PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals

Marilyn Friend   Lynne Cook

Seventh Edition

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for School Professionals
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Foundations and Perspectives

From Chapter 1 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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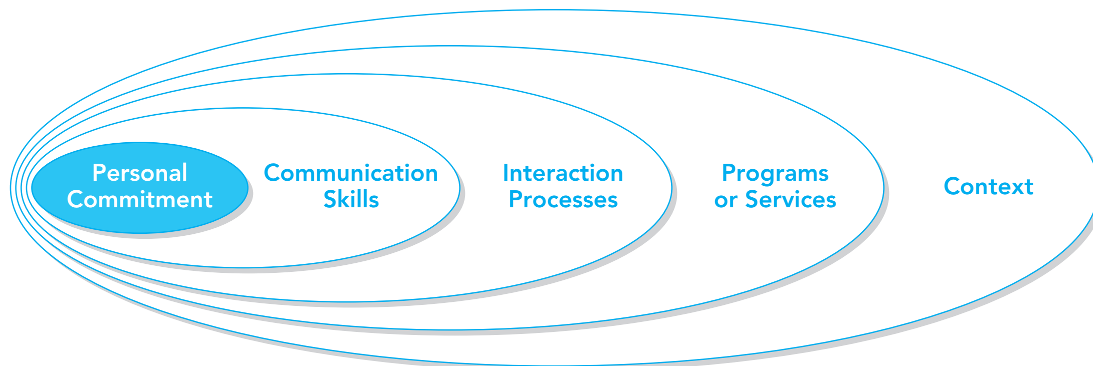
Foundations and Perspectives



Connections

Collaboration is essential to the practices of effective educators and the culture of successful schools. This chapter begins your journey of the study of collaboration. You will learn what collaboration is (and is not) and how it fits into a broader societal context. You will also find out about the increasing attention collaboration is receiving throughout education as well as some of the challenges educators face as their collaborative responsibilities increase. Finally, you will be introduced to a framework for studying collaboration.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define *collaboration* and describe its critical characteristics, distinguishing it from related but distinctly different concepts.
2. Outline the importance of collaboration from a broad societal perspective, including its place in disciplines such as business, health, and human services.
3. Analyze the place of collaboration within contemporary schools in the context of current legislation and other reform initiatives, including formal and informal collaborative practices.
4. Outline several challenges that may arise as educators increase their collaborative activities in schools.
5. Describe a framework for studying collaboration.

A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

A Day in the Life . . .

Holmes County School District prides itself on its efforts related to collaboration. At the district level, administrators meet regularly, and any initiative considered is examined in terms of its impact on all students, including those who are high achievers, those who are average, those who struggle to learn, those who are English learners, and those who have disabilities. Principals are held accountable for fostering a collaborative culture in their schools, and applicants for any job in the district are asked a number of questions about working with others, even when it is difficult. Here are examples of professionals' typical days and their collaborative roles in their schools.

Ms. Maharrin is a middle school social studies teacher. In addition to her daily teaching responsibilities, she is a member of her school's leadership team, and so today she attends a team meeting from 7:30 to 8:15 am to discuss several issues, including the staff development plan for the next school year. At lunch, Ms. Maharrin arranges to meet with Mr. Newby, the school psychologist, to design an intervention for the new student from Somalia who is experiencing considerable frustration in the classroom. Ms. Maharrin knows the upcoming field trip will be the primary topic for discussion during her team preparation period, and during her individual preparation period she needs to call two parents. After school, she plans to meet with her assistant principal, Mr. Okolo, to discuss the peer tutoring program the university interns would like to establish. At the end of the day, Ms. Maharrin wryly thinks to herself that on days like today teaching her students seems to be the smallest part of her job—something she never would have imagined when she entered the teaching profession 19 years ago.

Mr. Mendez is a second-year student support teacher (SST) at Hawthorne High School. Mr. Mendez begins each day touching base with his colleagues in the math department and working on paperwork. Once classes begin at 7:50 am, he spends the morning co-teaching two sections of Algebra I and teaching one section of a study skills class that has a math emphasis. During his preparation period, he meets with two students and the counselor about problems the students are experiencing in their classes. He also prepares directions for the paraprofessional who is assigned to support Matt, a student with significant physical disabilities, in a biology class and a geometry class. Mr. Mendez has time in his schedule for his assessment and individualized education program (IEP) writing responsibilities, and this afternoon begins with an annual review and transition planning meeting for one of the students on his caseload. After school, he works on lesson plans, meets briefly with Ms. Meyers, the social studies teacher with whom he cochairs the school's response to intervention (RTI) team, and makes a parent phone call. Mr. Mendez considers himself an advocate for students on his caseload, but he also knows that he influences teachers' thinking about students who are at risk. He finds that he must pay close attention to the personalities of the teachers with whom he works; if he establishes a strong working relationship with them, students are the beneficiaries.

Mrs. Lee is a literacy coach at River Bend Elementary School. Her primary responsibility is to assist teachers, especially those in the first two years of their teaching careers, to increase student achievement in reading and writing. Her job usually does not include directly teaching students unless it is to model a technique or demonstrate a strategy. Thus, Mrs. Lee spends her time observing in classrooms, meeting with teachers individually and in small groups, advising the principal about needs she identifies related to literacy, conducting staff development on specific strategies and approaches, and analyzing and sharing literacy data with school staff members. She also works closely with the school's parent advisory group to help families foster literacy at home. Sometimes Mrs. Lee misses her days as a teacher with its clear patterns and the joy of seeing her students succeed, but she also knows that she helps more students now by working with all the teachers and families and that her current job brings a different kind of satisfaction.

Introduction

Of all the complex tasks facing educators today, none is as demanding or as critical as creating a school culture of collaboration because it is a foundation of collaboration that enables all the other work of educators to be successful. To accomplish this goal, each person who works in schools must have the disposition, knowledge, and skills to collaborate. For example, each of the professionals just described has adult–adult interactions as a significant job responsibility. Ms. Maharrin, whose primary responsibility is instruction, also is expected to work with colleagues and parents. Half of Mr. Mendez's teaching occurs in partnership with general education teachers in that setting. Mrs. Lee's job illustrates the emphasis today on improving student outcomes. School leaders have realized that teachers need support in their classrooms in order to ensure that all students access the general curriculum and reach high standards. Taken together, these professional interactions illustrate three critical points for understanding the premise of this text.

First, collaboration has become an integral part of today's schools (e.g., Barth, 2006; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). In the past, educators who were not very effective in working with other adults were often excused with a comment such as, "But she's really good with students." Although working effectively with students obviously is still the most important aspect of educators' jobs, it is not enough. Everyone in schools—including special and general education teachers, administrators, related services providers, and other specialists—needs the knowledge and skills to work with colleagues, paraprofessionals, and parents. This is true in early childhood programs, in elementary schools, and in middle and high schools. It is true in schools that are still regarded as traditional in terms of programs and services as well as in those leading the way in educational innovation. Part of the reason for the importance of collaboration is the general trend of expanding and increasingly complex responsibilities, which are more realistically addressed when professionals pool their talents (e.g., Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar, 2007; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Martinez, 2010). Part of it is legislation setting high standards for academic achievement and clear accountability systems for all students (e.g., Love, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and part of it is the continued trend toward inclusive practices (Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008; Smith, 2007).

Second, examples of professionals' collaborative activities demonstrate that such interactions occur both formally and informally. School leadership teams, middle school teams, co-teaching teams, teams that meet to discuss students who are struggling to learn, and consultative meetings are representative of the growth of formal structures and activities in schools that rely on collaboration for success. Models emphasizing collaboration such as these are described in detail later in this text. Meetings between teachers to respond to immediate student needs and phone calls to parents are examples of informal collaboration. Both types of collaboration are important. However, informal collaboration often occurs whether or not a context for collaboration has been fostered and whether or not any formal structures for collaboration are in place. Formal collaboration typically requires that strong leadership has ensured that a collaborative school culture—one that values collegial interactions—has been created.

Third, this text is based on the belief that collaboration is the common thread in many current initiatives for school reform (McCoach et al., 2010). Collaboration is crucial as educators move to implement RTI practices, differentiate instruction, meet standards of accountability for student achievement as measured through high-stakes testing, and design and implement local professional development strategies. Likewise, collaboration is crucial as professionals work with the parents and families of their increasingly diverse

PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Working with Diverse Families

Collaborating with the parents and family members of your students is one of your first responsibilities as a professional educator, and doing this requires an understanding of the diversity and needs they represent. Ray (2005) offers some examples of family characteristics or circumstances and challenges that may arise.

- *Single-parent families* may experience a great deal of stress and isolation, and the children from these families are more likely than other children to live in poverty.
- *Blended families,* in which parents have children from former relationships, may need time to bond and to resolve issues related to child rearing (e.g., discipline). Sibling rivalry also may occur.
- *Multigenerational families,* in which grandparents, great-grandparents, or other relatives care for children, may face economic challenges, and the energy required to raise children may be daunting for the caregiver.
- *Foster families* are, by nature, temporary, and so the bonds may be a bit different from those in other families; children in foster families may experience stress because of not knowing exactly what the next steps in their lives may be.
- *Same-sex families* often face societal discrimination, and some teachers may feel uncomfortable interacting with these parents. Legal issues related to topics such as access to school records also may arise.

As a professional educator, you can enhance your interactions with diverse families by using strategies such as the following:

1. Be sure to know the correct last name of every parent, regardless of the family structure.
2. Avoid language that implies that "family" refers only to traditional family structure.
3. Regardless of family structure, offer information to parents or caregivers on their children's strengths and abilities.
4. Avoid making requests that may place parents in an uncomfortable position related to time or money. Some families cannot afford to contribute materials for classrooms, and some parents cannot come to conferences during typical school hours or on a specific day; therefore, options and alternatives should be offered.
5. Remember that projects and activities that presume students are part of a traditional family may not be appropriate. For example, alternatives should be found to creating a family tree and making Mother's Day gifts.
6. In some cases—for example, when grandparents or great-grandparents are raising children—you may need to explain school procedures if these caregivers are unfamiliar with them.

Most important, all educators should reflect on their own beliefs about nontraditional families and set aside any assumptions they may have about them. Being positive with students and families and being alert to and stopping teasing or bullying of students from these families are your responsibilities as a professional educator.

student groups. An initial illustration of this point is captured in Putting Ideas into Practice, which explores challenges that families may face and ways educators may effectively interact with them. Collaboration also is part of special education through initial referral and assessment procedures, IEP development, service delivery approaches, conflict resolution, and parent participation.

This chapter, then, is about effective interactions. It presents the universal concepts, principles, skills, and strategies that all school professionals can use to enhance their shared efforts to educate their students. Although slight variations in practice may occur related to one's

specific area of expertise (teacher, special educator, speech/language therapist, or administrator), learning about collaboration generally is truly an area that brings educators together.

Collaboration Concepts

The term *collaboration* is something of an educational buzzword. One can easily get the sense that collaboration is viewed as the preferred approach in nearly any school situation. It is touted as the mechanism through which school reform can be accomplished (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Dufour et al., 2008; Sagor, 2009) and the instrument through which diverse student needs can be met (Olivos, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010; van Garderen, Scheuermann, Jackson, & Hampton, 2009). Principals are admonished to use a collaborative leadership style (e.g., Hines, 2008), and teachers are encouraged to use collaboration to improve student outcomes (e.g., Garrett, 2010; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Martinez, 2010/2011). Unfortunately, the term *collaboration* often is carelessly used and occasionally misapplied, as suggested in Figure 1.

Despite all the current discussion about collaboration, definitions of the term have remained unclear, which has contributed to confusion about its character and implementation. In fact, some dictionary definitions of *collaboration* include reference to treason or working together for sinister purposes! In education literature and practice, you may find that *collaboration* either is used as a synonym for related but distinctly different concepts—including teaming, consultation, co-teaching, and inclusion—or is not defined at all beyond a sense of working together (e.g., Gleckel & Koretz, 2008; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012; Sagor, 2009). Because we firmly believe that a precise understanding of the term *collaboration* is far more than semantics, we begin by carefully defining it. Knowing what collaboration is and is not and how it applies to school initiatives and other applications can help you articulate your practices, set appropriate expectations for yourself, and positively influence others to interact collaboratively.

FIGURE 1 Some of the many misunderstandings about collaboration in schools.

Definition

The term *collaboration* is used frequently in casual conversation, but it also has a technical definition that characterizes it as a unique professional concept:

> Interpersonal collaboration is a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal.

Notice that we call collaboration a *style*. In the same way that writers use various styles to convey information to readers so, too, do individuals use interpersonal styles or approaches in their interactions with one another. Some professionals may choose to be directive when they interact; others may choose to be accommodative or facilitative; still others may choose to be collaborative. At first glance, referring to collaboration as a style may appear to detract from its significance by equating it with something ephemeral and seemingly lacking in substance. However, using this definition enables you to distinguish the nature of the interpersonal relationship—that is, collaboration—occurring during shared interactions from the activities themselves, such as teaming, problem solving, or co-teaching.

As just implied, because collaboration is a style of interaction, it cannot exist in isolation. It can occur only when it is used by people who are engaged in a specific process, task, or activity. To clarify this point, consider the following: If colleagues mentioned to you that they were collaborating, would you know what they were doing? Probably not. They could be collaboratively discussing strategies for supporting a student who has just enrolled at the school, sharing the responsibilities for an academic lesson in a co-teaching arrangement, or planning an interdisciplinary unit. What the term *collaboration* conveys is *how* the activity is occurring—that is, the nature of the interpersonal relationship occurring during the interaction and the ways in which individuals are communicating with one another. Think about this in relation to Ms. Maharrin, Mr. Mendez, and Mrs. Lee. In what activities are they engaged? Are these activities likely candidates for collaboration?

Defining Characteristics of Collaboration

Considered alone, the definition we have presented only hints at the subtleties of collaboration. Through our writing (e.g., Cook & Friend, 2010; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010), our own ongoing collaboration, and our experience facilitating the collaboration of others, we have identified several elements of collaboration that we refer to as defining characteristics, as they more fully explain the basic definition.

Collaboration Is Voluntary It is not possible to force people to use a particular style in their interactions with others. States may pass legislation, school districts may adopt policy, and principals may implement programs; but unless school professionals and their colleagues choose to collaborate, they will not do so. Perhaps the best illustration of this notion is the increasingly common mandate that professionals collaborate in designing and implementing programs for students with special needs in general education classes. If you are familiar with a school where this expectation is in place, you probably also are aware that some teachers are unwilling to collaborate, regardless of the mandate. For example, a teacher may spend a significant amount of time complaining about the demands of teaching certain students, apparently unaware that this is time that otherwise could be spent collaboratively designing instruction to help these students succeed. If that individual attends meetings as required but undermines the reading specialist's, English as a second language (ESL) teacher's, or special educator's efforts to support students, he or she is not collaborating in the sense outlined in this chapter. The professional relationship is constrained, the students are still in the classroom, and the specialist or special educator bears most of the

responsibility for making accommodations. Similarly, a specialist or special educator may repeatedly express doubts that student needs can be addressed in a general education setting. If this time were spent designing and carefully implementing strategies for supporting students, the concern could be addressed with data that would support or refute it.

Alternatively, a professional unsure about inclusive practices—whether it be a special educator, a general educator, a bilingual educator, or another professional—can express anxiety and uncertainty, but that person also may work closely with others to support students with special needs. In essence, schools and other education agencies can mandate administrative arrangements that require staff to work in close proximity, but only the individuals involved can decide whether a collaborative style will be used in their interactions. In our work in schools, we sometimes find ourselves emphasizing that there is no such thing as collaboration by coercion.

Does this mean that people cannot collaborate if programs are mandated? Not at all. Consider the situation at Jefferson High School, where general education teachers have been notified that each department will have collaborative planning time for the upcoming school year and will be expected to develop common assessments, implement consistent grading practices, and gather data to guide instructional practices. Mr. Turner might say, "I understand the need for us to be consistent in our work with students, but I'm not sure about this. I'm worried that this is going to take away my creativity as a teacher. But if we all work together, perhaps we can improve our students' achievement." The mandate is present, but so is the teacher's voluntariness to carry out the mandate, even though he and others may be voicing objections to it or ignoring it.

As with the other characteristics of collaboration described in this section, it is important to think about voluntariness through a lens of cultural diversity. For example, you may interact with parents from a culture in which school and learning is the business of teachers and administrators, not parents. The typical notion of collaboration may be invalid, in part because the parents do not adopt the style because it would never occur to them that this would be appropriate. What are other interactions in which the characteristic of voluntariness may be affected by cultural differences? How might this affect your efforts at collaboration with colleagues? With paraprofessionals? With others?

Collaboration Requires Parity Among Participants Parity is a relationship status in which each person's contribution to an interaction is equally valued, and each person has equal power in decision making; it is fundamental to collaboration. If one or several individuals are perceived by others as having significantly greater decision-making power or more valuable knowledge or information, collaboration cannot occur. To illustrate, think about a principal's participation on a multidisciplinary team. If the principal is considered to have equal, not disproportionately greater, power in the decision-making process, other team members may disagree with the principal's position, and the team's ultimate decision may be one the principal did not support. Without parity, it is likely that some team members will acquiesce to the principal's preferences because of concern about repercussions for disagreeing. Another example can provide further illustration: In an interdisciplinary teaching team, when one content-area (e.g., biology) teacher believes that another (e.g., English) does not have expertise to contribute to the instructional planning, parity is unlikely to develop. Look back at the case at the beginning of this chapter. How could the concept of parity affect each educator's roles and responsibilities?

As with the notion of voluntariness, a discussion of parity must include consideration of diversity. For example, several young female special educators from a single school once shared privately that they were concerned about their roles when co-teaching. In their culture, younger people are expected to defer to those who are older. They found that even in their professional environment, their colleagues expected them to take all

direction and to function more as helpers than partners, and they were very discouraged about changing this, given the strong cultural basis for the situation. Even gender may sometimes be a factor in establishing parity, with either a male or a female educator perceiving imbalance in the value attributed to the contribution. In another example, think about parity when professionals interact with parents from a culture different from theirs. Who might be perceived as having the power to control the interaction? How might parents communicate based on their perception of whether their contribution is valued? Keep in mind that individuals may have parity as they work together on a specific collaborative activity even though they do not have parity in other situations. For example, you may have parity in interactions with a paraprofessional to plan a community-based activity, but you may interact directively and with appropriately greater authority and decision-making power when giving instructions to the same paraprofessional about working with students. Similarly, administrators and staff on a curriculum committee may have parity; outside of the committee, though, the relationship among the members may be markedly different.

Collaboration Is Based on Mutual Goals Individuals who collaborate must share at least one goal. Imagine a meeting at which a decision must be reached about what specially designed instruction and related services a student should receive and the setting in which they should be delivered. In one sense, the mutual goal of designing an appropriate education program seems to be obvious. In reality, however, at least two goals may be under consideration. The parents, social worker, and principal might think that the student should be in a general education setting for most of the day, whereas the special education teacher, general education teacher, and psychologist might believe—because of professional literature they have read and their interactions with the student—that great care needs to be taken before there is any discussion of placement in a general education setting. In this case, a collaborative group will look at the greater goal of designing a program in the best interests of the student and will resolve their differences. In a group without a strong commitment to collaboration, the focus is likely to remain on the apparently disparate goals, and the matter may become contentious.

Professionals do not have to share many or all goals in order to collaborate, just one that is specific and important enough to maintain their shared commitment. They may differ in their opinions about a new student's achievement potential but share the goal of ensuring that the student participate in the remedial reading program. Their differences can be set aside as not being essential to the immediate issue. They may agree that a student with multiple needs coming to the school should spend most of the school day with typical peers but disagree about who should have primary teaching responsibility for the student, how appropriate supports should be put in place, and what arrangement should be made for assessing student progress.

Collaboration Depends on Shared Responsibility for Participation and Decision Making If you collaborate with a colleague, you are assuming the responsibility of actively engaging in the activity and the decision making it involves. We have found it useful to distinguish between responsibility for completing tasks associated with the collaborative activity and responsibility for the decision making involved in that activity. Shared participation in task completion does not imply that the individuals involved must divide tasks equally or participate fully in each task required to achieve their goal. In fact, participation in the activity often involves a convenient division of labor. For instance, as a speech/language therapist, you might collaborate with a kindergarten teacher to plan a series of language lessons for the entire class. You volunteer to outline the concepts that should be addressed

and to prepare several activities related to each. The teacher agrees to locate needed materials and to plan student groupings and instructional schedules for the lessons. In this case, you and the teacher are both actively participating in accomplishing the task, even though the division of labor may not be equal.

The second component of responsibility concerns equal participation in the critical decision making involved in the activity. In the example just described, you and the teacher had different responsibilities for the task, but to be collaborative you must participate equally in deciding the appropriateness of and possible needed adjustments in the material you prepare, and you are equally responsible for deciding whether the grouping and proposed schedule are workable.

Individuals Who Collaborate Share Resources Each individual engaged in a collaborative activity has resources to contribute that are valuable for reaching the shared goal. The type of resources professionals have depends on their roles and the specific activity. Time and availability to carry out essential tasks may be the critical contribution that one person offers. Knowledge of a specialized technique may be another's resource. Access to other individuals or agencies that could assist in the collaborative activity may be a third person's contribution. If professionals cannot contribute a specific resource, they may be perceived as less committed to the collaborative goal, and they may encounter difficulty establishing parity. If you were collaborating with the professionals introduced in the case at the beginning of this chapter, what resources would you expect them to contribute? What resources would you contribute?

For a different type of situation in which resources are shared, think of working with parents. For example, sharing resources often occurs when parents and school professionals collaboratively plan home reward programs for students. The parent is likely to have access to rewards to which the student responds (e.g., video games, computer access, special meals, access to a bicycle or car). The special services providers may be able to recommend the number of positive behaviors the student should display, the frequency of rewards, and the plan for systematically phasing out the rewards once success has been achieved. The program would not be possible without the contributions that everyone makes.

You may have found that sharing resources is sometimes the key motivator for individuals to collaborate. In fact, pooling the available—but too often scarce—resources in schools can lead to tremendously satisfying efforts on behalf of students; at the same time, it enhances the sense of ownership among professionals. Unfortunately, the reverse also may occur: A scarcity of resources sometimes causes people to hoard the ones they control. Collaboration becomes unlikely when that happens. Ultimately, when resources are limited, the choice becomes this: Come together through collaboration and make the best of what is available, or fall apart as individuals compete to obtain resources that may even be inconsequential in terms of value. Or, as Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately!"

Individuals Who Collaborate Share Accountability for Outcomes Whether the results of collaboration are positive or negative, all the participating individuals are accountable for the outcome. Suppose you and several colleagues plan a parent information meeting. One person arranges for a room, another makes arrangements to provide coffee, and a third reserves a media projector for the presentation. Shortly before the meeting is to begin, you realize that no one has remembered to pick up the media projector. In a collaborative effort, all the professionals share the resulting need to change the program at the last minute or to arrange to have someone dash to retrieve the projector. Similarly, if

A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Does Collaboration Improve Student Achievement?

Collaboration has intuitive appeal. That is, it seems to make sense that when school professionals work together, student outcomes will improve and teachers will gain increased knowledge and skills. But is there any evidence to support such ideas? A number of studies do indicate that collaboration makes a difference. Here are some examples.

A study commissioned by the Center for School Improvement in cooperation with the Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, examined 30 Ohio school districts that had made significant improvement in students' reading and math proficiency (Silverman, Hazelwood, & Cronin, 2009). The researchers found that these districts emphasized strong leadership that included shared leadership among professionals and principals, a strong collaborative culture and structures to support collaboration (e.g., common planning), co-teaching, and a priority on many types of teaming.

In a review of 23 studies spanning 15 years that examined school districts that were improving, Shannon and Bylsma (2004) found that four categories of themes characterized these districts. In addition to quality teaching and learning, effective leadership, and support for system-wide improvement, the authors reported that clear and collaborative relationships were essential. A nurturing professional culture, clear understanding of professionals' roles and responsibilities, peer support and trust, and related characteristics were integral in these districts.

Additional research on collaboration is needed to address topics such as the differences in collaborative activities between exemplary and struggling schools, ways to build a collaborative culture when it does not exist, and strategies for sustaining such a culture.

a school leadership team is meeting to discuss the results of the monthly student progress data collected, but one member has not finished compiling his part of the results, the team is accountable for rescheduling the meeting date or for assisting the member aggregating the information.

The examples just given relate to the outcomes of the shared work. However, in today's schools a second type of discussion of outcomes is equally important—that is, outcomes related to students. One question sometimes asked is whether collaboration makes a difference for students. The studies described in A Basis in Research address that question.

Emergent Characteristics

Several characteristics of collaboration can have multiple functions—they are mentioned both as prerequisites for as well as outcomes of collaboration. We refer to these as emergent characteristics. These characteristics must be present to some discernible degree at the outset of collaborative activity, but they typically grow and flourish from successful experience with collaboration.

Individuals Who Collaborate Value This Interpersonal Style Collaboration is difficult but rewarding. Professionals who anticipate collaborating must believe that the results of their collaboration are likely to be more powerful and significant than the results of their individual efforts, or else they are unlikely to persevere (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). Typically, success in collaboration leads to increased commitment to future collaboration, and so beliefs and attitudes become increasingly positive. Two examples from former students illustrate this point. One student reported, "I used

to work in a school where there was no collaboration. I worked very hard, but it was like beating my head against a wall. Now I work in a place where collaboration is the norm. I work even harder than I used to, but now it's fun." Another former student commented, "I used to think that collaborating meant that I had to have answers and get others to agree to my ideas. What I've learned is that by talking less and listening more and being more open to others' thoughts and ideas, we get better results—and that makes collaboration really worth the effort." Individuals who collaborate truly believe that two (or even more) heads are better than one.

Professionals Who Collaborate Trust One Another Even if you firmly believe in the beneficial outcomes of collaboration, you cannot suddenly introduce it, fully developed, into your professional interactions. If you already have worked in a school, you probably recall your experiences as a new employee, a phase in which you learned about your colleagues, the norms of the school setting, and the manner in which to approach the other professionals with whom you worked most closely. And even though you interacted with other professionals during that time, the extent to which you could collaborate was limited. Only after a period of time in which trust and, subsequently, respect are established can school professionals feel relatively secure in fully exploring collaborative relationships. Once begun, however, those relationships may be strengthened until trust of colleagues becomes one of the most important benefits of collaboration. This scenario describes the emergence of trust: At the outset, enough trust must be present for professionals to be willing to begin the activity, but with successful experiences the trust grows and the relationship becomes better able to withstand problems or disagreements. Conversely, trust is most fragile when a collaborative relationship is relatively new, as may be the case for Mr. Mendez, the student support teacher you met at the beginning of this chapter. If he violates a shared confidence, fails to contribute to planning for instruction, or communicates inaccurately, trust is likely to be damaged, and such damage can take a long time to repair. How long trust takes to develop can depend on many factors, including the overall support and administrative expectations for collaboration in the school; the similarity or dissimilarity among participants in terms of professional preparation, culture, and life experiences; the number and quality of the opportunities for interacting; and the commitment each person makes to the shared work.

A Sense of Community Evolves from Collaboration In collaboration, participants know that their strengths can be maximized, their weaknesses can be minimized, and the result will be better for all. The concept of community is receiving significant attention in contemporary professional literature (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008; Hord, 2009; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). What is increasingly recognized is that the development of a sense of professional community leads to better outcomes for students and satisfaction and support for educators (Conoley & Conoley, 2010). Perhaps you have experienced the sense of community in a faith-based, social, or student group. The willingness to work toward a common goal is accompanied by a decrease in concern about individual differences. This is the goal of the Holmes County School District, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

Taken together, these emergent characteristics highlight the opportunities you have and the risks you take when you begin to collaborate. You may attempt to establish trust and either succeed or are rebuffed; you may attempt to communicate an attitude supportive of collaboration and find that some but not others share your beliefs. Collaboration certainly is not easily accomplished, nor is it appropriate for every situation. More than anything, the emergent characteristics capture the powerful benefits of accepting the risks

of collaboration. When collaborative efforts result in higher levels of trust and respect among colleagues and between professionals and parents/families, and working together results in more positive outcomes for students, the risks seem minor compared to the rewards.

Collaboration in a Societal Context

How has collaboration come to be so important in education that it is the subject of entire books and courses in professional preparation programs? What is fostering the development of so many collaborative structures in schools? Why is so much attention now devoted to the quality of the working relationships among professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents/families? What is occurring for students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, is simply a reflection of the direction of many endeavors in society and their application in education (O'Leary & Bingham, 2009; Rosen, 2009). By examining the larger context for collaboration, you can better understand its pervasiveness in today's world and its necessity for today's schools.

Societal Trends

Consider the world in which you now live. A valuable starting point is the arena of work: The vast majority of jobs available in the early twenty-first century are in service industries in which individuals interact with clients or customers to meet their needs (e.g., retail sales, telecommunications). This present situation is in sharp contrast to preceding eras in which many workers toiled in isolation on assembly lines. Contemporary life also is characterized by an accelerated flow of information: People are inundated with it, whether through the Internet, the deluge of advertising that arrives each day, the seemingly endless array of television talk shows, or the stacks of publications that pile up—often unread—in many homes, offices, and classrooms. Mass participation—for example, through social media and through electronic collaborations such as Wikipedia—also is routine. With the enormous amounts of information constantly available, few individuals can hope to keep up with even the most crucial events occurring in their communities and their professions, much less throughout the world.

One response to the pressures of contemporary society's changing labor needs and its information explosion is an increasing reliance on collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Gobillot, 2011). For example, business managers, much more so now than in the past, are involving employees in decision making as a strategy for improving organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, employees report that they find their jobs more satisfying if they participate in reaching decisions. Researchers agree that a sense of ownership and commitment appears to evolve through participation in such activity, and cutting-edge employers target team approaches that foster shared decision making and clear communication as a major training topic for employees at many levels (Euwema, Wendt, & Van Emmerik, 2007; Fang, Palmatier, Scheer, & Li, 2008). All of these ideas, coming not from education but from business and industry, are directly related to collaboration.

Business is not the only domain in which collaboration is essential. In fact, collaboration seems to have become a standard for much that is worthwhile in contemporary professional culture. For example, Bennis and Biederman (1997), in their examination of the most significant innovations of the twentieth century—including the personal

computer, aviation technology, and feature-length animated films—concluded that none of them would have been possible had it not been for a high degree of collaboration among very talented people. Fullan (2001, 2008) contends that the ability to bring people together to form professional relationships is a fundamental skill that enables leaders to help people develop commitment and tackle the exceedingly complex problems facing many disciplines, whether business management, industry, education, or computer or biological sciences.

Collaboration also has become increasingly important in the area of human services. For example, it is viewed as a means through which welfare, medical, mental health, and other services can be more effectively provided to children and their families (e.g., Horwath & Morrison, 2007). In health care, collaboration is a means of bringing together medical and health care providers to integrate the delivery of services (Fraser, Mounib, & Payne, 2007), a means of increasing the community's health (Kisely, Duerden, Shaddick, & Jayabarathan, 2006), a means of improving public health agency performance (Lovelace, 2000), and a means of improving community emergency services (McGuire, 2009).

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Collaboration characterizes many twenty-first-century professions, including those in business, science, and medicine.

School Collaboration

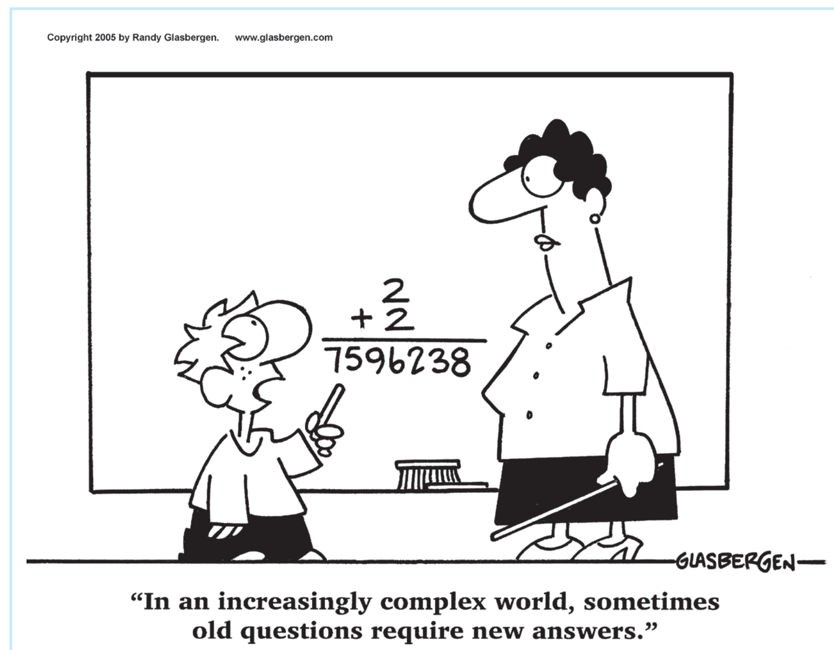
Beginning with the premise that schools are a reflection of the larger society, the current trend toward collaboration in the United States and around the world makes it quickly apparent why collaboration is such a significant trend in schools (Grangeat & Gray, 2008). Many examples of this trend are evident, and this section outlines just a few.

Response to Intervention Perhaps one of the most important types of collaboration emerging in twenty-first-century schools is one that originated in special education legislation but is implemented in general education: response to intervention (RTI). Response to intervention is an alternative procedure for identifying students as having learning disabilities, a move away from what has been called a "wait to fail" model that required a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). It also is evolving as a data-driven vehicle for proactively responding to many students' learning difficulties. In RTI, students who are falling behind despite being taught through high-quality, research-based instructional approaches are placed in successively intensive interventions for specific periods of time (e.g., 16 weeks), most often because of concerns about reading, although this procedure is also being applied in some locales when concerns arise about students' math achievement or behavior (e.g., Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007). The interventions often are referred to as tiers (i.e., Tier 2 intervention, Tier 3 intervention). Detailed data are gathered to determine whether the interventions being implemented are resulting in

accelerated student learning, a process referred to as progress monitoring. If the interventions are effective, they are continued, or if determined inappropriate, discontinued. If, after a series of such increasingly focused interventions, a student is not making enough progress to eventually reach the same level of achievement as peers, a team may decide that a learning disability exists and determine that the student is eligible for special education services. In a few states, just the series of interventions is a basis for that decision; in many states, additional assessment procedures also are used.

Response to intervention calls for a high degree of collaboration (e.g., Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Consider the experience of Ms. Jackson. As a third-grade teacher, she is very concerned about Cecil's reading skills. As she has reviewed his progress and taught him for the first part of the school year, she has found that he still has tremendous difficulty with many basic phonics skills, affecting his ability to master the third-grade curriculum. She asks her school's RTI team to problem solve with her for Cecil. After reviewing Cecil's school records and assessment data, the team agrees that he is significantly behind his peers and is unlikely to make adequate progress without more intense intervention. The reading specialist, speech/language therapist, assistant principal, and Ms. Jackson decide that he should participate daily in a 30-minute specialized supplemental reading program that focuses on systematic development of phonics skills. After 10 weeks of this intervention, the same team reconvenes and reviews the weekly data on Cecil's progress. Although he has not caught up with his peers, the team decides that the intervention is resulting in significant progress and should be continued.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide detailed information about the many dimensions of effective RTI procedures. What is important for you to remember is that these procedures are based on collaboration. When a team of professionals come together to analyze student needs and design instruction that will accelerate learning, the results are better ideas, an increase in learning, and less need for the more structured and regulated services of special education.



"In an increasingly complex world, sometimes old questions require new answers."

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Additional Examples of School-Wide Collaboration RTI is just one, albeit important, model emphasizing collaboration among school professionals. For example, teachers are being asked to team with each other and with other school professionals, including media specialists, science consultants, literacy coaches, counselors, and speech/language therapists (e.g., Bosma et al., 2010; Canter, Voytecki, Zambone, & Jones, 2011; Herrera, 2008; Simcox, Nuijens, & Lee, 2006). In all these efforts, the goal is to provide enhanced instruction to improve student learning.

Middle school approaches are an especially interesting application of teacher–teacher collaboration (e.g., Graham, 2007) because they are premised on strong collaboration among teaching teams in core academic areas. Teachers in middle schools have regularly scheduled shared planning time so that they can integrate curricula, coordinate assignments and other major activities such as field trips, and discuss issues related to their instructional work. They also share data about their shared students and collectively find strategies to effectively meet their students' special learning needs.

Another type of collaboration emphasized in the school literature concerns school–university partnerships, often under the guise of school reform (e.g., Gillespie, Whiteley, Watts, Dattolo, & Jones, 2010). One example of partnership for preprofessional preparation is a residency program (Solomon, 2009), in which university faculty members collaborate in school settings, especially urban settings, with school professionals to recruit, prepare, induct, and mentor new teachers. Another example is blended teacher preparation, in which general and special education preservice teachers learn together and sometimes receive dual licensure when they complete their professional training (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007; Griffin & Pugach, 2007).

Yet another type of school collaboration receiving renewed attention is peer collaboration (e.g., Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). When students work with partners on various instructional tasks, they generally learn more than if they had worked alone. Further, professionals have come to value peer interactions as a means of preparing students for their likely roles in the world of work (e.g., Oortwijn, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2008).

Finally, collaboration has not been ignored by school administrators. Principals are forming school leadership teams and collegial work groups to share decision making on critical school issues (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Morgan & Clonts, 2008). They also are working collaboratively with teachers to nurture their skills as leaders, help them set professional goals for each year, and make judgments about their schools' reform efforts (e.g., Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; Yost, Vogel, & Rosenberg, 2009). Principals are emphasizing that teachers should work with each other to solve problems about students experiencing difficulty, to establish and assess academic standards, and to create positive working relationships with parents and family members (e.g., Billingsley, 2007; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). The school as a collaborative community of learners is now a central theme for effective administrators.

Keep in mind that even these examples represent only a small fraction of the collaborative activities in today's schools. Some additional examples are included in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Special Education Collaboration

Special education collaboration is a subset of school collaboration, but it has such a rich history and has become so much a part of policy and practice that it merits separate attention (Ludlow, 2011). For example, even before the passage of the first federal special education law in 1975, special educators were providing indirect services to students with disabilities by working with their general education teachers in a model called consulting teaching

PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

The Many Faces of School Collaboration

Throughout this chapter, you will read about many school applications of collaboration. But there are so many ways professionals collaborate that not all can be adequately addressed between these covers. Here are just a few examples of formal and informal collaborative activities occurring in contemporary schools:

- *Professional learning communities* (PLC) are a structured approach for professional development. In PLCs, educators come together based on a shared need (e.g., all seventh-grade math teachers learning about the new curriculum; all teachers interested in learning more about co-teaching; all teachers teaching U.S. history and who are expected to incorporate writing and literature into the course). The teachers meet regularly, share readings, and take turns leading the group with the goal of jointly increasing their knowledge and skills.
- *School reform teams* often are formed when school professionals are faced with an urgent challenge to raise student achievement. There may be a leadership team that includes representative teachers, support staff, and parents. There also may be grade-level or department teams that meet regularly to create common assessments, review student data, discuss changes to instruction dictated by the data, and evaluate the effectiveness of the changes made.
- *School–community collaboration* usually has as its goal improving outcomes through a unified effort. Collaboration among school professionals, community members, and agency representatives may focus on preventing dropouts, raising achievement, reducing gang activities, and enlisting parents and families in educational efforts.

(McKenzie, 1972). Likewise, school psychologists have long been urged to multiply their impact by helping teachers, who could then better address the learning and behavior problems of all their students (Tharp & Wetzel, 1969). When P.L. 94–142 became law, collaboration was firmly integrated into special education with the provisions of parent participation and the mandate for the least restrictive environment. With each revision of special education law, the place of collaboration has been strengthened until now the law has, in essence, made collaboration a required part of special education services. As shown in Figure 2, collaboration is either mandated specifically or strongly implied in the entire process of identifying students who receive special services, delivering their instruction, and interacting with parents.

Unfortunately, considerable confusion has accompanied the evolution of collaboration in special education, especially since the increasing adoption of inclusive practices. For example, in some schools the terms *collaboration* and *inclusion* are used interchangeably, even though one is a style of interaction and the other is the belief system that creates a foundation for how students are educated. In others, collaboration is considered a way to deliver services, often confused with co-teaching, a service delivery approach.

A discussion of special education collaboration would not be complete without mention of early childhood programs, for which collaboration generally is integral (e.g., Branson & Bingham, 2009; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). For example, early intervention services are based on the beliefs that parents or other caregivers are the primary teachers of young children and that professionals can foster their participation through collaboration. Further, early intervention programs are mandated to coordinate services among all providers (e.g., educators, social service agencies, medical professionals), and this mandate exists within a context of collaboration.

FIGURE 2 Direct and indirect expectations of collaboration in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- *IEP teams.* Each student's educational program must be designed by an IEP team that generally includes special education and general education professionals as well as parents. This team also includes speech/language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, administrators, and any other personnel needed to contribute to the student's education plan.
- *Least restrictive environment.* The law requires justification for any placement that is not general education. This presumption strongly suggests that general education teachers, special educators, related services personnel, administrators, and others should work together on behalf of students.
- *Highly qualified teacher requirement.* Special educators who teach core academic content (e.g., math, social studies, science, English) to students not taking alternate assessments must be highly qualified in those areas. However, if a highly qualified general education teacher and a special educator share teaching responsibilities, the special educator may not have to be designated as highly qualified in the content area. That is, the special educator's highly qualified status in these situations relates to the learning process, whereas the general educator's relates to the core academic content. This requirement of the law can foster collaborative service delivery.
- *Assessment process.* Parents must give permission for their children to be assessed, and they also must have a voice in the decision making that occurs as a result of assessment. Even more communication responsibility occurs when students are reevaluated. Because a decision may be made in some cases to omit standardized testing, parent involvement in decision making is even more critical (although if parent input cannot be obtained, the process continues).
- *Transition.* Transition relies on strong collaboration among educators as well as students and parents. Further, transition plans often require the involvement of professionals from other agencies, and so interprofessional collaboration may be required.
- *Discipline and behavior support plans.* For any student with behavior problems, a functional assessment and behavior support plan is required. The process of gathering data, identifying the problem, designing alternative interventions, implementing them, and evaluating the outcomes typically will include participation by several professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents/family members.
- *Paraprofessionals.* Paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, and other individuals in similar roles should receive appropriate training for their jobs and supervision of their work. Although not all interactions with paraprofessionals may be collaborative, the specific expectation for teacher–paraprofessional interactions can foster collaboration.
- *Mediation and dispute resolution.* Unless declined by parents, states must make no-cost mediation available to parents as a strategy for resolving disagreements concerning their children with special needs. Further, prior to a due process hearing, the district must convene the IEP team members and parents in an attempt to informally resolve the dispute. The implication is that a strong bias exists for all parties, working together on behalf of students, to design the most appropriate education rather than escalating conflicts.

collaboration in early childhood special education you should realize that many professionals point to this area when seeking exemplary practices in school collaboration.

Another dimension of collaboration for special educators concerns the partnerships formed among the professionals who provide special education and related services. For

PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Internet Resources for Collaboration

The Internet is a tremendous source of information about almost any topic. Although only a few sites specifically address the professional collaboration that occurs among school staff members, the following sites include information on collaboration and pertinent related topics.

www.beachcenter.org

The Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas has as a goal working with all stakeholders to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families. This family-focused site contains many articles of interest and links to other sites emphasizing family collaboration.

http://teachnet.edb.utexas.edu/~Lynda_Abbott/teacher2teacher.html

Teacher-to-Teacher Collaboration is a web site sponsored by the University of Texas. It includes links to sites that focus on assisting teachers to connect and interact with one another. It also includes links to information about professional development, instructional matters, student behavior, and other topics of interest to educators.

www.allthingsplc.info

At All Things PLC, you can learn about professional learning communities (PLCs), an increasingly common form of school collaboration, blog with others about PLCs, and look at data related to the impact of PLCs on student achievement and other outcomes. Recent articles on the site addressed the use of technology and the implementation of behavior interventions.

www.powerof2.org

Power of 2 is a web site developed as part of a federally funded project to assist teachers and other educators in working together on behalf of students in inclusive schools. It features a wide variety of material focused on accommodating the educational needs of students with disabilities.

www.middleweb.com

As you might guess, Middleweb is a web site devoted to topics of interest to middle school educators. However, because collaboration is so integral to middle school models, you will find many helpful resources on this site. Some recent discussions included collaborating about grades and considerations related to working on a team instead of as an individual.

One other suggestion: As you seek information related to collaboration and related topics, don't forget to check your own state department of education's web site. Many have practical information that is directly related to state policies as well as links to other valuable local and national sites.

example, special educators often work closely with speech/language therapists to create effective language interventions that can be implemented across the special education and general education settings. Likewise, they may collaborate with a technology specialist to help a student with a communication disability become proficient using a new communication device. They also may interact on a regular basis with the school nurse, a counselor, and a consultant who advises the teacher on working with students with visual impairments. That is, collaboration within the field of special education is as crucial as collaboration between special educators and those outside the field.

The Challenges of Collaboration

Despite collaboration's clear importance and increasing emphasis in education, a number of challenges may arise when school professionals attempt to establish collaborative relationships. These issues pertain to school structure, professional socialization, power status among

participants in the relationship, and pragmatic issues. You can explore other issues related to collaboration and possible solutions for addressing them by visiting web sites such as those described in Putting Ideas into Practice.

School Structure

It has long been recognized that many professionals in schools typically do their substantive work in isolation from others (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Pomson, 2005; Sarason, 1982), and this recognition and concern about its implications for the teaching profession continue even today. This structure of professional isolation is contrary to the concept of collaboration, and its drawbacks are clear as the success of schools with a collaborative culture has been documented. When physical isolation from other adults is the norm, each school professional sets about working with students. How do these professionals accomplish this? Essentially, they take charge. In their classrooms or offices, they are the experts who hold authority and power over students, and so they typically use a directive style to promote student learning, which is appropriate. However, constant use of this style with students may interfere with professionals' ability to switch to a collaborative style for interactions with colleagues and parents. As school leaders increasingly create school structures that foster collaboration, they should be aware of the companion need to facilitate constructive interactions among professionals.

Professional Socialization

Physical isolation and the use of a directive style with students are part of what contributes to the wide variation in emphasis on collegial relationships. However, a norm of isolation sometimes is still fostered through professional socialization. First, in some teacher and other professional preparation programs, you may discover that as you are successfully completing your student teaching, practicum, or internship experiences, your supervisor must leave you alone to work with students. In other words, your professional training itself may encourage a belief that working in isolation is the role of the professional. Even if you entered the teaching profession through an alternative route to licensure, you might have found that your proficiency was directly or indirectly judged based on how well you handle instruction, student matters, and planning on your own . . . but not on your work with others.

Second, this socialization of isolation may continue as you enter your profession and gain experience. Even for some teachers who participated in collaborative preparation programs, school cultures of independence or self-reliance are so strong that what evolves is a belief that you should handle your professional problems yourself. If you seek help, it is often only after you have decided that whatever is occurring is no longer your problem; your goal becomes seeking another to take ownership of it.

This discussion of structural isolation and individual characteristics of professionals in schools may leave the impression that collaboration is unlikely in school settings. That certainly is not the case, as was illustrated by Ms. Maharrin, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In fact, attention to collaboration has gained significant momentum over the past several years. We mention the issue of structural isolation only to raise your awareness of the difficulties in collaborating and to stress that, even if you have learned about the importance of collaboration and embrace its value, you may work with colleagues who have not and who may resist participating in collaborative work. We also want to convey some of the resulting challenges that you will undoubtedly experience as you attempt to collaborate. These challenges are not unique to your specific school setting or professional

E-PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborating Through Blogging

You may already know that a blog (short for weblog) is a sort of electronic diary, updated fairly frequently, that offers insights on a topic and links to related sites. Here are blogs that you may find helpful:

http://teacherlingo.com/blogs/default.aspx

The Teacher Lingo web site is dedicated to providing teachers with a platform for collaboration. The web page provided opens to the teacher blogs. A wide variety of topics are under discussion at any point in time and may include the following: assistive technology, instructional dilemmas and possible solutions, teaching ideas, responses to conflict at school, and general information about working in schools, including not only working with students but also working with other professionals and parents.

www.proteacher.net/blogs

The ProTeacher blog site is designed to address topics for all educators, including those in all subject areas and at all grade levels. Conversations are grouped so that it is simple to join a conversation directly related to your interests. Topics at the beginning of the school year focus on getting started with a new student group and setting up for success; other subjects have included responding to disruptive student behavior, working with students with autism, and educators' work conditions.

www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3752562

This Scholastic web site includes a list of the "Top 20 Teacher Blogs." These blogs span school levels, specific subjects (e.g., art, math, science), and special education and focus on both instructional techniques and stories about schools and students. There is a blog for student teachers, too.

You may find that you want to make your own blog. You can do so at several of the sites just mentioned or at others such as http://blogger.com. Once on a blogging site, just follow the simple directions, and soon you will be sharing your ideas and experiences with others.

role; they result from many factors that are part of all school professionals' experiences. Ultimately, these dilemmas provide the rationale for exploring the skills described later in this text because it is those skills that can empower school professionals to complement their other professional skills with collaborative ones.

Keep in mind that if you are in a school setting where isolation is more common than collaboration, possibilities for forming positive working relationships still exist. You might find one colleague with whom you can forge a partnership. It may be that teachers in your field from other schools in your district are eager to collaborate. A third way to address isolation is through the use of technology. E-Partnerships offers a few suggestions for accessing and using blogs as a means of reaching out to others and learning from them.

Power in the Relationship

Whenever there are interactions among people, the topic of power should be mentioned because the entire character of interactions is based in large part on each participant's power or perceived power (e.g., Raven, 2008). For example, Robin is a fourth-grade teacher who has worked in her school district for many years. She is well respected and

has a specialist's degree in reading. When she takes the role of reading coach, her colleagues are happy to follow her advice because she has expert power; that is, she is viewed by others as knowing more than they do on the topic of reading instruction. She also may have what is called referent power; that is, the likelihood that others will follow her suggestions because they admire her and value her input. Another type of power generally held by principals or other supervisors is called legitimate power; that is, educators follow the directions of administrators because those leaders have the right to require compliance. Other types of power include reward power (the perception that the other person controls valuable resources), coercive power (the perception that the other person may punish an individual for ignoring direction), and informational power (the perception that the other person's knowledge of the details of an explained change demonstrates a reason to implement it).

Think about the implications of power for collaboration. For example, if you are a preservice teacher, what will be your power base for collaboration as you begin your career? You may find that you have to work diligently to cultivate informational and reward power. If you are an experienced educator, you may already have referent power as well as expert power, and you may need to be aware that you are somewhat intimidating to novice educators because of your power. Consider other interactions in which power may be unbalanced: For example, an early career special educator co-teaching in an advanced high school class may perceive that the general educator holds nearly all the power. When educators interact with parents, especially those who live in poverty or who have recently come to the United States from another country, they should understand that they may be perceived as holding power. A similar situation might exist in working with paraprofessionals.

What is important to remember is that collaboration is based on parity; that is, a balance of power based on the valued contributions made by each participant. As perceived differences in power increase, the likelihood for true collaboration decreases. Further, if an expectation for collaboration exists and there is not a balance in power, stress, the topic of Putting Ideas into Practice, is likely to increase.

Pragmatic Issues

When we described the defining characteristics of collaboration, we noted that resource sharing is essential and mentioned items such as time, space, and materials. Sadly, collaboration in schools often is constrained when these items and other logistics are not adequately considered. For example, some professionals have regularly scheduled common planning time for their grade level, department, or team, but other educators can find only a few moments to touch base before or after school or during a hurried lunch (e.g., Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). Similarly, some school administrators ensure that team members can attend meetings by providing coverage for their classes; others schedule all such meetings after school. Some special education co-teachers spend a significant amount of time or the entire class period with their teaching partner, but in other cases special educators or specialists are expected to provide services in two or even more classes during a single instructional period.

We mention the topic to acknowledge that logistics and other details of arranging for high-quality collaboration sometimes comprise the greatest obstacle facing those who collaborate.

PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Managing Stress

Collaboration not only offers support to educators but also may lead to stress. Here are sources of stress related to collaboration and ideas for how to deal with the inevitable stress of being a professional educator in a collaborative school.

Sources of Stress

- *Role responsibilities.* The evolving nature of the educators' jobs, including the increased expectation of working with many colleagues and managing student learning across settings, is a significant source of stress.
- *Assignment to collaborative tasks.* Teachers who are told they will co-teach, educators assigned to RTI teams, and professionals directed to contribute to professional development may find such assignments stressful.
- *Work conditions.* When educators must attend frequent meetings, participate in professional development activities, serve on committees, and still find time for their own planning, stress is likely to be high.
- *Support.* Educators who perceive that their administrators do not support their work experience a high degree of stress.
- *Collegiality.* In addition to administrative support, teachers need support from colleagues. If they believe their contributions are not valued, stress is likely.
- *Cultural differences.* When professionals interacting with each other and with parents are from different cultures, stress may increase as special care is needed to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Dealing with Stress

- *Set realistic and flexible goals.* Some educators create a set of expectations that are so difficult to achieve that failure is inevitable, and guilt—and stress—may follow.
- *Focus on student learning.* Teachers can directly affect student learning. Stress can be reduced when educators keep track of and can point to student gains in learning and appropriate behavior that they have directly influenced (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, & Otis-Wilborn, 2008).
- *Establish priorities.* When there are so many tasks to complete that the list seems endless, it is very easy to tackle them from a crisis perspective; that is, giving attention to whichever item is most pressing or obvious. Instead, step back and set priorities. If you encounter difficulty in setting priorities, a more experienced educator or your principal may be able to assist you.
- *Take care of yourself.* Working nonstop sounds admirable, but it is not a healthy habit and can lead to burnout. Some educators try to keep up with their many job responsibilities by seeing students during their lunch period and working before and after school. They may take home a large tote filled with work each night, and they try to work for a couple of hours after their own children go to bed. Educators should follow the same general advice for stress reduction that could be offered to any busy professional:
  1. Take breaks (and teachers have precious few of those, lunch being one).
  2. Develop healthy eating habits.
  3. Exercise regularly.
  4. Make sure to keep a boundary between your work life and your personal life.
- *Celebrate your accomplishments and your profession.* Don't lose sight of all you are accomplishing. If you have led a committee that provided professional development to teachers, that is a reason to celebrate. If your students have made significant growth—even if it was not reflected in scores on high-stakes tests—that is a reason to be proud.
- *Access outside support.* Elsewhere in this chapter is information about accessing blogs and other teacher collaboration sites. Asking your questions of others, participating in discussions, and offering insights as you learn can be great ways to reduce stress.

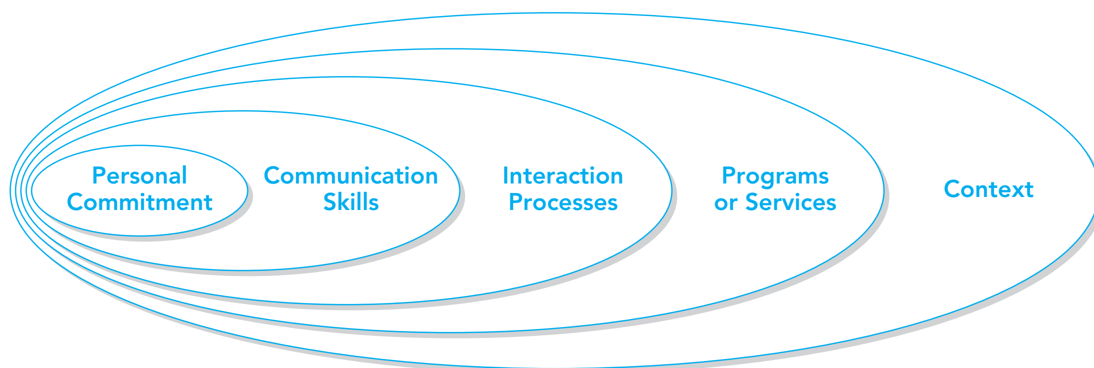
This discussion of the challenges that school structure, professional socialization, power, and pragmatic issues present for collaboration could have a somewhat sobering effect on your enthusiasm for it. In part, we hope this is so. Collaboration can be a powerful vehicle for accomplishing professionals' goals of educating students, but it can also be overused and misused. Collaborative efforts should be implemented only with a realistic understanding of their complexities and difficulties, because such understanding will lead to careful consideration of the extent to which collaborative efforts are feasible and recommended.

A Framework for Learning About Collaboration

The importance of collaboration in society and schools, and recognition of the challenges of collaboration form a rationale for studying it and for understanding that it is a technical field of study. That is, the fact that you interact well with others does not mean that you understand all the dimensions of collaboration. The complexity and subtlety of collaboration (e.g., Cook & Friend, 2010) suggest that in order to learn to form effective partnerships with others, you should strive for as complete an understanding of it as possible. To accomplish this purpose, we offer a framework for learning about collaboration in Figure 3 that presents the components of collaboration and their relationships to one another:

- Personal commitment
- Communication skills
- Interaction processes
- Programs or services
- Context

FIGURE 3 Components of collaboration.



This framework shapes the material presented in this chapter as well as its organization, and you will find that this chapter opened with a graphic to remind you which part of the framework is addressed in the chapter.

The first component of the study of collaboration concerns your *personal commitment* to collaboration as a tool for carrying out the responsibilities of your job, including your beliefs about the benefits of working closely with colleagues and parents/families and the added value of learning from others' perspectives. Although it is difficult to offer specific skill training related to this commitment and no text is devoted solely to this component of collaboration, you will find that throughout this text you are asked to reflect on the importance of and merit in collaborating with others. For example, the professionals introduced at the beginning of this chapter demonstrated through their actions that they are committed to their collaborative efforts.

The second component of collaboration is *communication skills,* the basic building blocks of collaborative interactions. Although most educators have relatively strong communication skills in order to be in their professions, the skills needed for collaboration are somewhat more technical and are best learned with focused practice. In addition, most educators need to consider their communication skills in the context of working with colleagues and parents from diverse cultures (e.g., Clark & Dorris, 2006). For this reason, outline those skills, provide many examples of their uses (and misuses), and offer opportunities to practice them. The assumption is that you will use these skills to implement services you learn inthe text.

The third component of collaboration includes *interaction processes*—that is, the steps that take an interaction from beginning to end. The most common interaction process is problem solving. Many educators' collaborative activities are actually specialized forms of problem solving. Other processes include responding to conflict and resistance. For all interaction processes, strong communication skills are essential.

The fourth component of collaboration is the set of *programs* or *services* in which collaborative activities occur. In this text, the services emphasized include teams, co-teaching, and consultation and other indirect services. It is within these services that interaction processes to design and deliver strong educational programs and services occur.

The final component of collaboration is *context,* which refers to the overall environment in which collaboration occurs. Because people so often are critical in determining the climate for collaboration, special attention is given in this text to paraprofessionals, parents, and others (e.g., related services personnel, representatives of community agencies). Pragmatic issues, such as time for collaboration, and issues related to collaboration, such as ethics, complete this part of the framework.

As with any text, some topics cannot be adequately addressed. For example, although mention already has been made of student–student collaboration and of such collaboration being an important part of creating schools supportive of all students and improving outcomes, the emphasis here is on adult–adult interactions; and so student partnerships are mentioned only briefly but are not prioritized. Likewise, even though professionals often collaborate around designing and implementing academic and behavior interventions for students, those topics merit separate attention; we believe that attempting to address collaboration as well as instructional and behavioral strategies in one textbook does a disservice to both topics.

SUMMARY

- Collaboration is an interpersonal style that professionals may use in their interactions with colleagues, parents, and others. It can only exist voluntarily in situations in which individuals with parity have identified a mutual goal and are willing to share responsibility for key decisions, accountability for outcomes, and resources. Several characteristics of collaboration both contribute to its development and are potentially its outcomes: attitudes and beliefs supportive of a collaborative approach, mutual trust, and a sense of community.
- Collaboration is a reflection of contemporary societal trends related to changes in business and industry and the continued rapid increase in information flow and exchange, especially through electronic channels. In schools, collaboration is mandated or implied in legislation and related reform efforts, including various forms of teaming (e.g., response to intervention programs) and practices that provide curriculum access to all learners. Collaboration is particularly central to special education services.
- Individuals who collaborate may find that challenges occur related to the structural and professional isolation of schools, professional socialization, power in relationships, stress related to managing interactions with others, and practical matters concerning resources such as time.
- Studying collaboration includes understanding your personal commitment, learning communication skills and interaction processes, creating programs and services in which collaborative approaches can be used, and recognizing context factors that foster or constrain collaboration.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Select one of the professionals whose typical days were profiled in this chapter's opening case. Use this professional's profile as the basis for analyzing the extent to which the defining characteristics of collaboration are present or could be established. Which characteristics can most easily be met? Which may pose significant barriers to developing effective collaborative relationships? If you were the professional profiled, what are two challenges to collaboration that you might face? What could you do to address these challenges?
2. Think about the educators profiled in the opening case study in terms of power. What types of power does each of these educators have? What could be the impact of their power (or lack thereof) on their interactions with colleagues?
3. Discuss the issue of parity with your classmates. To what extent do they perceive that special educators, general educators, bilingual educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, and related services providers have equal status in schools? If parity does not exist, how could issues related to it be addressed?
4. Suppose you are a new teacher in a school in which collaboration occurs informally among some teachers, but is not a highly valued part of the school's culture. Further, imagine that the school has received a mandate to move strongly toward inclusive practices. What do you believe your role is in accomplishing the dual goals of collaboration and inclusive practices? How might you use Figure 3 to analyze the steps that should be taken and to discuss them with your administrator?
5. If you have worked in a setting in which collaboration was valued and encouraged, write a summary of your experience. Use this as the basis for a discussion with others to generate specific examples of the characteristics of collaboration.
6. What is your responsibility if collaboration is needed but is not occurring? For example, what if you are on a grade-level or department team, and some members spend meeting time grading papers, or they seldom complete the tasks they agreed to do? What if you are a co-teacher, and your partner does not want to plan together or does not want to share classroom instruction?
7. Peruse recent issues of popular news magazines. What examples of societal collaboration are addressed? What universal themes related to the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration can you identify from these materials? How might current trends in collaboration in business, social services, and other disciplines affect school collaboration in the future?