



Developing Collaboration Through Cross-age Coaching

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Further Information

This poster and further information is available at
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Introduction

The behaviours associated with effective collaboration can be easy to list but difficult to define or discuss meaningfully with students. The prospect of initiating a cross-age connection between our Senior and Junior Schools led to the opportunity for eight Year 11 boys to observe groups working to solve mathematical problems in a Year 6 classroom over several weeks.

This provided a shared experience of promoting and developing the types of behaviours and skills considered necessary for boys to work collaboratively.

Working successfully in groups is an important part of classroom interaction as it is a vital skill in both the workplace and other social contexts outside of school life.

The Research Question

How might observing Year 6 boys during mathematical problem solving enable Year 11 boys to identify and promote effective collaboration skills?

Research Context and Participants

St Kevin's College is a Catholic school for boys in the Edmund Rice tradition, with students from across Melbourne attending one of four campuses, from the Early Learning Centre to the Heyington Senior Campus.

Central to the mission of St Kevin's College is the promotion of excellence in learning as an essential means of facilitating human growth and liberation, the recognition of family, and a desire for all to achieve fullness of life. St Kevin's College promotes a community which observes the four touchstones: Gospel Spirituality, Liberating Education, Inclusive Community, and Justice and Solidarity.



Eight Year 11 students from a Senior School tutor group were chosen to work with one Junior School Year 6 class.

This program encouraged relationships with the Junior School and provided opportunities for Year 11 students to engage in meaningful experiences with their tutor in the areas of service and wider school involvement.

The Research Action

The senior boys worked in pairs with a group of Year 6 boys on five weekly occasions. Whilst the junior students solved a mathematical problem as a group, the Year 11 boys observed behaviours and skills related to collaboration and enacted strategies aimed at promoting and developing effective interaction within their group.

Data Collection and Analysis

What behaviours would you see in a group cooperating well with each other to solve a problem?
How should these behaviours be ranked in order of importance?

- Sixteen behaviours were predicted and ranked in order of perceived strengths and weaknesses of a Year 6 student.
- Each Year 11 boy reflected on his observations, describing the personalities and interactions within the group.
- Photographs were used to trigger conversation and to recall patterns of interaction.
- Desirable collaborative behaviours were promoted
- A 'role-play' was performed in two parts, demonstrating 'less-than-ideal' interactions and high levels of collaboration.
- **Identification of Effective Collaborative Skills and Promotion of Effective Collaborative Skills.**



Key Findings and Discussion

Many Year 11 boys reflected on their own interactions within a group, based on their observations of the younger boys. "I know I'm more like him. I usually let others give their opinions and keep my ideas to myself or just use their ideas in my answer later. I should probably try and lead a bit more early on, just like I was trying to get him to do."

Students showed appreciation that Leadership was a more complex behavior. "When I suggested dividing up the roles, it was obvious that A was willing to let others try to solve the problem. When they got confused he stepped in and gave like a hint. It was much different than when he just said what the answer was in the first two weeks."

Cooperation and Teamwork were identified and observed as present or absent. "All the boys listened when the problem was being read out. A couple of them couldn't see the poster so they moved and other boys let them fit in-between." "B didn't make any contribution to the problem, you could tell that he wasn't even really listening. He just stared some of the time, but other times he didn't even bother watching."

Conclusions

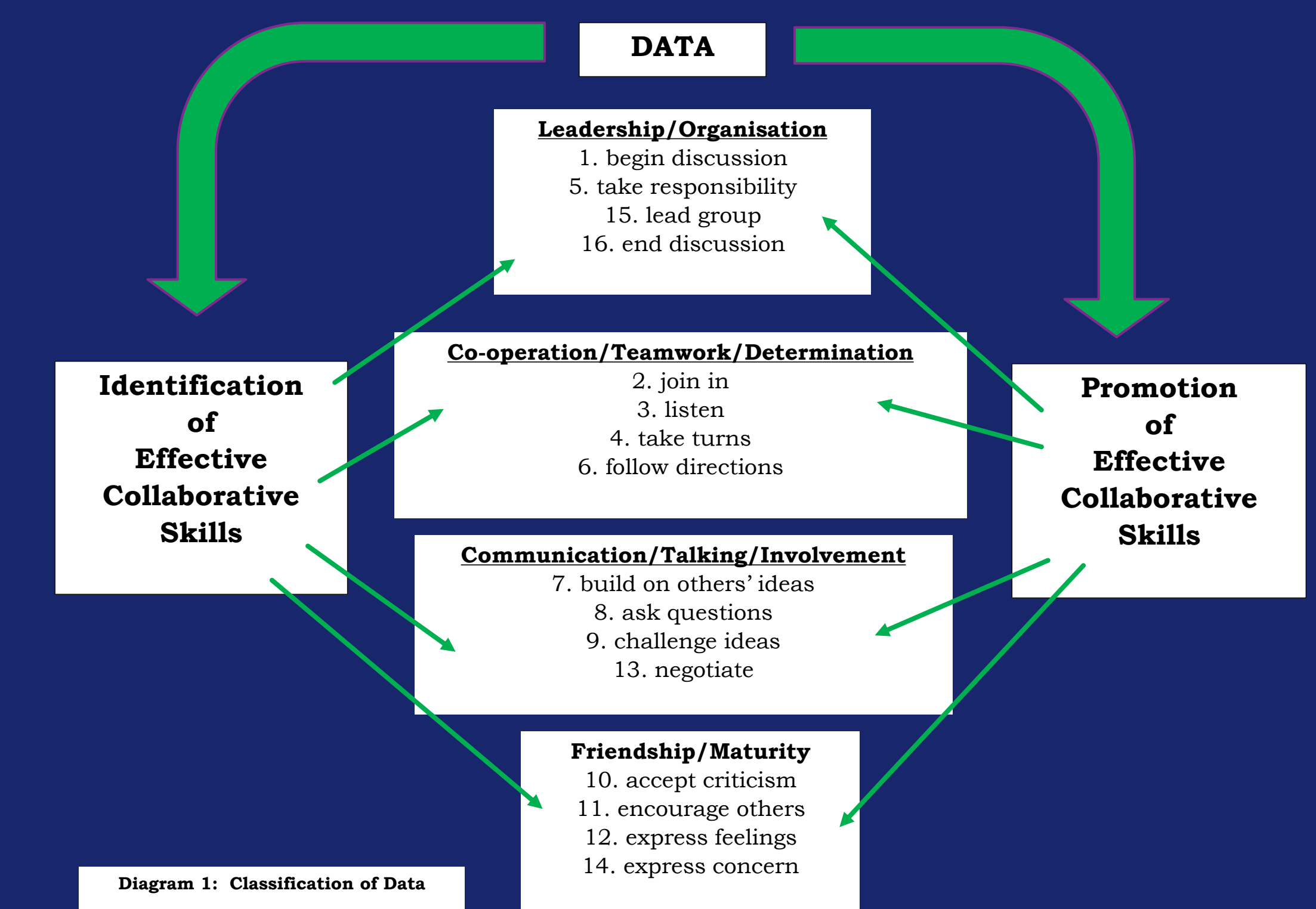
Older boys embraced the opportunity to mentor and coach younger boys in the classroom setting. Using this powerful strategy to introduce positive experiences has been an especially potent learning experience and an opportunity for individual growth for both the older boys and the younger ones.

Given the willingness of the students to participate in this project, it would be beneficial to form ongoing partnerships, possibly extended throughout the year. Other topics such as Creative and Critical Thinking Skills, and Initiative Strategies could also be explored.

Sharing this project will encourage colleagues to pursue cross-age projects between our College campuses, forging new links and valuable learning experiences for all boys involved.

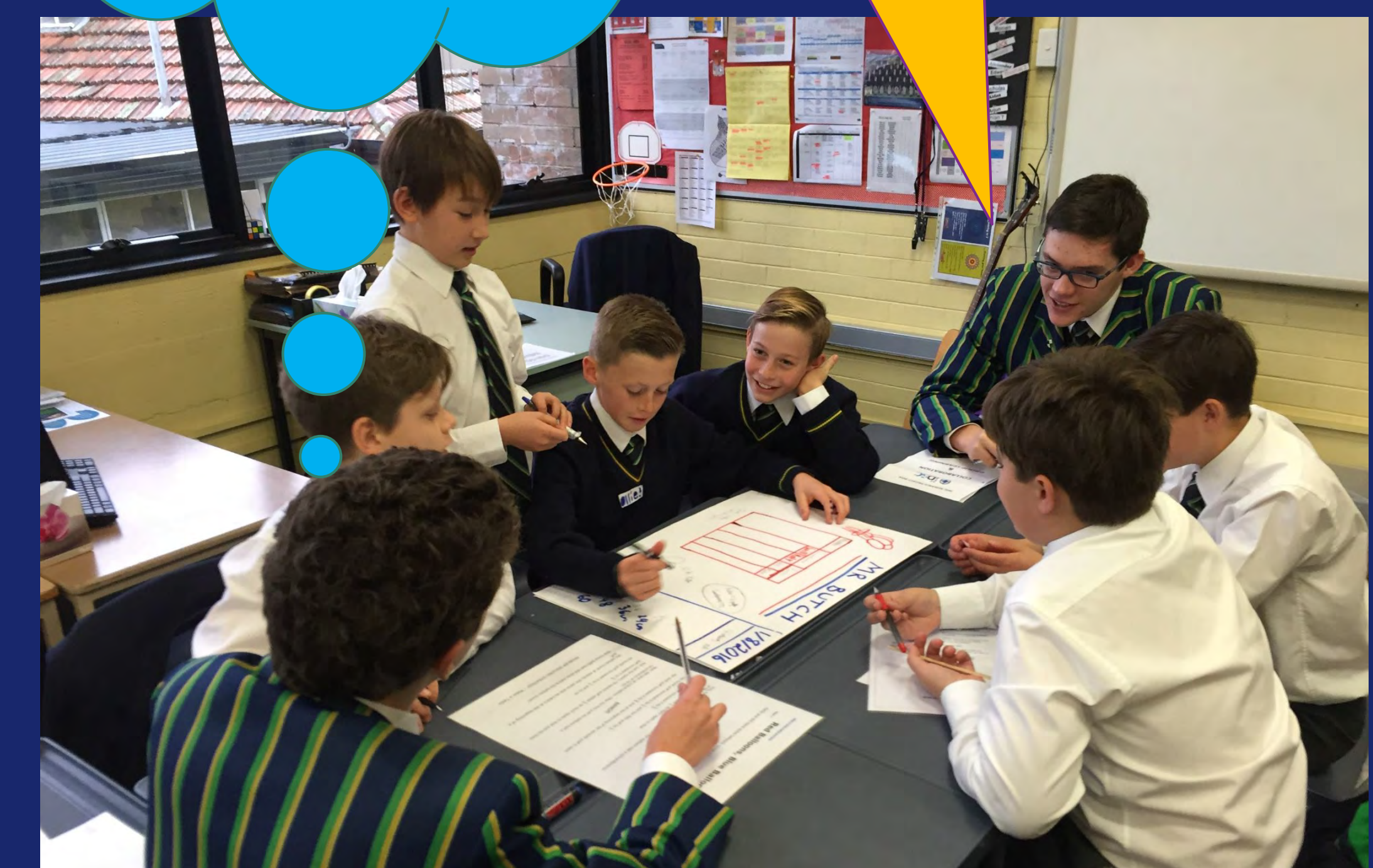
Readings

- Karcher, M.J., 20 Cross-Age Peer Mentoring. (2007). *Youth Mentoring: Research in Action* 1(7), 3 – 17.
- Hammond-Diedrich, K. C., & Walsh, D. (2006). Empowering Youth through a Responsibility-based Cross-Age Teacher Program: An Investigation into Impact and Possibilities. *Physical Educator*, 63, 134- 142.
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International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2016 – 2017:
Collaboration and the Power of Group Learning