Developing a Collaborative Culture

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Collaboration implies mutual interdependence as well as mutual respect. Each of the participants must bring something of value to the collaborative table. Muronaga and Harada (1999) assert that successful collaboration is based on a shared vision, common goals, and a climate of trust and mutual respect. Small (in press) states, "To be motivated to collaborate, all participants must first see some personal value in collaboration and believe that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful collaborative Partnerships for a vibrant and engaged community of learners, strengthens the whole

Awareness of the roles and expertise of library media specialists is also cited as an important factor in creating collaborative partnerships. Hartzell (1997) advocates a proactive approach by library media specialists in their relationships with teachers and suggests one strategy for accomplishing heightened awareness and visibility through greater participation in nonlibrary educational professional organizations and conferences.

- Some practitioners were asked to share their strategies for establishing a collaborative culture in their schools. Their ideas are presented below.
- Begin by establishing a relationship with just one teacher and developing effective collaborative projects. Successful examples of librarian–teacher collaboration can become contagious, creating a demand for other such experiences throughout the school. Success breeds success.
- Be open and friendly with your teachers. Go seek them out because they aren't going to come looking for you. A proactive library media specialist is a critical prerequisite to successful collaboration.
- Volunteer to do staff development workshops on technology. This helps to establish your credibility as an instructor and your expertise in a valuable area for potential collaboration.
- Develop administrator support for flexible scheduling and collaborative planning. Administrator support can make a big difference in how hard or easy it is to create cooperative relationships with teachers.
- Sit in on team or grade-level meetings or other days when planning occurs.
- Study classroom and hallway bulletin boards; find out what is happening and think of ways you might collaborate.
- Get assigned to committees as an initial introduction to working with teachers.
- Submit articles to your district newsletter highlighting student activities related to collaboration projects. Offer to be in class the day the teacher assigns a research project to give a research pep talk.

All of these strategies help to develop a collaborative mentality (Small, in press) in which *all* collaborative partners understand the importance and benefits of collaboration to themselves, each other, and their students.

If you have proven strategies for fostering a collaborative culture in your school and would like to add them to this list, please email them to me at drruth@syr.edu.

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