Collaboration
and collaborative planning

Collaboration is a powerful way for teachers to improve maths provision

Why plan together?

Research, anecdotal evidence and experience all point to the benefits of teachers planning lessons and schemes of work as a department.

The DfE's 2016 report on eliminating unnecessary workload identified that 'School leaders should place great value on collaborative curriculum planning which is where teacher professionalism and creativity can be exercised.'[1] As well as planning lesson activities, teachers doing the maths themselves is crucial: 'those involved in planning should complete all the mathematical tasks for themselves, considering possible alternative solution strategies and representations and seeking to anticipate how students may respond to the task.'[2]

The NCETM's Essence of Mathematics Teaching for Mastery also highlights the importance of collaborative planning, identifying an underpinning principle of mastery to be 'Teachers continually develop their specialist knowledge for teaching mathematics, working collaboratively to refine and improve their teaching'.

What is collaborative planning, and what is it not?

Collaborative planning isn't about getting planning done as quickly as possible. Instead, it's a way to share expertise and support the development of the whole department. Once in place, this often does result in reduced time spent planning.

There isn't a single model of collaborative planning, nor is it something that necessarily happens during specified meetings only. Providing the culture is there, it can happen during unstructured time, including when simply chatting with colleagues.

It's also not about taking away teachers' autonomy. It's about finding shared approaches and learning from one another. When done well, all teachers have a voice, and it's developmental for all.

Collaborative planning contributes to the running of a well-functioning department. It's about making sure students get the best deal, no matter which classroom they are in.

What does the 2023 Ofsted report, 'Coordinating Mathematical Success', say about collaboration?

> ***In the vast majority of secondary schools, department meeting time is allocated to improving the quality of provision in mathematics as opposed to undertaking administrative tasks. Many leaders and teachers note that this had been a significant and positive change over the recent years.***
>
> **Main findings, Secondary schools**

> ***In one school, leaders had identified what important mathematics content needed to be learned [...]. They had collectively developed resources to be used for these brief retrieval activities that took place in lessons [...]. Teachers had a common understanding of how to follow up these activities.***
>
> **Assessment section, example of stronger practice**

> ***There was a noticeable difference in teachers' CPD between schools with historically stronger provision and those where it had been weaker. In schools that had historically stronger provision, CPD was most often department-led, and often focused on effective teaching of specific parts of the mathematics curriculum.***
>
> **Systems at the school level, paragraph 136**

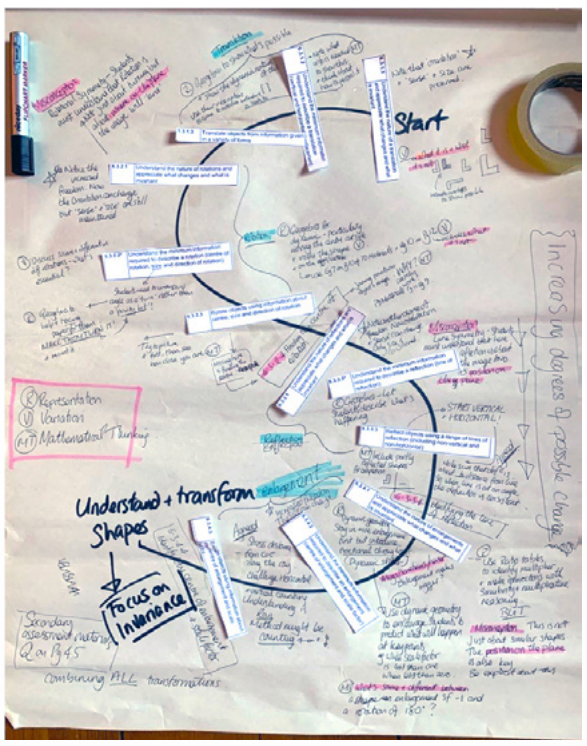

Image: S-plan

Tips for effective collaboration

1. Get the culture right
Build trust through communicating clearly, sensitively, and transparently. Value everyone's expertise and ensure all voices are heard. The focus should be on student learning.

2. Have a clear, shared vision
Start small: agree a topic or curriculum area where you can address a genuine need. Set clear goals, and make it practical.

3. Get stuck in
Many departments like to plan on a big sheet of paper so everyone can get involved; an S-plan can be a great way to do this. Focus your discussions on possible student responses.

4. Make time
Regular time must be given to collaborative planning, especially when it's new; departmental meetings are a great starting point. Allow time for open discussions and exploration.

5. Give ownership
Build on teachers' strengths and interests. All colleagues can learn from each other, regardless of experience.

6. Reflect
Keep going: revisit and improve. Be mindful of the whole curriculum and the small steps, taking care to balance the two.

References

1. DfE. (2016). Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources. London: Crown Retrieved from gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teacher-work load-planning-and-resources-group-report

2. Baldry, F., & Foster, C. (2019). Lesson Study in Mathematics Initial Teacher Education in England. In Theory and Practice of Lesson Study in Mathematics (pp. 577-594). Springer, Cham.

MATHSHUBS

ncetm.org.uk | @NCETM

NCETM
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE TEACHING OF MATHEMATICS

Coordinators of the Maths Hubs Programme