

Learning From One Another With Collective Intelligence

Angela Mastracci is a consultant and trainer in higher education pedagogy

Debby Ann Philie, Anne Kafka and Jules Massé are pedagogical counsellors at the college level

Since my time as a pedagogical counsellor (CP) in the college network, I have become passionate about professional co-development and its ability to help a group of people co-construct meaningful learning. In order to give an overview of the power that this method can have in terms of professional, pedagogical and institutional development in the college network, it seems pertinent to tell you about the exchanges I had with my colleagues Debby Ann, Anne and Jules in the context of the implementation of co-development groups for CPs in the college network.¹

¹ To learn more about the project, please see the box at the end of this article.



Angela Mastracci – Founded by Payette and Champagne (1997), professional co-development is a structured method for those who believe they can learn from each other to improve their practice. It is a process of inquiry and consultation, organized in steps,² that focuses on issues, concerns or projects presented in turn by participants in the group, usually composed of six to eight people. In your opinion, beyond this definition, what is the essence of co-development—its nature, its soul?

Pedagogical counsellors – Essentially, co-development is a supportive professional space where we can learn from each other to improve and benefit concretely from the power of our collective intelligence, and of course, develop a network. This confidential space for sharing and helping each other, without being accountable, simply to learn and nourish our practice, contributes to our professional well-being. In fact, the essence of co-development is to take time—time to stop and learn to listen, time to reflect on one's practice and time to dialogue with others. Co-development thus encourages deepening real concerns through practice. Over time, the mutual support provided encourages exploration and commitment to action. The support of the group gives the necessary confidence to try new professional approaches. It is therefore a practice with real potential for transformation.

AM – It is important to know that the design of networked professional co-development groups for CPs took shape following positive experiences with the method by groups of teachers, as well as exchanges with Debby Ann. The goal of the project is to allow pedagogical counsellors to develop and consolidate their skills in a structured and collaborative framework, in line with their needs, while promoting the integration and transfer of learning in their environment. Now in its second iteration, it is a project for CPs, designed, coordinated, facilitated and documented by CPs for conscious, effective and autonomous practice (Mastracci, in Champagne, 2021, p. 291). That being said,

the co-development method can be transferred to colleges to support the professional and pedagogical development of all stakeholders. What does participation in the project mean for your community?

CPs – Supporting teachers in their professional development is at the heart of the CP function. However, for both CPs and teachers, issues of time, availability and human resources limit the possibilities of training activities. Payette (2000) mentions that co-development is training that allows people to make concrete progress on their files and that eliminates the question of learning transfer, since the work is done directly on professional situations. With a pinch of humour, we can say that it is a training approach for people who do not have time for training (p. 41)! Considering the needs and constraints of our respective environments, we have been able to set up professional co-development groups for teachers in two of our colleges through our participation in the professional co-development groups for CPs project.

At the first college, in partnership with the regional educational research consortium of the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, a co-development group was offered to all teachers wishing to develop and consolidate their teaching skills at the college level in a structured and collaborative framework while promoting the integration and transfer of their learning to their environment. In the second college, a co-development group was set up as part of the professional integration program for teachers. New teachers were given the opportunity to participate in the program and were invited to present a problem related to their teaching practice using the co-development method. They were able to learn from their novice colleagues, but also from experienced colleagues who had the opportunity to give back. In both cases, the experiences proved to be highly valued by the participating teachers, demonstrating that co-development is gaining recognition as a formal professional development tool.

AM – As all of your examples demonstrate, co-development is gaining in popularity and is already being deployed in many college settings. Let's take a moment to reflect on why co-development fosters individual professional development nurtured by collective intelligence. First, let's explore the guiding principles behind Payette and Champagne's (1997) co-development practice, which are reaffirmed in Champagne:

² Editor's note: Interested readers can learn more about the steps and actions of participants based on their role by reading Nancy Chaput's text on p. 24 of this issue or by referring to the article "Le groupe de codéveloppement professionnel: apprendre les uns des autres," which appeared in *Pédagogie collégiale* in Winter 2019 (Vol. 32, n° 2).

- Practice holds knowledge that science does not produce;
- Learning a professional practice is learning to act;
- Sharing experiences with others allows for learning that would otherwise be impossible;
- The practitioner in action is a unique person in a unique situation;
- The subjectivity of the actor is as important as the objectivity of the situation;
- Working on professional identity is at the heart of co-development (2021, p. 23-24).

Supporting the transformative potential mentioned above, these six principles are evocative of meaning. In your case, which of these principles proved to be more significant in terms of the learning achieved during the co-development sessions among CPs? Why?

CPs – The principle that *practice holds knowledge that science does not produce* is, in our opinion, the most significant in terms of learning when we participate in a co-development group. Because the process of professionalization of CPs in higher education is still in its infancy (Biémar *et al.*, 2016, p. 262), particularly due to the lack of pre-service training, we necessarily learn about our practice as we experience different situations in the field. In this way, participation in a co-development group becomes a driving force, a lever, a springboard for professional development in order to model our practice in college-level pedagogical counselling. We thus construct our knowledge and participate in our professionalization.

Learning a professional practice is learning to act is the principle that has proven equally significant, as each time someone exercises the role of facilitator, they learn more about facilitating a co-development group. Although you can read about the method beforehand, observe colleagues facilitating a group and exchange with the members of the organizing committee, it is the moments during which you actually facilitate that allow you to learn when and how to intervene in order to provoke exchanges, guide the discussion, contribute to establishing a climate of trust, etc.

The different roles exercised as a participant in a co-development group make it possible to highlight that *the practitioner in action is a unique person in a unique situation*. As a consulted person, it is a genuine challenge to precisely

expose a lived experience. In order to formulate a request that is clear enough to be dealt with by the group, you are exposed to the questioning of the consultants, who make you see the situation differently, as well as to the role and expectations of the consulted person in their situation. The perspective of others thus helps to envision yourself in the situation. As a consultant, we seek to understand not only the situation of the person consulted, but also their vision of the situation and their range of possible actions. Co-development allows someone to explore the multiplicity of points of view and the complexity of collective action from a practical point of view. As an observer, you refrain from intervening, except at specific moments designated in the functioning of the group. This posture forces you to practise active listening, to leave space and to observe something other than your own repetitions and self-confirmations. You notice that the other's reality is as complex and complete as your own.

AM – In order to facilitate the establishment of optimal conditions, the practice of co-development is determined by three values and a rule. The three values include commitment to the group, mutual aid, and respect,



while the rule refers to the confidentiality of information, without which the trust of the participants and the capacity to be open to others cannot be achieved. Is it possible to see links between these four essential aspects of the method and the skills of the CPs, which call on the soft skills associated with collaboration, self-regulation, ongoing reflective practice, the pedagogical support relationship, rigour, consistency and ethics? What skills and know-how are developed or consolidated by the co-development method and contribute to collective intelligence?

CPs – First of all, we must allow ourselves the right to make mistakes. For example, by carefully observing the progress of consultations, we become aware of our limited capacity to listen or of the powerlessness we feel when faced with others who are more assertive. The search for balance in exchanges and the desire to contribute without imposing yourself require a certain humility and openness to trial and error. To optimize each other's learning, we must respect a certain rhythm that we influence without being able to control it. To do this, the facilitators and participants show kindness, which allows everyone to explore their vulnerability without fear.

The co-development method highlights the power of the art of questioning, particularly when clarifying the topic in step 2. The ability to formulate open, non-judgmental, non-suggestive questions that have a positive impact on the person being consulted and encourage in-depth reflection (Desjardins, 2016) allows for a better understanding of a situation and thus for it to be dealt with consciously and effectively. Collective intelligence, through the diversity of the questions asked, gives the opportunity to look at a situation from all angles and thus to access perspectives that are impossible to access individually.

The co-development method also allows for the development of interpersonal skills related to the cooperative relationship in pedagogical counselling. By participating in a group, the CPs commit to becoming partners in their learning by demonstrating autonomy and responsibility, to consult each other with openness and kindness, and to alternate in the different roles they play without judgment or interference. All the rules of cooperation (St-Arnaud, 2003) are thus mobilized and by the same token create the catharsis effect of co-development. It is only by cooperating that the CPs can learn to find solutions to their professional problems. Co-development thus favors the development of knowledge related to cooperation, and it is this cooperation that allows the collective intelligence to work.

AM – Your answers show that even if the co-development method facilitates problem solving, this is not its main purpose. It is rather to learn to look at the problem differently, to open one's horizons to possible avenues through the feedback of the consultants, to reflect in depth on one's professional practices and to identify plausible actions. In this sense, learning is more important than solving the problem (Payette and Champagne, 1997, p. 110). To fully benefit from a co-development group, it is important that participants adopt a learning posture. How is learning promoted by the method? How does this happen concretely from one session to the next?

CPs – The right to make mistakes, already mentioned, greatly favours learning because it contributes to creating a safe space where, for example, the consulted person feels comfortable sharing their reactions to a difficult professional situation, the consultants can practice formulating questions properly, and the facilitator can dare to bring a certain flexibility to the organization of a co-development session. All of these



risk-taking activities, which are essential to learning, are facilitated in this way.

The commitment and stability of the group over a period of several months allow members to step back and rediscover or deepen the consultation process each time with a fresh perspective. Keeping a diary *in situ* is also very useful, as people often have a different, sharper vision during the meeting or just after. By taking a few notes, you get more out of the reflective practice. Each meeting also provides an opportunity to share some follow-up on the previous consultations, which rekindles and deepens learning and supports the application of elements from the group discussion.

In addition to the learning that the method itself promotes, other, more modest ways of learning can be deployed within the group. Indeed, a fun icebreaker activity lasting a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting allows the participants to settle down and get to know each other. In the same way, to make sure we seize the opportunity that the break represents to change our minds and to stretch, it is possible to run a quick activity after the break: physical activity, a cultural exchange, a scientific challenge... In short, nothing is excluded when it comes to learning together!

AM – We can see that the learning potential makes the desire to give back even stronger, all the while contributing to in the professionalization and the promotion of the pedagogical counsellor role and making this project of the CPs’ professional development last continuously and autonomously. Why get involved?

CPs – It is important that it be a self-supporting project to ensure its sustainability and above all to keep it a "project for and by CPs," which allows us to learn together, to define ourselves together, and to emancipate ourselves together professionally by proudly exercising our power to act. This is facilitated by the fact that the heterogeneously formed groups are not organized by "file." Diversity creates rich learning, but also brings us back to the essential: the identity of the CP profession. Thus, getting involved in a professional co-development group for college-level CPs is a unique professional development opportunity; it is free of pressure, accessible and friendly, allowing everyone to learn and give back in their own way, according to the role they wish to play within the group, while participating in the development of their professional community. We are

committed to educational well-being and believe that we can make a difference by helping to set up co-development groups for CPs. Indeed, investing in such a group allows you to strengthen your sense of competence, professional commitment and harmonious passion for the profession, generate positive emotions and build positive relationships. As Nancy Goyette (2021) points out, these five elements contribute to giving meaning to the profession and, by the same token, to increasing the sense of well-being.

AM – The benefits and positive outcomes of the co-development process seem to be multiple and endless. That said, not everything has to be rosy! There are bound to be less comfortable moments or delicate situations during a session. There are also bound to be ways to get around them or avoid them. What warnings do you have about potential difficulties or pitfalls when deploying the co-development method?

CPs – First of all, co-development cannot meet all collaboration needs or suit all discussion venues; it is not a magic method that can be used in all contexts. For example, the method does not aim to obtain a group consensus; therefore, if the priority is to solve a problem common to a group of people, there are other methods that are likely more appropriate to deploy. On a completely different note, co-development does not claim to be similar to individual or group therapy. Furthermore, if the facilitator becomes aware of this type of need during a session, it is advisable to discreetly guide the individual or group to other professional resources that are better suited to address this type of need. A potential limitation exists when a group is composed solely of people who are too new to the profession and have little background knowledge of it. To get around this limitation, it is necessary to combine co-development with other methods, for example, pedagogical vignettes. Finally, without the voluntary participation of group members, it is very difficult to create and maintain a climate conducive to individual and collective learning by ensuring the foundations of co-development: commitment, mutual aid, respect and confidentiality. In such a case, tensions between the participants will be felt and will harm the process.

AM – Thus, when co-development is deployed in a fertile context, the power and effectiveness associated with

the method promote professional development, the development of skills and the evolution of professional practices, as is the case with the professional co-development network groups for CPs. What is the next step for these groups?

CPs – Well, they will continue, in French and English, in 2022-2023. We encourage those interested to take the plunge! The continuation of these groups for CPs sets the stage for multiplying the potential benefits of professional development for professional and teaching staff in the college network to collaborate and learn together around common pedagogical projects. For example, the

facilitation of communities of practice focused on educational success could be enhanced by integrating the co-development method as a learning strategy. Collective intelligence will allow for individual reflection on one's professional identity, to consolidate one's professional posture and to anchor one's practice in increasingly informed and coherent professional knowledge. There is nothing like this to bounce back with new perspectives and solutions in one's work. The college community can only benefit from the influence of the professional co-development method by CPs. ■

The networked professional co-development groups for CPs project in a nutshell

The instigators

Angela Mastracci, retired CP (Cégep Marie-Victorin), and Debby Ann Philie, CP (Cégep Gérald-Godin)

Chronology of actions

Winter 2021: An exploratory group was held online with the help of Performa for the initial communication. In total, four meetings of three hours each were co-facilitated by the instigators and two other CPs, Anne Kafka (Cégep de St-Felicien) and Annie-Claude Prud'homme (Cégep Rimouski and the Fédération des cégeps). On their own time, eight CPs who are local Performa respondents participated in the group.

Year 2021-2022: The self-supporting project continued online with two groups respectively consisting of 10 regular education CP participants, from 15 different

colleges. Each group was co-facilitated by CPs Debby Ann Philie and Anne Kafka, paired with two new facilitators, Jules Massé (Cégep de Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Collège Montmorency), and Julie Depelteau (Institut Kiuna). A total of six meetings of three hours each were spread out over the school year.

Year 2022-2023: The intention is to continue the project with French language groups and replicate it with English language groups.

Future date: The team's desire is to replicate the project for and by CPs in continuing education.

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Angela Mastracci, a former pedagogical counsellor, retired from Cégep Marie-Victorin since 2017, is a consultant and trainer in higher education pedagogy. She is interested in formative assessment, creativity assessment as well as the co-development approach. She is also a lecturer with Performa and a member of the Association québécoise de codéveloppement professionnel.



Debby Ann Philie has been a pedagogical counsellor at Cégep Gérard-Godin since 2010, where she is in charge of student success, professional development and institutional development, after several years in programs and research. Recipient of the 2014 Vecteur pédagogique award from the AQPC for the quality of her counselling of teachers and administrators in her environment, she is also a lecturer in pedagogical counselling with Performa and a member of the Association québécoise de codéveloppement professionnel.



Anne Kafka has been a pedagogical counsellor at Cégep de St-Félicien since 2018. Having first taught mathematics at Cégep Limoilou, she has been working in the college network since 2014. Her main files are program management, teacher induction and professional development. Considering herself still new to the pedagogical counselling profession, she is pursuing part-time studies in the graduate micro-program in pedagogical counselling offered by Performa at the Université de Sherbrooke.



Jules Massé is a pedagogical counsellor at Collège Montmorency. Formerly, he was an ICT respondent and local Performa respondent at Cégep Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. He has several years of experience in college teaching (philosophy), but he has also worked in companies as a multimedia integrator, writer, designer, project manager and manager.