ms. Rose not only gave her the chance to immediately practice converting one-way teaching to reciprocal teaching. It also provided the opportunity to develop her professional judgment in recognizing when student pairings could bring added benefits to students.

Cultivating an Environment for Exploration

These brief moments in the classroom were weeks in the making, illustrating the power of the coaching cycles used by Educate. Reflecting on initial classroom visits, Kyle described teaching and learning happening with the teacher doing the heavy lifting in the lesson, not the students. During early coaching sessions, Kyle worked with Ms. Rose to formulate a learning goal and envision what successful learning might look like at the end of their coaching cycle. Together they constructed a focus for their work, effective ways to support students to engage more independently. This aligned with school-based goals and, as Kyle described, "connected the work to the community's vision."

Due to the short nature of this coaching cycle, Kyle recounted the need to guard against simply transactional behaviors seeking to "achieve something great" and allow space for Ms. Rose's reflections to guide the next steps. Kyle likened this approach to creating opportunities for Ms. Rose to demonstrate agency so her learning could "flourish like wildflowers in a field," not overly constrained by prescriptive advice or actions. Kyle would share observation notes and wonderings with Ms. Rose on their collaborative document and she would often respond. Subsequent sessions in the coaching cycle included Ms. Rose sharing strategies implemented and then dialoguing together about next steps, highlighting the responsive nature of Educate's approach to coaching. In one session, they decided that Kyle would model a round robin discussion protocol for Ms. Rose to observe in the classroom. She then implemented the protocol in a future lesson and debriefed with Kyle. The broader school culture also supported the idea of learning through modeling as teachers were encouraged to visit one another's classrooms to learn. Each of these aspects of the coaching and learning journey created the ecosystem for the "coaching at the elbow" seen in the classroom vignette to take root.

■ Collaboration Benefiting Communities

This case also highlights how coaching equipped Ms. Rose to help grow her students along Educate's Innovation Spectrum for collaboration - infusing rich collaboration through varied groupings of students. Remember Jorge and Andrei? The recollection that each brought something valuable to the pairing helped to modify the effects of status that can hinder cooperative learning (Cohen, 1994). Kyle described teaching and learning observed in the classroom and planning documents near the end of the coaching cycle as well-paced, flowing with quick and slow moments to prioritize reflection and meaning making, utilizing appropriately the protocols and scaffolding strategies learned.

Ms. Rose's reflections confirmed that the discussion protocols/strategies impacted teaching and learning in her classrooms: "Students [are] more confident with the protocol, embedded in most lesson plans." Her reflections also noted increased, "...peer support - students have more opportunity to teach each other and do reciprocal teaching." Near the conclusion of their coaching cycle, Kyle and Ms. Rose identified that she was not only part of an agentive collective with Kyle and her students, but also within her broader school community.

■ Conclusion

Ms. Rose views her teaching journey as one of continuous learning and she now better understands how learning can happen in a social context for both students and teachers. The nature of her coaching experience with Kyle providing assistance in her classroom illuminated how the same can happen among her students, fellow teachers and administrators. Kyle's coaching improved collaboration and agency in Ms. Rose and her students and exemplifies Educate's goal to work with teachers at the point of instruction to bring about meaningful growth.

■ *Pseudonyms

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■ A School Ready for the Next Step

Student success in verbalizing thinking and problem-solving together was an important first step in a longer journey. Starting the coaching relationship listening with empathy, Reggie helped teachers design learning to improve students' metacognition, a skill vital to success in school and life. Significantly, Reggie also provided space for Principal Qualls to engage in reflection, share a long-term vision, and connect current work with him to future work. This amplified the coaching cycle with teachers beyond a one-time intervention into building skills and expanding perspectives, setting the table for sustained coherent change. Their work together exemplifies Educate's purpose: activating communities to spark meaningful change.

■ *Pseudonyms

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