

CHAPTER 1

Leading Through Collaboration With Colleagues

Excellence in Education

Trudy Lund

Anchorage, Alaska

A common joke among teachers is that people think we come to school each day to play with the children. Yes, I've been known to play with my students. (In fact, today I pretended to eat a Play-Doh "cookie" in order to please a sweet kindergartner.) Those who have taught for any length of time know that teaching is a very stressful occupation. Add to that the pressure of ongoing standardized testing requirements and

2 BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

many wonderful teachers, unfortunately, leave the profession. I hope you will glean something helpful from what I have learned about teaching and life during the past 20+ years.

Be an Excellent Teacher

Teaching could be a 24/7 job if you wanted it to be. I suppose you could do that if you didn't want a life or a family. However, remember that if you are married, your family does come first. As I journeyed through 20 years of teaching, I saw many who were on every committee, taught every training day, and had their name on most district publications. Almost 100% of those teachers' marriages have ended in divorce. Your classroom will take most of your time. Yes, teach a class from time to time. Take classes to keep you inspired with fresh ideas. If you have to introduce yourself to your husband and children, you're doing too much.

File folders and file boxes are your best friends. Don't keep reinventing the wheel each year. That's not to say you want to do the same things year in and year out, you don't. But there will be some really cool projects that you'll want to do each year, and if you're organized, you can pull them out and be ready to go. I have a file box and an artist's folder for each month of the year. I would probably go back into my burning house to save them (I'm kidding). But keeping my things organized has saved me hundreds of hours each year.

One day after school I wandered into the room of a co-worker and dear friend. As she talked to me, I watched her go around the perimeter of the room, organizing and putting away the clutter of the day. I was amazed and said, "Do you do this every night?" She said, "Yes. Another teacher told me to never leave until I'd cleaned around the room and cleared my desk." What wonderful advice! I follow it every afternoon and I look forward to coming in the next day.

Share Your Excellence With Others

The best classes and seminars I've ever taken were taught by other teachers. I've taught some myself. I chuckle when I think about that 21-year-old young woman who graduated after 3½ years of college.

What I knew then compared to what I know now are miles apart. Most of what I've learned about teaching I've learned from other teachers. Don't be afraid to ask your co-workers for help. During my first years of teaching, I carried a camera around with me (an idea from another teacher.) I took pictures of classroom set-ups, art projects, and bulletin boards. I still have those pictures and have used many of those ideas. If math is your favorite subject to teach and you've mastered a particularly difficult curriculum, volunteer to share your ideas with other teachers.

About 15 years ago, we adopted a new reading curriculum. The "whole language" concept was so new to everyone that we felt we were drowning. We formed a first-grade teacher support group. Initially, we met to discuss how to teach the new curriculum. After a few meetings, it turned into a sharing of ideas about the entire first-grade curriculum. We started bringing in ideas each month and providing a copy for each member of the group. After meeting all year, we went away with a bundle of ideas, and we felt comfortable with the new reading curriculum. If you're feeling uneasy in an area of the curriculum, chances are so are many other teachers. Invite other grade-level teachers in your area to meet once a month. Serve bagels and share your fears and cheers. Your colleagues are your greatest resource.

Be an Excellent Co-worker

I want my classroom to be a stress reliever for my co-workers and myself. I'm not sure why, but for the first 10 or so years of teaching, I viewed my classroom as a bedroom at a friend's house. I felt I was a guest and should keep everything tidy and my personal belongings in a suitcase. It probably sounds silly, but I remember the day I excitedly put an adhesive-backed mirror inside my teacher's closet. I began to realize that I spent more waking hours in that room than at home, so why not make it comfortable? Hence, I began to stock my room with stress busters: a microwave, refrigerator, Ziplocs, fancy paper, a toothbrush, postage stamps, snacks, an extra set of clothes, the list goes on and on. At least once a year every teacher in my building will come in to borrow something, and I like that. I understand the pressure we work under, and it makes me feel good to make someone else's day a little easier. So, if you're still working under "guest" guidelines, stock your

4 BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

room with whatever makes you happy. And don't forget to share with your co-workers. Some day you'll need to borrow something from them.

Be an Excellent Friend to Families

Each September, 20 or so fresh little faces timidly walk through my classroom door. They are not only walking through that door, they (and their families) are also walking into my heart. I teach in a neighborhood where many families are struggling just to get by. I want my students and their families to view me as their friend and someone they can turn to for help. I am thankful that my husband has a generous heart. In the 28 years we've been married, he has never complained about the money I've spent on my students and their families. I know I can't cure the pain that many of these people endure, but I can help in small ways. I remember a family whose oldest child was in my class. Their younger child was born with many physical and mental challenges. I knew money was extremely tight for them. A friend of mine asked me if I knew of anyone who wanted some children's clothing, much of which was like new. I collected those clothes and took them to school. There wasn't a dry eye in the room when I asked the student if she'd like the clothes. You see, it didn't cost me anything. And on the last day of school, I received one of my most cherished letters thanking me for caring about their family.

Save Some Excellence for Yourself

A few years ago I took a class. I can't even remember what the class was about, but the instructor was talking about personality types. She had us take a test and then we scored them and identified our own personality type. She told us that approximately 7% of the U.S. population was the personality type that felt a deep responsibility to help others. It is estimated that 70% of the teachers in the United States are in this category. We care about the children and we want to help. But we must take care of ourselves, too. Let your down time be down time. Carve out time to go for walks, sit and look at a beautiful sunset, and yes, stop and smell the roses.

For probably the first 10 years of my teaching career, I used to carry a heavy burden about all the children in the world. I worried about those who weren't getting an adequate education. I felt it was my

responsibility to make sure that happened. I felt I had to do something. One day I read a story about a little boy standing on a beach, throwing in sea stars that had washed up on the shore. A man walked by and said, “Why are you throwing back sea stars? There are so many! You can’t possibly make a difference.” The boy looked at the man, held up the sea star in his hand, and as he tossed it back into the water he said, “I made a difference to this one!”

Each year we get a classroom of sea stars. I can’t be responsible for all the children on earth, just those in my room. Make sure all your sea stars end up in the ocean. You will make a difference to each one of them!

Lovingly dedicated to Jerry H. I will *never* forget you, buddy!

Operation ~~Help Me!~~ Collaboration

Or How I Survived My First Years of Teaching

Julie York

Portland, Maine

Let me start by saying I am not a trained professional; I am in training. I didn’t go to school to teach high school, nor did I prepare myself to deal with the complications that arise from such a profession. I got in through a stroke of luck and ability and have never looked back. How did I survive? How did I adapt? Because I’m Wonder Woman! Well, actually, I’d like to think it’s because of a little thing called “collaboration.” I collaborated with a *lot* of people.

Before I even began my illustrious career as a video productions teacher, real life instructor, Web master, assistant yearbook advisor, anime club creator/administrator, and educational access channel director (whoa, when did those titles pile on?) there was Scott. Scott met me the week after the principal called to inform me that I had the job. This was a job I didn’t expect to get based on skill alone, especially since I was trained for elementary school and had little to no experience with “the big kids.” Sure, I knew the equipment and the subject, but the job? That’s where Scott came in. He showed me the ropes, explained the

position, and helped me better understand the curriculum he left behind when he left to teach Woodworking. We collaborated, or at least, I tried. Mostly I just sat and listened as if I were a rather large sponge. I was there, he was there, and he had experience. It comforted me to know that if I needed help there was someone, somewhere I could go to. Okay, so it wasn't collaboration per se, but it was definitely me working together with someone else. I would have helped more if I had half the experience under my belt that Scott had.

But I definitely couldn't stay that way forever. After struggling through the fateful first year of teaching, I began to grow and develop as a professional. The kids became used to me, I became used to them, and I began to care less about just getting through the lessons and more about the quality of the course. (Trust me, first year teachers of the world, it happens!) Students started to share ideas with me and I started to notice that their ideas made sense and could be used to better my plans. I began to think about ways to develop the curriculum and strategies to involve even more people, other people, specifically those persons *outside* my classroom. I was getting tired of having everything be from me and my experiences, and the course work remaining the same old routine. This is where my department chair, Jerry, stepped in.

Jerry and I shared a video course the second semester of my first year. It was amazing! Suddenly I could bounce around ideas with another teacher who was actually teaching the same course that I was. We shared curriculum, discussed ideas, and worked together. Our students collaborated and worked in groups across classes. Work and lessons became more vivid and detailed, and curriculum was enhanced. The lesson plans were dusted off and rubrics were updated once a semester. Students started to notice that the videos we created had more variety and a greater impact.

Life was good!

I began to work with other teachers to see how they taught things. During lunch break, I would chat with Ralph from science in an effort to better understand how he dealt with the physics of light and color temperature. During department prep, I would talk with the retiree Jack about how he worked with particularly pesky kids, the ones who know all the right buttons to press and exactly when to press them. Life was getting less hectic, and I thought, "Hey, I'll be ready for year two! I have help, I'm getting better at this, and I can do it!"

That's when a brand new class was added to my load: Computer Applications 1. Once more I was put in the position of knowing the content but not knowing how to teach it. This time there happened to be a few teachers who taught the class but no concrete curriculum. In addition, the state started to discuss the Maine Learning Results and Common Assessments. As a school and as a state we needed to work together to present a curriculum all students could achieve. We were responsible for really nailing down our rubrics and producing something we could show the big people in Augusta.

This was when collaboration came in once more to save the day. This was when I started working with Sheree. Together we plowed through it all and made something to be proud of. We developed a system of rubrics that worked well across all our classes, created a curriculum for Computer Applications 1 that was based on what we'd had in place but with some details ironed out, and even had time for the occasional chat or sharing of experiences. I helped her and she helped me. Besides Jerry from last semester, this was my first real experience at having a say in something beyond what came out of my mouth in my courses. I was collaborating! Because of my work with Sheree, I learned how to create a more solid curriculum, improving the one I already had for the video course. I overcame the stress of having nothing and worked with someone else to create something we could both be proud of.

Working together was interesting, too. I learned that sometimes I would do more work and other times she'd do more. It didn't always end up equal, especially when we had Jerry working with us for another course. Dividing a task by three is a lot more complicated than dividing by two, and no one who deals with teenagers all day long can be patient all the time. Collaboration means learning to work with others just as much as it means working for a better quality. I learned as much about myself as I did about learning to work with people. It's easier for me now because I understand the politics of working in a group of adult professionals. If you've never done it, do it. Trust me, it can be hard, stressful, and at the same time, rewarding. Just like the groups of students we sometimes force to work together, adults can learn to do it when there's a goal in sight.

So by the time the second half of my second year rolled around, I was ready and pumped to do more work with other teachers. I started doing projects with the rest of the school. My students started airing more and more work on the educational access channel. I started

inviting community members into the classroom to discuss various issues and concepts. I started to really listen to those around me and learn. I started to talk back. I started to work with others, enjoying it and allowing it to enhance my work. I also wasn't frantically trying to make it through my first year, half sick the whole time and desperately trying to get better while losing more and more sleep.

Who knows what did it, but I started to become part of the team of South Portland High School. I was becoming part of a community of teachers dedicated to teaching young people and helping them develop. There was no single leader but, rather, a community of teachers that together led the students, each other, and the school.

I don't think I'll ever look at teaching the same way again. Now I don't just teach one class, I work in a class that is connected to a building that is filled with possibilities. I don't just check with my department chair when considering a new project; I check with other teachers and sometimes even the principal. I don't do it every single lesson (where would I find the time?), but I do try to find the time. I try to find the opportunities for collaboration wherever and whenever I can. Voting 2004 involved my class, computer classes, English classes, social studies classes, and more. The Healthy Living Project of 2003 started as a principal-led initiative and turned into something the whole school could be proud of, including my five video classes. We interacted with each other, other students, and the community to produce some of the best public service announcements, video commercials, and instructional videos I've ever seen. We worked together—not just me and my students, but me, my students, and my school.

Collaboration brings people together. I have felt validated, secure, and happy during the times I have worked with others to create something bigger than my classroom. I have felt some of the burden and responsibilities of being a teacher lighten just from sharing them with others. Collaboration is something that now, three years later and going strong, I wouldn't do without in education.

So the next time I have to redo a curriculum from scratch because of a state mandate saying we need yet one more standard to add to the heap, I know exactly what to do. Give it a go, test it out myself, then bring it around to others. Get feedback and input and make the changes. It is my responsibility to teach my curriculum, but that doesn't mean I need to do it all alone. Once more, I am not a trained professional; I am in training.

Helpful Tips

- After you make a lesson plan or unit, show it to other people. You'll make it the best you possibly can (because who'd want to show other people something that really stinks?) and then they'll help you improve it even more. You'll be amazed at what they see.
- Listen to others. Sometimes I can't shut up and I think I know all the answers, but then I'm reminded, usually by students, that I'm not perfect. There's a time to talk and there's a time to listen. Try listening some more.
- Working together *can* be more work (like the group of kids in which one student does everything for the group), but it can also mean sharing the work and sharing the outcome. It's worth it. Don't be discouraged by bad experiences; there's always a way to make it work. Think of your students, the outcome, and getting the task completed.
- Not everything has to be done with others. Don't fix the unbroken wheel, but do look at your curriculum every now and then and think, "Is this the best it could be? Is this working well, or could it be better? If it needs improvement, do I know how or would someone else be able to see it?" It's hard to see problems when it's your creation.

Professional Collaboration Within an Inclusive Classroom Setting

How to Make It Work

Alisia Carey

Lexington, South Carolina

The concept of team teaching is inviting to some educators and daunting to others. Just the thought of sharing or relinquishing some teaching responsibilities is almost too much for some teachers to bear, and therefore they may miss out on a wonderful professional experience,

10 BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

one that all involved can learn from and embrace. While team teaching can be a highly motivating and fulfilling experience, it is not always easy. It takes planning, compromise, and dedication from all parties. But at its best, team teaching is an inspiring and rewarding practice for educators and students alike. This article will describe a successful team teaching situation, the collaboration it takes for it to run smoothly, and the value of this approach to all of the students involved.

As the special education teacher in an inclusive preschool child development class, I have first-hand knowledge of the challenges involved in making team teaching work. As a result of the need to provide a more appropriate setting for some students with disabilities, the inclusive preschool class was started six years ago. Because this class is the only one of its kind in our district, my co-worker and I did not have a model; we had to work together to implement the program while striving to establish our own identities within the classroom. In my experience, whether you are team teaching all day or for a period or two, the most successful situations evolve from mutual respect for the teaching abilities of those involved and the ability to collaborate to provide a quality educational experience for all of the students served. Successful educators working in team teaching situations embrace the teaching differences between themselves and their classroom partners. Each teacher has his or her own style, which should not be stifled by collaboration; rather, each style should be welcomed and respected as yet another way to reach every student. As professional educators, we must not be afraid of differing approaches or methodology and must be willing to learn from our most valuable and accessible assets, the teachers around us.

The motivation for any of us to take professional risks, strive for leadership roles, and think outside the box is the need to continually challenge and inspire our students. Through the concept of team teaching, students are consistently exposed to diverse teaching styles, differing personalities, and the chance to generalize skills taught between teachers. In my experience as the special education teacher in a team teaching situation, I have seen not only the students with disabilities blossom within the collaborative setting, but also the general education students as well. Through our efforts, the students that we serve have

learned to accept different approaches within the classroom and have learned at a very early age that there are many authority figures in a school.

While I believe that team teaching and the collaboration that it involves is a beneficial situation for all parties, it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to make it successful. It is best when approached with an open mind and the goal of creating a successful learning environment for every student. Collaboration through sharing ideas and information, modeling new approaches, and communicating with all involved is the foundation on which a successful team teaching situation is based. Recognizing that each educator is an “expert” who brings different experiences to the classroom aids in the development of the idea that ownership is a team effort. With that, it becomes “our students,” “our class,” and “our success.” Collaborative efforts within the classroom, school, or district lead to effective leadership at every level of the educational system.

In summary, whether you are already teaching in a team situation or considering the prospect, the following tips should be useful for creating a successful collaborative environment for staff and students alike.

Helpful Tips

- *Show Respect.* Respect the abilities, judgment, and contributions of your co-teacher. You will want the same in return.
- *Keep an Open Mind.* Embrace the differences in teaching styles and approaches.
- *Talk.* Keep the lines of communication open.
- *Stand Together.* Work through differences privately, and always present a united front to students.
- *Be Flexible.* Be willing to compromise.
- *Show, Don't Tell.* Lead by example.
- *Be Clear.* Expectations should be clear for all involved.

Using Staff Development to Implement a Schoolwide Reading Goal

Angela Judd
Hutchinson, Minnesota

Believing that all classroom teachers can and should teach reading strategies to their students, our school improvement committee at Hutchinson High School proposed the following goal: improve student reading scores on standardized tests, student reading comprehension, and student reading abilities. After presenting it to the staff, who endorsed the goal, a focused reading committee that included the media specialist was formed. We researched the latest data on reading programs and decided to introduce a limited number of initiatives each year and to focus on one schoolwide reading strategy during the first year.

To begin, I trained our staff in the KWL (What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Learned) method the first year, encouraging teachers to use the pre-reading, during reading, and after reading strategies to help increase student understanding and achievement. Teachers were given laminated posters of the KWL chart for their classrooms. At the same time, we implemented the Scholastic Reading Program, encouraged all classroom teachers to participate, and provided training. We decided to have all the students take the Scholastic Reading Inventory test every year to provide us with comparison data. In addition, we designed an evaluation survey for teachers to use.

Since the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tenth-grade reading test used for the No Child Left Behind legislation asks mostly inferential/analytical and critical/evaluative questions, during the second year we added training in vocabulary strategies, and during the third year we concentrated on the types of questions to ask in the classroom. Using sample test questions and articles, I trained the staff in the differences between the types of questions as well as how to help students find answers in texts using the B+ (Is it an answer I can find if I go BACK in the text?) or H+ (Is it a method that I need to figure out in my HEAD?) method. That spring, all teachers wrote reading plans, indicating which methods they would use in their classrooms and how they would measure success. Teachers could choose KWL, Increasing

Inferential/Analytical and Critical/Evaluative Questions, Vocabulary Strategies, and/or the Scholastic Reading Program.

By the third year of our reading goal, over 3,000 books had been checked out of the library, compared to only 358 before we started the program. Not only had the number of books checked out grown dramatically, but the reading Lexile scores jumped as well. All grade levels demonstrated a decrease in the number of students scoring below grade level. At one grade level, almost half the students who had been reading below grade level improved their scores to grade level or above. In addition, the number of teachers using the program doubled.

This is our fourth year of the reading goal. I trained the teachers to use Reading Summaries and HUG (*Highlight the text, Underline the details, and Gloss/write notes on the margins*). Staff members from 10 different departments currently participate in the Scholastic Reading Program, using it as required outside reading, extra credit, or supplementary reading. In the spring, teachers will meet during a staff development day to share the results of their reading plans, discuss their strategies, examine student work, and evaluate student achievement.

The media specialist and teachers report that students share excitement about reading, scoring 100% on their Scholastic Reading quizzes, and increasing Lexile scores. One ecstatic mother called the school counselor and told him how much her daughter was reading and that over the three years, she had increased her Lexile score from 772 to 1447. The average is 25 points a year.

Scores on the Minnesota Reading Basic Skills Test show improvement. For example, in the ninth and eleventh grades, the number of students passing in 2004 almost doubled compared to 2003. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tenth-grade reading test results reflect that 81% of the students are at grade level or above. The scores in the Literal/Explicit, Interpretive/Analytical, Critical/Evaluation categories were all above the state average. On the state's School Report Card for our school, our reading proficiency rate was listed as 88.74%. These results validate our efforts.

One of the main reasons for the success of the goal was the focus upon one specific goal for four years and the use of staff development time to revisit the goal several times a year. Effective staff development centers on a school's instructional goals, is frequent and intensive, and

14 BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

includes follow-up exercises. If teachers reflect in an organized way, assess student work together, and share resources and strategies, a sense of collective responsibility for improvement of the school will build.

Helpful Tips

- Involve staff in writing the goal.
- Form a focused reading committee that includes the media specialist.
- Present research showing why all content teachers should teach reading strategies.
- Show the value of a schoolwide reading program such as Scholastic Reading.
- Focus upon one reading strategy in the beginning.
- Revisit the reading goal four times a year.
- Work on the goal for several years.
- Coordinate staff development time with the reading goal.
- Ask teachers to write individual reading implementation plans.
- Evaluate the success of the program and make necessary changes.

 **Statewide Teacher Training Networks**

Angela Judd

Hutchinson, Minnesota

Often during staff development training teachers don't receive practical, hands-on materials that can be easily incorporated into a curriculum, or they don't receive information from a presenter who is currently teaching in the classroom. State education departments should use teachers for staff development training and offer opportunities for teachers to train other teachers throughout the state. The Minnesota Department of Education has a program called the Quality Teacher Network, which is a group of educators dedicated to assisting schools throughout

Minnesota to improve student achievement. I currently belong to the Language Arts QTN, which is organized and supported by the language arts specialist of the Division of Academic Standards and Professional Development in the Minnesota Department of Education. Our motto is “Improving Student Achievement Through Quality Teaching.”

Network members are experienced educators who are selected on the basis of their content knowledge, pedagogical skill, leadership, and professional development experience. The networks are designed to represent the variety of schools and education professionals in Minnesota. The member selection criteria is as follows: administrative support; tenured evidence of investment in professional development (e.g., advanced degree, attendance at workshops/conferences, membership in professional organizations); evidence of leadership at school, district, region, state, or national levels; and diversity in grade levels, geographical location, gender, and school/district size. Each network also includes members knowledgeable about English Language Learners and Special Education.

QTN members receive professional development training. In return, QTN members provide services to their schools, other districts, and the Minnesota Department of Education. Services include training, mentoring, resource development, research, and advising. Delivery methods include workshops, study groups, mentoring, or working with curriculum teams. Members are expected to attend QTN professional development opportunities and provide evidence of engagement and service.

Our network offered several Summer Institutes in 2004 to teachers throughout the state. “Raising Writing Achievement in Secondary Students” and “Raising Writing Achievement in Elementary Students” gave teachers the opportunity to become members of a community of writers and teachers of writing who were focused on learning and practicing strategies that improve student writing. Another session, “Teaching Media Literacy and Research Strategies,” helped teachers with the Minnesota Language Arts Standards that require students in Grades 3–12 to become critical users of information in print and electronic resources. This institute focused on strategies and tools that help students efficiently access, effectively process, and responsibly use information.

In the fall of 2004 and winter of 2005, another series of two-day workshops, titled “Raising Writing Achievement in Secondary Students

through 6 Trait Strategies and Best Practices,” was offered throughout the state. As a facilitator for these workshops, I felt that teachers appreciated the specific classroom experiences and materials that I could share about KWL, Minnesota’s Language Arts Standards, Before/During/After Reading Instruction, RAFT (Role/Audience/Format/Topic) writing, Authentic Audiences and Purposes, Best Practices, the HUG Reading Strategy, the four types of writers, the Writing Process, Writing Summaries, Evaluation and Scoring, 6 Traits of Writing, and Examination of Student Work. Teachers especially appreciated practice in scoring student work. During one activity, teachers read student samples from the Minnesota Writing Basic Skills/Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment in Writing Exam and practiced scoring them. Another activity involved scoring student work using the 6 Traits. NWREL (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory) has many student work examples on their Web site (<http://www.nwrel.org>). Valuable discussion occurred, and teachers agreed that they gained new insights as well as useful classroom materials.

It is invigorating to train other teachers. We meet as a group four times a year to share materials, work on projects, plan workshops, and read professional materials. The knowledge that I have gained by being a member of the QTN has been invaluable and the most useful professional development experience of my life.

Helpful Tips

- Always begin with an ice-breaking fun activity. One of my favorites is Penny for Your Thoughts. Ask teachers how many pennies they have handled in their lives. Then ask them to draw the front and back of the penny on a piece of paper. Next, pass out pennies for them to examine to check the accuracy of their drawings. Point out how we can be overly familiar with something and not really “see” it.
- Motivate teachers to listen by showing how this information will help them. Include professional research material to prove the value of your presentation.

- Provide a specific agenda and stick to it. Don't allow yourself to be sidetracked.
- Break the day into many activities. Keep each activity to no more than 45 minutes to ensure teacher interest.
- Use a variety of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. Teachers as well as students have different learning styles. Have them journal, draw, perform, and play games like Jeopardy. Use the Carousel (where sheets are placed around the room and teachers circle the room, placing teacher-directed responses on each sheet) and the Gallery Walk (where teachers place ideas on sheets and walk around the room, looking at others' suggestions).
- Model best practices. Make the workshop a supportive setting for shared learning using active exchange and valuing ideas, collaborative small group work, and exercises.
- Keep a sense of humor and smile, smile, smile. If an issue arises, put it on a piece of paper called the Parking Lot, and tell the teacher that you will return to the problem later. Remember to return to the question later when the tension has decreased.
- Use Exit Slips and Entrance Slips for breaks or between days. Tell teachers in order to exit they must ask a question relating to the material learned on the slip. When teachers return, they must select one of the questions and answer it.
- Use fun quizzes with prizes to check for teacher understanding.
- Always end with an evaluation tool so that you may assess the success of the workshop. One of my favorites is the Square/Box/Circle Form. Have teachers write what "squares with their thinking" in the square, new ideas they've learned in the box, and questions they "still have circling" in the circle. Another favorite is the 3-2-1-Take Off. Teachers list "Something big I learned," "What I will do now (action I will take)," and "What I need (or want to know) next."

 **Structured Freedom*****Successful Schools Through
Collaborative Learning Communities***

Jason R. Harding
Monroeville, Pennsylvania

It takes a village to raise a child. Many great leaders have communicated these words of wisdom. They remind us that we can envision, implement, and achieve more when collaboration is a key factor in our everyday participation in society. In an age of standards and accountability, this premise could not be more appropriate and significant for educators. Collaboration is the key to success for all students. It is an essential ingredient in an educational environment that demands nothing less than that every student *can and will* learn in our classrooms. In order to develop this vision into reality, it will take much more than closing our doors to plan and teach on our own. We must build communities that are conducive to sharing ideas, knowledge, theories, and data collection. Only within these communities will our students be able to achieve at an optimum level in all instances, and will everyone reap the benefits of the experiences of those around them. We must openly communicate about what is working well and about areas in which we need to improve—in our instructional practices, individual student work, assessment results, and all components of student achievement.

You may be wondering, “How can I create this opportunity in my school?” The answer is found in a series of steps that will structure your freedom to communicate in an efficient, equal opportunity environment. This “Structured Freedom” cannot be achieved alone and will be a lifelong learning commitment. My goal is to provide you with a framework to create your own “Structured Freedom” promoting improved collaboration, data collection, and analysis with your colleagues. The process to create “Structured Freedom” is a long-term commitment that will take patience and dedication, but the result is well worth the effort.

1. Create a Vision Statement and Strategic Plan

If we want to know the path on which we will travel, we must first choose a destination. This is an opportunity as an educational leader to engage in a dialogue with the other members of your school community and develop a vision statement. The vision statement should encompass all that your collaborative school community will work to change, improve, and maintain over the course of the school year. All of your ships need to sail in the same direction in order for the process to be successful. If there are many areas that your collaborative school community decides need to be addressed, you should list all of them. The list should then be prioritized through collaborative efforts to analyze and discuss data presented by the group. Keep the items that are not at the top of the list, and implement them later as you begin to see progress in the higher priority areas. The high priority items will drive the strategic plan that is the foundation of your vision statement. The targets of the strategic plan should be measurable and achievable through the collaborative process.

2. Create Your Collaboration Pods

Now that you have created your collaborative community's vision and strategic plan, it is time to create the core groups that will make up the community. I call these your Collaboration Pods. Every collaborative learning community may choose to do this differently. Your Collaboration Pods should be made up of four to eight people. Some communities form the pods based on comfort level, some by balancing areas of expertise, whereas others just "count off by eights" and create their groups by chance. No matter which method you choose, the pod that you join will be your support group, your cheerleaders, your analysts, your confidantes, and the people you can count on when you have a problem. The problem may involve individual or group student work, teaching practices, or collaboration among a grade-level team. The Collaboration Pods will be the key to unlocking problem-solving strategies through discussion in a structured setting for your collaborative learning community.

3. Develop Data Collection Tools

We all have been exposed to data analysis and data-driven decision making due to the accountability that drives our education system today. Some educators view these terms as negative and not “student friendly” in their practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. If used correctly, data and the informed decisions that they can provide can forward student success. For this reason, data collection and analysis by your Collaborative Learning Pods are key factors for success. Before any presenters can begin to collect data to present their problem or student work to the Collaborative Learning Pod, the group must develop tools that will make the data collection practical and easily managed within a classroom. There are many options, ranging from a simple checklist to a more in-depth analysis with spreadsheets and graphs.

I believe that it is best to begin simply and to add to your “toolbox” as the Collaborative Learning Pod meets over time. The tools should fit the preference of each participant. The purpose is to ensure that each person feels comfortable and the rest of the Pod receives information and data that they can analyze for data-driven decision making. These options may get you started in building your own “toolbox”:

- a. Checklists
- b. Tally Charts
- c. Rubrics
- d. Hand-Drawn Graphs
- e. Easy Grade Pro
- f. Excel Graphing/Spreadsheets

4. Develop Your Collaborative Learning Pod Expectations

Next, Pod members need to develop the structure that will allow everyone the freedom to teach and learn collaboratively. The Pod’s expectations should help the group to be open and honest, enhancing the feeling that everyone is there to help and not to attack each other. The expectations should reflect everyone’s feelings within the Pod.

This is an example of the expectations established by one of the Pods in which I participated:

a. There will be one presenter and one facilitator at each meeting. The facilitator will ensure that the group sticks to the Pod's expectations. The facilitator should ask the Pod to refer to expectations 2–7 if anyone strays from them.

b. The presenter will have 10 minutes to present his or her problem or student work to the rest of the Collaborative Learning Pod while everyone listens and takes notes. The presenter should present any data collection at this time for group analysis.

c. The group should then use the data collection and information that the presenter has offered to them. The questions should be answered as they are asked individually. Once one question is answered by the presenter, it is not discussed in any way. The next question should follow and should be specific to the person asking it. It should not build on the question before it. This will eliminate the presenter feeling attacked by the other Pod members. The members should only ask one question until everyone has had an opportunity to question the presenter. Once this has occurred, members may ask a second question, a third question, and so on throughout the 10-minute time period.

d. Then, the facilitator will have the group members discuss suggestions and possibilities for improvement for approximately 10 minutes. As they do this, the presenter will step back and take notes on the discussion. The presenter does not participate in the discussion and should not be addressed by the rest of the group. It is a reflective time for the presenter. The group members should avoid statements that attack and should use open language. This may include starting with "Based on the data, Joe could" or "I wonder if." These types of statements offer problem-solving strategies rather than try to solve Joe's problem for him.

e. The facilitator should then ask the presenter to use notes to share what he or she has learned and how to implement this in the classroom.

f. The Collaborative Learning Pod should then discuss what did and did not go well in the session.

g. The facilitator should remind everyone at the conclusion that all meetings are confidential in order to maintain the integrity and trust of the Collaborative Learning Pod.

5. Implement Ideas

Presenters take what they have learned and implement these suggestions in their classroom. Data collection should continue and the presenter should analyze the data regularly to see whether progress has been made. If it has, presenters should continue to collect data until they have reached their goal. Once they have reached their goal, they can begin collecting data in another area to present to the group the next time that it is their turn.

If the data show no significant progress, then the presenters should present the data along with another verbal description to the Collaborative Learning Pod to begin the process again. It is not a failure, only a speed bump on the road to success. The Pod should learn from the new data collected and why the previous recommendations were not successful for the presenter. This will open the door for even better, more informed data-driven decisions.

6. Different Environment Equals Different Processes

By now, some of you may be excited and ready to build a collaborative learning community. Others may be thinking that this is idealistic and will never work. We all are in educational environments, but they differ in demographic makeup. It is important that you take this basic process and make small changes to ensure success in your school. I cannot do this for you because you understand your current school environment better than anyone else.

I am fortunate to work for a large school district in an affluent suburban community in Pittsburgh. My resources and environment have helped me make this vision a reality more easily than it might in a school district that did not already have so much collaboration in place. This does not mean that it cannot be done. It means, instead, that an individual may have to work harder, develop the process at a different pace, find outside resources, or start with one small Collaborative

Learning Pod and build a collaborative community from the ground up. It does not matter how it happens or the length of time that it takes to do it. The common factor is that student achievement *can* increase through collaboration and all of society will benefit as a result.

Lifelong Teaching and Learning

Linda Hodges

Fullerton, California

Many years ago, as a first-year teacher, I realized that the knowledge acquired during my college years was just a beginning; there was so much more I needed to learn about the subjects I was teaching. Almost 40 years later, I can honestly say that my efforts to learn more are still ongoing and what a joy it is. It inspires me!

Without a doubt, the best resources available to teachers are their colleagues. Interactions with other teachers as well as professionals from universities, business, and industry are invaluable. There is a vast array of opportunities for teachers to grow professionally through courses, workshops, conventions of professional organizations, and meeting with fellow teachers in their schools or districts.

As a teacher leader, one should keep abreast of educational developments and volunteer to serve on committees that examine school curricula and other policies such as school schedules and educational technologies that affect student learning. This will benefit your school and all the schools in your district, as it is important to have articulation among schools to ensure a proper scope and sequence in the curricula throughout the school district. Teacher leaders should work with administrators to foster cooperation among their schools.

Teacher leaders should set an example of professionalism through their own pursuit of means to improve their teaching. They must participate in as many professional growth opportunities as possible throughout the school year and during the summer vacation. Furthermore, they should encourage other teachers in their departments and schools to do the same. Most of the best teaching ideas are learned from other teachers. As a science teacher, I have been very fortunate because

numerous companies, educational institutions, and government agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation) sponsor courses and programs for teachers. These sponsors include the University of California, Irvine; the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); Howard Hughes Medical Institute; Texas Instruments; The Jet Propulsion Laboratory; Chevron Corporation; The College Board; the Dolan DNA Learning Center; the Ocean Institute (Dana Point, CA); and the Northern California Society of American Foresters. A teacher has to look for these opportunities and take the time to apply for them and then attend them.

Using the resources gleaned from courses, workshops, and one's own teaching experience, teacher leaders can organize workshops of their own design to share ideas with other professionals. With the support and encouragement of my school administrators, I have had the privilege to foster professional growth in several ways:

- Sharing expertise with teachers in my department and other departments in our school. For example, making computers and other technological instructional tools available to teachers and providing proper training for their use. Training is provided by experienced teachers from our school, workshops held at the county Department of Education, professional education conferences, and through companies specializing in educational technology.

- Presenting workshops for teachers in other schools in our district or county. From contacts made at the University of California, Irving, I have presented workshops at several high schools and middle schools throughout the county and have demonstrated many science lessons for science workshops at UCI covering topics in genetics, biotechnology, and cell biology.

- Conducting science workshops for elementary school teachers attending education conferences for the Diocese of Orange (my school district).

- Inviting elementary, middle, and high school teachers to Saturday Science workshops held at my high school. Some of these workshops have been organized and presented by me; for example, a Food Science Workshop in 2003. Others have resulted from the

collaboration of several teachers in our science department, all of whom are master teachers. A teacher leader recognizes the expertise of colleagues and welcomes their input whenever possible.

- Working with teachers from high schools and elementary schools in our district to articulate the curricular needs at all grade levels in an effort to improve the entire science curriculum and create an appropriate scope and sequence for the district.

- Coordinating a meeting of all science teachers from our district high schools. At this meeting, a keynote address regarding State Science Standards was given by a university chemistry professor who is very involved in state science education projects. This was followed by small-group sessions in which teachers shared ideas for teaching science.

As a department chair, I have spearheaded fundraising projects to support technology in my department and school. These funds have been used to purchase computers for the school computer labs as well as computers and other technology for science instruction such as calculators, DVD players, electrophoresis equipment, scientific probe ware to use with calculators and computers, projectors, spectrophotometers, video-flex cameras, and video-microscopes. Some schools have organized academic “booster clubs” of parents and community leaders who help with fundraising projects. Additional funding can be obtained through grants.

Teacher leaders enlist the expertise of community resources, recruiting outside professionals as guest speakers for classes, for school assemblies, or for faculty/staff enrichment. For example, speakers from the Audubon Society, Allergan Pharmaceutical Company, and a forensic anthropologist from a local university have addressed the students and faculty at our school. Field trips to local museums, universities, or educational centers should also be encouraged.

Finally, teacher leaders support a wide range of school functions, from athletics to theater and art projects, clubs, school publications, and service projects. It is important to show students that you care about them by your words and actions. Good teachers love what they do, recognize the gifts and talents of their colleagues, and learn from them.

Helpful Tips

- Seek dialogue with teachers and administrators in your school and with other schools.
- Encourage your colleagues to pursue professional growth opportunities.
- Raise funds for educational programs.
- Conduct workshops for other teachers.
- Support student activities.

 **Scopes Trial and Error***A Lesson in Integrated Teaching**Stacey Smiar*

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Although we are a small school with small class sizes and combined grade levels, the crossover between the subjects is limited due to schedule and space constraints. Nonetheless, the social studies teacher, Jenn, and I, the science teacher, were strong believers in integrated learning and were determined to create at least one series of lessons that combined our two subjects. Jenn and I had already aligned our curriculum so that seventh and eighth graders were studying eugenics and the Holocaust while I was teaching genetics. Jenn's focus for the year was "Justice and Dissent," with one of her goals being to hold a mock trial in order to help students understand the justice system. She knew that I was interested in teaching Darwinism, so when she found a book on historic mock trials and came across the Scopes Monkey Trial, we knew we had found a perfect match.

For the social studies component, Jenn instructed students on how to perform a mock trial and research historic figures. As they read about

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Many thanks to Jennifer Kay Goodman for her collaboration with this article.

the controversy over evolution versus creationism, the kids were driven to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of evolution. After all, some of them were going to have to defend characters who believed in evolution, and some were going to have to argue that evolution was wrong. This is where science class took over, where we examined exactly what evolution *is*. What evidence is there? Who believes it and why? Who doesn't and why not? What does it mean to say that humans descended from monkeys? This brought us into a whole host of topics that I didn't plan and couldn't have predicted. Kids were fascinated by the various links and branches in the "family tree" of primal apes to *Homo sapiens*. We debated whether Neanderthals died off or mated with descendents of modern humans. We even hypothesized about the future evolution of human beings. What features would humans need? What wouldn't we need? How might the environment change, and how could we change the environment so we wouldn't have to change?

The result was a lively classroom full of twice as many students as usual. Student-made posters decorated the walls with sayings like, "Don't Make a Monkey Out of Me" and "Separation of Church and State." Students were focused on last-minute research and rehearsal of their characters. Having two teachers in the room helped us manage the energy of the room. The trial ensued with students acting out an historic conflict that incorporated more than just one discipline. We felt that students ended that unit with a much deeper understanding of both science and social studies and an improved ability to look at two sides of an issue.

I have had many experiences of working with colleagues on interdisciplinary teaching ideas. I've taught a sixth-grade interdisciplinary unit on the family farm and designed and led science research to help students understand the biomes and adaptations of various organisms in cultural studies they've done in social studies. In an effort to teach seventh graders research paper writing skills, an English teacher and I combined forces to create a project in which students would choose one of the human organs and write a research paper about it. In addition to teaching the students about the systems of the body, I also taught students how to responsibly research using the Internet, take notes, organize their ideas, and create a PowerPoint slide show. In a separate project, I worked with a math teacher on Excel spreadsheets and graphing to chart the growth of pea plants in science class. Also with sixth

graders, the computer teacher and I worked together to teach kids to harvest images off the Internet and import them into a slide show to create a multimedia presentation of their “Breaking News Report” at a famous earthquake or volcano.

The common thread in all of these projects is that what existed at the start were a couple of teachers with enthusiasm and the hope that this could be a fun, different, and educational project. I’ve found what is most helpful is for the teachers involved to agree upon and clarify a goal at the start. Naturally you will plan some methods to reach the goal, but some will be figured out along the way; the kids’ interests and stumbling blocks will help guide you.

As teachers, we put so much emphasis on kids working in groups, but rarely do teachers get the chance to do so. Working with another colleague, you have double the sense of each student’s strengths and weaknesses. You learn more about each student both from your colleagues’ different perspectives and from seeing the child in a different setting or working with a different skill. You grow as a teacher by challenging yourself with new curricula, new teaching methods, and new relationships with your teaching peers. The process is more time consuming than teaching and planning on your own, but it can be twice as rewarding.

Helpful Tips

- Clarify your goal. What skills or content do you want students to have at the end of your unit? This will keep you focused. For example, I knew when the students were writing about organs that I was to be most concerned with their research process and organization, *not* their acquired knowledge of the large intestine.
- Keeping your goal in mind, develop your means of assessment. Will students defend characters in a mock trial? Write a paper? Teach students of a younger grade?
- Establish your planning time. This is undoubtedly the most difficult part. You might pick a prep period during the week, meet before the school day starts, or agree that e-mail at

night works best for both of you. You will likely feel excited and eager to have a colleague with whom you can debrief.

- If you can organize the time and space, there may be two teachers in the same room, or you may teach parallel lessons in your separate rooms. I feel it is more meaningful, if it is possible, for the students and teachers involved to come together at least at the culmination of the project, for both a sense of accomplishment and closure.
- Check your ego at the door. All teachers involved have to be willing to take risks, make mistakes, adapt to changes, and listen to their colleagues. You may not reach your goal as smoothly as you planned, but I haven't seen a collaborative project that didn't benefit the students in some way. And remember, you can try anything once, but you don't have to do it twice.

Staff Development Initiatives Within Faculty Groups

Scott Hogan

Phoenix, Arizona

As a graduation requirement, high school students in Arizona must pass the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test by 2006 in reading, writing, and mathematics. The April 2005 math test will have approximately 100 multiple choice questions. As the AIMS Student Guide puts it, “the questions will emphasize conceptual understanding, process, and problem solving skills rather than just computation skills.”¹ Students are not allowed to use calculators.

While most math teachers in our district know about the five Arizona math standards (number sense, data analysis, algebra, geometry, and logic), district administration felt training was needed to help teachers understand the different *types of math* on the test and *how to cover* each kind of problem. Historically, our test scores have been very

low and clearly need to get better. Thus, we developed a workshop to address these issues. Three math teachers, Renae Short, Elaine Arrieta, and I, from different charter high schools in the Leona Group volunteered to present a workshop to math teachers from the district's other schools in a one-day format composed of two sessions, each running for close to an hour and a half.

We designed the math test preparation workshop in three distinct sections. The first section was titled "What Are the State Math Standards?" The second was "How to Cover Each Kind of Problem in Class," and the third we called "Roundtable Discussion of Strategies."

To prepare for the first part of the presentation, I downloaded the state math standards from the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Web site and condensed the concepts within each standard into simpler language. I typed an example for each concept and used an enlarging machine at Kinko's to turn the $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ " pages into 18×24 " posters. The copy was set to 26-point, black ink for maximum visual impact on the audience. At an office supply store I bought five three-packs of 20×30 " foam board, a can of spray adhesive, and a utility knife to cut the foam board to size. I then mounted the enlarged copies onto the foam board. These 18×24 " posters were the basis of my presentation. I explained each standard and the percentage each one was of the total test and also gave an example to illustrate each concept.²

The second part of the workshop involved going over the AIMS Practice Test published by ADE. Ordinarily the test's 43 sample questions are an integrated collection of problems that cover the five standards, in no special order. We decided to reformat the test; each problem was assigned a standard or concept and then placed in one of five categories that matched the state math standards (number sense, data analysis, algebra, geometry, logic). This grouping of practice problems by standard was the key to showing the types of math covered on the test. Each teacher was given two copies of the test, one an unedited version and the other with problem sets categorized by standards-based groups.

To further meet the twin objectives of the workshop, showing the types of math and kinds of problems covered on the test, we asked each teacher to bring a "curriculum map" of the classes he or she taught. A curriculum map, much like a road map for travel, lays out the essential topics of the course and covers skills, content, activities, and assessments used by the teacher. Such maps are useful tools to make sure you are on

the right track, pacing yourself to teach the essentials. They can be fine-tuned to make sure your objectives are on target and students understand the concepts. We showed teachers a generic curriculum map, how to refine their initial curriculum draft, and how to use the map as a directional device for instruction.

The third section of the workshop was the roundtable discussion, in which we broke the audience into five-person groups. Each group had the large 3M Post-It notepaper to record strategies for covering each kind of problem on the test in the required math classes. The strategies recorded included giving each student a copy of the test formula reference sheet on cardstock the first week of on class; having students write answers on individual whiteboards instead of on paper; and giving all math tests in multiple choice format, similar to the AIMS test.

In summary, this three-part presentation was designed to help teachers understand the different types of math on the AIMS test and the importance of covering each kind of problem in classes that are required for our student population. In the process, standards and examples were presented on large posters, two kinds of practice tests were given to teachers, curriculum maps were used as tools for effective instruction, and a roundtable discussion allowed participants to share test preparation strategies.

This professional development workshop proved to be highly successful and offered a way for the math teachers in our district to come together to address an educational challenge. Renee, Elaine, and I worked together as the leaders on this project and found that collaborative leadership can lead to success for everyone involved.

Helpful Tip

Know how to use software, typed content, and foam board to create informative visual presentations.

Notes

1. Arizona Department of Education. (2004, September). *High school student guide to AIMS: Arizona's instrument to measure standards*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.
2. The percentages were obtained from Arizona Department of Education. (2005). *Spring 2004–2005 AIMS mathematics blueprint*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.