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Why Can't We Just Be Friends?

Special educators thrive on anticipation. At the beginning of our careers, at the start of the school year, when we move to a different building, or work with a new age group, we spend time and energy wondering what awaits us. We imagine students who will learn from us and be influenced by us. We get ideas for the inspiring lessons we will teach. We foresee professional friendships that will last for decades. As busy as we are, we hardly feel the burden of responsibility as it settles on our shoulders.

As special educators, we want our work to go beyond the classroom—whether our own classroom in which we teach, or those of general education teachers in which our students are included. For that to happen, we must be able to successfully work with the many adults in the lives of our students. Our professional working lives must include an ongoing commitment to develop and sustain effective professional relationships. If our students are to succeed, we must be able to effectively collaborate in our work setting.

How can this be done? This book will provide practical ways to develop and maintain the professional relationships you need for successful collaboration. These relationships make day-to-day work more effective. Ultimately, these relationships benefit our students, their parents, all our school colleagues, and ourselves.

BECOMING PROACTIVE: IMPROVING THE SCHOOL CLIMATE THROUGH COLLABORATION

Beginning teachers must be able to work not only with their students but with many different teachers.

When I got my first teaching position, I was very nervous. I didn't know how to get from one end of the school to the other without getting lost. But as the year went on, things changed. It all became different when I started to work with other teachers. Instead of feeling like I was working in a building, I felt like I was working for my students with other adults. By the end of the year, I could help my students so much better than I could at the beginning because of the other teachers I got to know.

Collaboration is no longer just an ingredient in school life but an essential feature (Burnett & Peters-Johnson, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005). Caron and McLaughlin (2002) identified the presence of a "collaborative culture" as an indicator of an excellent school, even though the strategies used in schools might differ from classroom to classroom. Research projects examining collaboration in the context of early childhood education (e.g., Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001), secondary settings (e.g., Bouck, 2005), as well as those in preservice preparation programs (e.g., Knapczyk, Frey, & Wall-Marencik, 2005) describe the extended interactions between general and special educators. Collaboration has the potential to make these interactions productive and satisfying for all involved, to the benefit of the students.

When interviewing for new positions, special and general education teachers are often asked about their ability to collaborate. Clearly, collaboration skills alone are not enough to enable an individual to be a successful teacher. To get hired and remain employed, all teachers must be effective in the classroom. Before getting their first job, most special educators have completed extensive professional training, mastering all of the following: assessment of students with disabilities, design and delivery of effective learning opportunities for their students, and evaluation of the services provided. Teachers use the instructional strategies they were taught in rigorous teacher preparation programs. Many books are available to help teachers learn to assess student progress (King-Sears, Cummings, & Hullihen, 1994; Mayberry & Lazarus, 2002; Spinelli, 2006). Teachers also learn methods for instruction (Bos & Vaughn, 2006; Eanes, 1997; Reif & Heimburge, 2002; Sailor, 2002; Salend, 2005; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). Teacher preparation course activities and books or guides prepare beginning teachers to be competent in their direct instruction of students.

This same disciplined approach is also needed to prepare special education teachers to establish and maintain effective working relationships with their colleagues. Many factors contribute to making good teachers (e.g., National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2004). For both general and special educators, a link between policy and practice is needed, and the NCTQ observes that "many of the policies in place at the state and district levels do not reflect the best research" (p. 2). Their booklet, available for free at www.nctq.org, highlights issues that should be considered when preparing general and special education teachers.

One reality that both general and special educators face is that an increasing number of special needs students are receiving their education in inclusive settings. Collaboration is an essential part of the program planning needed to make such placements effective (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2005; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). When successful, positive collaborative relationships in schools have many rewards. Teachers who experience the long-term benefits of a collaborative school environment are more committed to their profession and more productive (Gerber, 1991). Malone, Gallagher, and Long (2001), reporting on the outlook of 148 general educators who were members of teams supporting children with disabilities, reported that the general educators valued opportunities for discipline collaboration, as well as the personal benefits (e.g., collegiality, improved knowledge, personal support) and positive communication that emerged from the team process (p. 586).

Collaboration skills are increasingly incorporated into teacher education programs for special educators (e.g., Conderman, 2001; Crutchfield, 2003) as well as general educators (e.g., Coombs-Richardson & Mead, 2001). Kluth and Straut (2003) have used a collaborative approach in the university classroom for four years, illustrating different types of collaborative partnerships that general educators and special educators might use in inclusive classrooms.

> How better to prepare students for inclusive classrooms than to demonstrate and model inclusive practice? The university or college classroom can become a laboratory for developing co-teaching and coplanning skills that will undoubtedly be needed in the diverse, inclusive classrooms students are entering. (Kluth & Straut, 2003, p. 239)

As Fisher, Frey, and Thousand (2003) describe,

> Inclusive educators do not maintain separate classroom responsibilities. Instead, they assimilate into the varied settings in which their students participate. The ability to collaborate with general educators, coaches, related service professionals and vocational personnel is fundamental because they are the instructional providers . . . Successful special educators are masters of collaboration. (p. 46)

In the Hamill, Jantzen, & Bargerhuff (1999) survey of 111 educators in 10 schools, and in focus groups conducted with some of these educators, collaboration was identified most frequently as of highest importance (significant at .01) for competencies of teachers and administrators in inclusive schools.

> As this investigation highlights, educators place high value on the need to develop skills in collaboration. If collaboration that supports inclusion is to prevail among both teachers and administrators, their professional development should provide opportunities for interaction and shared experiences across the disciplines of general and special education. (p. 33)

This point is further made by Edmiaston & Fitzgerald (2000), who describe a model program built upon collaboration as the basis for successful inclusion. The designers of the POND program make use of the Reggio Emilia approach, incorporating collaboration directly into their work with young children:

> Collaboration helps achieve the common goal of inclusion. Loris Malaguzzi (1993), the late founder and director of early education in Reggio Emilia, described *relationships to be the fundamental, organizing strategy of our educational system. We view relationships not simply as a warm, protective backdrop or blanket but as a coming together of elements interacting dynamically toward a*

> *common purpose (p. 10).* At the early childhood center, important collaborative relationships develop between teachers and children, children and their peers, general and special educators, and teachers and parents. (p. 66)

Programs like the service-learning experiences that four high schools in Kentucky organized for students with moderate and severe disabilities (Kleinert et al., 2004) could not exist without widespread collaboration.

Cross-agency collaboration is powerful, as described by Little and Houston (2003) as a result of a multischool team-based approached aimed at improving student performance: "The knowledge, skills, and perspectives from each of these partners enhance the common vision, necessary support, and unique roles contributed by each collaborator. However, this critical component is also the greatest challenge, as multiple systems often struggle to collaborate within a single system" (p. 85). How can collaboration more routinely be incorporated into these settings?

Collaboration skills can be learned. Collaboration techniques are presented in this book along with the research that supports their use. Using this book, you can develop and use a detailed set of goals to proactively define your ideals for new working relationships. The following definition of collaboration is used to underscore the goal-oriented nature of a collaborative effort:

> Effective collaboration consists of designing and using a sequence of goal-oriented activities that result in improved working relationships between professional colleagues. The responsibility for collaborating can either be the sole responsibility of one individual who seeks to improve a professional relationship, or a joint commitment of two or more people who wish to improve their working relationship.

Collaboration rests on the ability to accurately assess the demands of a situation, develop appropriate expectations, and initiate actions that will enable collaboration to occur. When this takes place, both students and their teachers benefit. Scribner and Scribner (2001) describe high-performing schools serving Mexican American students in which collaboration is identified as a key component of success.

> Collaborative governance and leadership serving Mexican American students did not seem to be driven by state-mandated accountability measures. Educators held themselves accountable, however, believing that all children can learn and that it was their responsibility to make it happen (Scribner & Reyes, 1999). (pp. 3–4)

Collaboration can enable educators to work together to effectively assist students. The impact of collaboration on students is further supported by Christiansen, Goulet, Krentz, and Maeers (1997): "Collaborative learning communities that build knowledge from within and through interactions with others [lead to] . . . relationships which, in turn, affect teaching practice and educational change" (pp. xvi–xviii). When synergy takes place in the school, students are the beneficiaries.

The assumption that teachers and administrators automatically know how to collaborate may be unrealistic. As Glenn (1989) explains, "the missing ingredient in too many schools is the energy for learning that arises from commitment—commitment of teachers and principal to a *joint* [italics added] enterprise and commitment of teachers and students to a school they have chosen" (p. 779). Programs such as the one described by Sharpe and Hawes (2003) provide a five-step process—based on the work of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (2002)—that enables general and special educators to begin the process of working together. The authors characterize the steps as "a simple but effective strategy for bringing general and special education teachers together to address the academic and social needs of students with disabilities in the general education settings" (p. 6). Other, more in-depth resources (e.g., Bauwens & Hourcade, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2002) and this book provide opportunities to consider the challenges teachers face when collaborating and how to overcome them. Special educators need explicit training to enable them to foster and maintain collaborative relationships and to fully participate in joint enterprises.

Davis and Thomas (1989) describe a school climate of trust and good communication between staff and administrators as preconditions for effective collaboration. Kilgore, Griffin, Sindelar, and Webb (2002) made a similar observation when looking at schools that made progress incorporating inclusive practices into their school settings:

> Lasting changes occur when stakeholders build collaborative cultures, rally behind a vision, and build reforms into the organization of the school. When teachers work in relative isolation—without the guidance of a school vision, the assistance of "critical friends," the support of professional development, or the discipline of accountability—they typically resist school reforms, especially those that threaten classroom autonomy. . . . Over time, . . . within [the school's] open and collaborative climate, teachers redefined their roles, accepted greater responsibility for all student learning, shared teaching ideas, allowed others to suggest curricular and instructional modifications, and developed a greater sense of personal and collective teaching efficacy (Webb & Barnash, 1997). (p. 11)

An example of this collaboration model in use is provided by Haskell (2000), who describes the benefits for all students when collaboration between general science teachers and special educators occurs: "A proactive collaborative relationship with the special education teacher can result in a teaching situation which is not only more agreeable to the science teacher, but also more beneficial to all of the students in the classroom." Beginning special educators are generally optimistic. They presume that these preconditions—trust and good communication—exist everywhere. They embark on their new jobs, assuming that "everyone will get along." Many are unprepared when they encounter the unexpected.

On my first day in the building, I went up to people in the teachers' lounge and introduced myself. They smiled at me but went right on talking. After that, I ate lunch in my room. I don't think I said ten words to another teacher that whole first year.

When special educators receive neutral or negative reactions, they often dismiss the opportunity to analyze what has taken place. They may (1) be too busy to examine the encounter in depth, or (2) conclude that difficulties are the exception rather than the rule, or (3) assume that problematic encounters are going to happen all the time and that little can be done. They may use a variety of explanations to justify the encounters—including blame or guilt. Instead of changing their behavior, they may avoid the particular teacher or teachers. If these difficult encounters persist, their optimism can sour and be replaced by pessimism. This negative spiral is defeating.

When confronted with interpersonal problems, teachers do not always employ the systematic approach used in typical teaching situations. For example, when an instructional practice is ineffective, a teacher will assess what happened and make the necessary changes. In a failed collaborative effort, teachers often passively accept the consequences. They may inaccurately presume that (1) they *should* know what to do, or (2) their colleagues are probably people with whom no one could collaborate. The resulting feelings are very similar to those that innovative teachers sometimes experience. Renegar (1993) describes the response of innovative teachers to their colleagues in this way:

> Teachers who have experienced their colleagues' negativity about creative teaching efforts frequently characterize this response as jealousy. Others classify it as negativism motivated by insecurity or laziness. Whatever the cause, the negative peer pressure frequently has the chilling effect of intimidating the innovator and extinguishing the flame of experimentation. (p. 70)

You do not have to be defeated by negativity—there is another alternative. This book provides you with a constructive, proactive approach to collaboration based on four assumptions illustrated by the following example:

> *My reason for going into teaching was my interest in people. I was always good at figuring out what made people act the way they did. That's why I was so upset when my paraprofessional and I couldn't get along. Things went from bad to worse in a few short weeks. If I hadn't had to do this project, I don't know what would have happened. We got things turned around, and I feel so relieved! I never ran into a problem I couldn't solve before. Now, I know when it happens again, I'll be ready.*

The four assumptions are

1. Most special educators have instinctively learned to work effectively with other adults. These instinctive skills will be sufficient for the majority of working relationships to be successful.
2. Problematic professional encounters are *inevitable* barriers that will appear occasionally in the life of every special educator.
3. Developing a positive, proactive approach to overcome or transform these barriers is the responsibility of the special educator.
4. All the necessary components of this type of approach can be learned.

This book provides a step-by-step approach for developing and carrying out a collaboration project. Your collaboration project, described more fully in Chapter 6, will enable you to improve a relationship in which you are currently involved. You can do this improvement on your own, following the steps outlined in the book, or as part of an organized group activity (e.g., a professional development program in your school, with other teachers who get together informally to address collaboration issues, or as part of coursework in your special education program).

Before you begin the design and implementation of your project, you will explore the basic ingredients of collaboration. Throughout this book you will find idea try-outs and project try-outs. Idea try-outs give you ways to reflect on experiences you have already had and review them in light of the ideas presented in this book. Project try-outs are activities that enable you to apply ideas presented in the book to your current situation. Both types of try-outs are designed to help you improve your collaboration skills.

Record your responses to the try-outs in a collaboration notebook (a loose-leaf notebook or an electronic version of a notebook, with a new file for each chapter). It will help if you date and label each entry in your notebook using the try-out number that appears in the book. You can be your own best critic.

> *The best part of the project was reviewing what I wrote in my daily notes. I was amazed at what I learned by rereading my thoughts just a few weeks later.*

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLABORATION PROJECT

Using guidelines provided throughout this book, you will design and carry out a collaboration project that meets your needs. This project gives you the opportunity to change a specific professional relationship by changing your way of interacting with another person. The collaboration project, fully described in Chapter 6, can be completed whether or not you are currently in a school setting. The project focuses on *you*. It helps you to find ways to think and behave differently, even if the person with whom you want to better collaborate remains the same. No one needs to know about the collaboration project other than you and people you choose to inform.

Terminology

To clarify communication about the projects, the following terms are used in this book:

- The "person with whom you want to better collaborate" is called the *target person.*
- You are called the *project planner.*

Typical Questions

Does This Really Work?

The collaboration project has been used by over 1,000 special educators in training to improve their school or work situations. Some of these special educators were at the very start of their careers, and they completed their collaboration projects while they were full-time students. Others were employed as paraprofessionals or worked as volunteers in schools. Still others were established teachers interested in improving their collaboration with others. Approximately 90% of the special educators who completed collaboration projects experienced dramatic changes in either behavior or attitude.

Behavioral Changes. When behavioral changes took place, project planners found new ways to interact with their target persons. Each target person demonstrated a new behavioral response. When the project is underway, patterns of interaction between the planner and the target person begin. Occasionally, unexpected changes take place.

> *When I started this project, no one could have ever convinced me that it would work. I thought he was a stuck-up snob and wanted to have as little to do with him as possible. But now, I see him in a whole different light. I learned that he is easily intimidated by new situations and is on his guard more than I ever guessed. Other people are amazed that the two of us get along so well now.*

Both people begin to behave differently. Sometimes, the target person turns out to be more reserved than anyone had suspected. Other times, the target person responds to new opportunities for planning or co-teaching. Behavioral changes in the relationship are often evident to everyone, even though the collaboration project is not public. Examples of behavioral changes are provided throughout this book.

Attitude Changes. In other collaboration projects, there are no evident changes. To others watching the people who are the focus of the collaboration project, everything may look the same. However, the project planner has a new attitude about the target person. Instead of feeling frustrated, angry, or disappointed by the target person, the planner has some new insights about the target person's motivation. At other times, there is greater acceptance of the limitations of the working relationship.

> *When I started this project, I decided to pick a problem which I faced with my co-teacher all the time. She loves to share gossip, even though it makes me very uncomfortable. As a result of my project, I learned that in spite of her need to gossip, we could work together. Even though outwardly nothing changed, I didn't get so upset anymore. Instead of trying to fix her, I focused on me. I learned how to avoid those conversations and accept a part of her that used to drive me crazy. When the project was over, I felt a real sense of relief. The gossip still goes on, but it just doesn't bother me anymore.*

Usually, the attitude change comes as a direct result of the project. Because of the effort expended in this project, new attitudes emerge. Throughout this book, you will read about attitude changes that improved collaborative efforts.

How Can the Relationship Change If the Only One Working on It Is Me?

The collaboration project is based on two assumptions.

- *Assumption 1*. Each relationship develops its own kind of balance. Visualize it as a teeter-totter. When both people stay in the same positions in relation to each other, there is little likelihood of change. When one moves, both are influenced. Therefore, the project activities require re-examination of old habits. New activities potentially result in behavioral or attitude change.
- *Assumption 2.* In all relationships, when one person makes a commitment—and takes subsequent action—to improve the working relationship, change results. The improvement is either a behavior or attitude change.

These two assumptions lead to the project. Teachers who have completed the project are amazed that in a relatively short time they are able to see dramatic shifts in their relationships—either in their behavior or in their attitude.

In some projects, the planner talks with the target person about the need for improvement in their working relationship. Together, they agree that they want to make some changes. All of the ideas in this book can work equally well if you conduct your project privately or in conjunction with your target person. However, most of the examples given in the book presume that you and your target person do not discuss the project together.

How Is Working by Myself Collaboration?

In most school situations requiring collaboration, people are not equally motivated. Even though their relationship is asymmetrical, they must find ways to work together. Generally, one person has to put more energy into initiating the working relationship or fixing problems that have occurred. This project gives you the momentum needed for collaborating with anyone in your work situation. You should be able to work with people who see situations the same way you do, as well as with people who don't. The skills you'll develop—to take ownership of your thoughts and actions—will prepare you to be an effective collaborator in all circumstances.

Compare being a collaborator to being a member of a winning sports team. Each member of the team must find ways to be able to perform consistently at the peak of his or her capabilities. Individual excellence is presumed. Only when individual team members are fully in control of their individual performances can the team win. Team confidence must be based on a history of competence. A team can only win when team members can assess themselves accurately and take full responsibility for meeting team goals. The project gives you a means of preparing for your collaboration with others. Part of this process will include helping you to become familiar with both your strengths and your weaknesses. In Blanchard's (2001) highly engaging story about developing skills essential for teamwork, members of a hockey team learn how to analyze what they need to do differently—as individuals and as a team. This project will enable you to examine what you bring to your school setting as well as what you need to learn to contribute more effectively.

Isn't It Unethical to be Doing Something Like This When It Is Kept Secret?

In all working relationships, there are public agendas that are separate from private ones. It is extremely rare for people in a workplace to share every thought or idea that they have about each other. The intent of this project is to help you become an effective collaborator. By investing time and energy in the improvement of a working relationship, which is aimed at yourself, you are contributing to the overall improvement of the relationship. In this way, the project serves a valuable function. Most teachers who have developed and implemented projects feel awkward spending so much time and energy privately focusing on another person. As you will read in this book, nearly all of them conclude that the project's benefits are significant enough to outweigh their initial apprehension.

Some project planners choose to inform their target person that they would like to improve their working relationship and share some aspects of the collaboration plan. That option is open to you.

Idea Try-Out 1.1 is designed to help you consider what you have already experienced. Your review of what you've observed can help you to organize your ideas about collaborative relationships.

Idea Try-Out 1.1

At Work: Yes and No

This idea try-out allows you to identify characteristics of working relationships that you would like to include in your professional future. Think about paid or volunteer jobs you have held over the last few years and people with whom you have worked. If you wish, you may also think about contacts with family members or friends. Remember to date and label this try-out in your collaboration notebook for future reference. Your notebook should be in a format that is easy for you to use—it can either be a paper notebook or an electronic one. Pick one approach and stick with it for all of the activities that reference the notebook in this book.

1. In your collaboration notebook, on the left side of the page, list four or five pairs of people who got along well with each other. Double-space your list of names.
2. On the right side, next to each pair of names, record two or three phrases describing their working relationship. You may want to put down a word or phrase that reminds you of a time you saw them working together well.
3. On a new page, on the left side of the page, make a new list of four or five pairs of people who had trouble getting along with each other. Double-space your list of names.

4. On the right side, next to each pair of names, record two or three phrases describing their working relationship. You may want to put down a word or phrase that reminds you of a time you saw them having problems getting along.
5. After looking over these two lists, turn to a new page and make a chart for yourself, using a line down the middle of the page. Label the left-hand side "YES" and the right-hand side "NO."
    a. On the left, jot down two or three features you would like to have in future working relationships with colleagues.
    b. On the right, put down two or three features you would like to avoid in future working relationships.

As you complete the try-out, you may find that you have trouble putting your thoughts into words. Throughout this book, you will find ideas and suggestions that should increase both your vocabulary and understanding of working relationships. You can add to the lists you created for Idea Try-Out 1.1 throughout your use of this book. You may think of new things you want to include, and those you want to avoid, in future collaborative relationships, as well as your vocabulary for describing collaborative strategies, based on your new ability to attend to working relationships all around you.

The literature pertaining to the field of collaboration is extensive; it is incorporated throughout this book. Embedded in the literature are four major principles of collaboration, which are central to this book. The collaboration project you will carry out incorporates the following principles.

PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATION

1. The goal of collaboration is to create a climate of heightened professionalism between professionals, with an "indirect impact on student outcomes" (Idol & West, 1991, p. 72) such that the students who are served by the professionals can achieve their highest potential.

The focus of this book will be on maximizing the effectiveness of collaboration between special education and other professionals who work together. The long-term, indirect goal of collaboration is to help students to achieve their fullest potential. This focus is based on the notion of "shared responsibility" that Will (1986) describes as the effective working relationship of general educators and special educators. The benefits to students include use of research-based practices in content areas such as reading (e.g., Schmidt, Rozendal, & Greenman, 2002), improved student achievement (Givens-Ogle, Christ, Colman, King-Streit, & Wilson, 1989; Stewart & Brendefur, 2005), and the successful accommodation of an increasingly diverse student population (Johnson, Pugach, & Devlin, 1990). The results lead to seeing students in new ways. Instead of thinking of them as "yours" and "mine" they become "ours" (Keller & Cravedi-Cheng, 1995, pp. 84–85). More experienced special educators, when interviewed, referred to collaboration and consultation as a strategy used to enhance student outcomes, significantly more often than did novice teachers (Stough & Palmer, 2001; Stough, Palmer, & Sharp, 2001).

2. Collaboration "should provide a vehicle to facilitate independent problem solving on the part of participants" (Johnson et al., 1990, p. 11).

The goal of collaboration is *not* to create an intertwined group of professionals who will work together on joint projects indefinitely. In the following description, a teacher figured out how to improve her collaboration with a hard-to-like counselor.

Whenever teachers talked about our high school guidance counselor, they would get angry. "She never listens!" "She always thinks she knows what's best for students." I knew she had strong opinions that I was never going to change. Still, I was determined to broaden the range of post-high school options for my special needs students. After lots of trial and error, she and I applied for a grant from our local Rotary to identify resource people in our community who could mentor my students during their junior and senior years. It has made a world of difference in the lives of my kids! She's still just as hard to take as she always was, but I didn't let it stop me.

Ideally, collaboration promotes the efficient and effective resolution of problems. Occasionally, work will be done individually—in other cases by collaborative teams.

This collaboration principle underscores one way this book differs from much that has been written about collaboration. Here, there is no prerequisite that collaborators must have identical intentions. It is unrealistic to always find shared collaboration goals in schools. Many teachers must work with colleagues who don't intend to change objectionable interpersonal habits. Yet, "difficult people" must still be involved in the planning of students' programs.

Following this principle is the caveat of Cook and Friend (1991a). They warn that "collaboration is not a panacea." In other words, collaboration cannot be expected to solve every problem educators experience. The following example Cook and Friend describe is a familiar one:

> Collaboration is seldom a means of correcting fundamental problems in an already existing program. The most direct example of this occurs when a special education teacher is asked, under the guise of collaboration, to work with a general education teacher experiencing difficulty with classroom discipline. The risk is great that the general education teacher will resent the special education teacher. (p. 8)

The special educator must be careful to avoid such traps. Therefore, the target of the collaboration effort has to be one that is either a joint concern to both individuals or one that is indispensable for the person doing the collaboration work. Cross-disciplinary models can facilitate new approaches to solving problems (such as the collaboration between special educators, administrators, and school counselors in training, described by Shoffner & Briggs, 2001, involving an interactive CD-ROM). "As the three groups of professionals-in-training shared their ideas, they learned to draw on each others' perspectives and strengths [to solve the case problems]" (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001, p. 199). The collaboration project can be used to improve working relationships with other special educators or others in your school environment.

3. Collaboration is "an interactive process that enables teams of people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to . . . problems. The outcome . . . produces solutions that are different from those that any individual team member would produce independently" (Idol, West, & Lloyd, 1988, p. 55).

When attempting to solve problems, some teachers get stuck and fail to improve the situation. Then, individuals often become entrenched in their own belief systems, usually convincing themselves that they are justified—in their frustration, hopelessness, despair, or anger.

As part of the collaboration process proposed in this book, individuals are encouraged to develop effective collaboration resource networks, which can serve many purposes. (In Chapters 6 and 7, various ways to set up and work with these networks are described.) Collaboration resource networks help project planners to feel less isolated. But they can also provide the action orientation toward problem solving, which can lead to improved working relationships. "The facilitating and enabling functions of collaboration provide the foundation from which teacher empowerment can be built" (Johnson et al., 1990, p. 11). An outcome for network members is that they are better able to achieve the goals they set for themselves. These goals can be achieved whether they are working on the collaboration problem indirectly or directly.

4. In the collaboration effort, "vested interests are sublimated to the broader purposes of the . . . strategic agenda" (Lasley, Matczynski, & Williams, 1992, p. 257).

Teachers who make a commitment to a collaborative effort must subsume their personal preferences to the total requirements of the task. Ripley (1998) makes this point very clearly:

> The biggest change for educators is in deciding to share the role that has traditionally been individual: to share the goals, decisions, classroom instruction, responsibility for students, assessment of student learning, problem solving, and classroom management. The teachers must begin to think of it as our class. (p. 16)

The strategic agenda for the classroom is focused on meeting the needs of all students. This can mean that the type or timing of effort that is comfortable for one person may have to be modified when others have conflicting needs. For example, Elliott and Sheridan (1992) reviewed literature on effective teams, and they identified seven characteristics that maximize teams' effectiveness. One of them involved planning before meetings, including distribution of material to team members before the meeting (p. 329). For some teachers, planning in advance may be onerous. However, to benefit others, these burdens may have to be accepted. As Friend (2000) recommends, collaboration "must arise out of an understanding of its potential and pitfalls, and as a system-level standard it can be sustained only through professionals' deliberate use of appropriate knowledge and skills" (p. 131). Collaboration rises beyond the personal to a systemwide commitment to work. Friend goes on to caution that "calling nearly every shared effort in schools collaborative, whether it is or not, diminishes the value of the concept, dilutes professionals' understanding of what it requires, and fosters a false belief that there's not much to collaborating" (p. 131). Collaboration is more than a word.

Incorporating a collaborative approach to education of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional (CLDE) students was the focus of the study by Roache, Shore, Gouleta, and de Obaldia Butkevich (2003). At the end of their study of 125 education professionals, they concluded that

> The challenge to collaboration in CLDE students' education is to develop democratic, ethical processes with multicultural understanding and respect. . . . However, collaboration efforts may result in conflict between educators, if not done carefully. To avoid these potential areas of conflict, it is important for the collaborative team to establish democratic processes of collaboration and have a clear understanding of the roles, expertise, and responsibilities of each team member. (p. 130)

Roache et al. (2003) recommend that individuals put aside their own issues and look at the broader concerns of the education of students in order to collaborate effectively.

Sometimes, special education teachers may have to consider a broader strategic agenda when it pertains to students with special needs. For example, with reduced federal contributions, communities are evaluating the services that school districts can provide to all students. Special educators will be in the middle of the debate over essential services. The principle derived from the work of Lasley et al. (1992) can be central to many discussions.

The ability to follow this principle may be a challenge that requires extensive self-assessment. Chapter 3 provides a starting point for this process. Project Try-Out 1.2 gives you an opportunity to explore your use of the Collaboration Principles.

Project Try-Out 1.2

Collaboration Principles

This project will give you an opportunity to make use of the four Collaboration Principles. Use one to reflect on a decision you've already made, and then apply it to a decision you will be making in the near future.

1. Think back to a recent decision of yours that had an impact on other people. This could be a minor or major decision affecting people in any setting—school, work, or home.

2. Select one of the Collaboration Principles that appeals to you.
3. In your collaboration notebook, rewrite the Collaboration Principle in your own words.
4. List two or three ways in which you followed this Principle to reach the decision you selected for Step 1.
5. List two or three things you could have done, or ideas you could have considered, that would have extended the impact of the Collaboration Principle.
6. Identify a time in the next two weeks when you will make a decision with others. Write a note to yourself about it in your collaboration notebook. List two or three ways you would like to handle that decision.
7. In two weeks, respond to these two prompts before and after the decision is made:
    a. While making your decision, review the note you wrote to yourself.
    b. After the event has taken place, write a new, brief note. Include both a self-critique and two or three things you want to remember about the whole experience in the future.

Project Try-Out 1.2 lets you try a new approach for decision making. It gives you a structured way to change your usual process of making decisions. The chance to think about a collaboration principle, and thereby to see things from a different vantage point, may enable you to think about what you would like to do differently in the collaborative process.

Professional Working Relationships: An Analogy

Relationships that special educators form with other adults in their schools and within their school districts can be central to their professional lives.

> *We've been working together as a team for so long that we depend on each other constantly. When we need to talk, we know what the other person is thinking right away—it's almost as if we have our own code. Secret Santa gave us a big poster of peas in a pod one year—that's us! We hung it right up in our classroom, and it still makes us smile.*
>
> *I don't know how we could get through some of our tougher days without each other.*

This is an example of a teaching team that works together seamlessly. Special educators must work closely with other adults to help students achieve academic goals.

The uniquely intimate professional relationships that special educators have with their paraprofessionals, colleagues, and administrators parallel arranged marriages. People who are expected to be compatible are brought together, with optimism, by their advocates. In the best circumstances, the relationships formed are deep and honest, emerging from shared values. Both parties actively work toward strengthening their commitments, overcoming their differences, and jointly developing a useful frame of reference. In the worst circumstances, shallow or hostile relationships result, leaving both parties feeling cheated and pessimistic.

Special education teachers must learn all they can about collaboration with their general education colleagues—teachers, administrators, and support personnel—so they can succeed in the "arranged marriages" that will be a part of their professional careers. The collaboration project described next shows how one teacher turned a frustrating situation into one that was gratifying.

> *I didn't realize before I implemented this project how hard it was for me to tell people unpleasant things. I would clench my teeth to avoid reacting negatively. I wanted to have a sense of harmony at work but had no idea how to go about developing it.*
>
> *I've learned how to let go of many of the negative things that used to get to me. I was surprised that quite a few were not so important and could be ignored. I've learned how to deal with people at school, in spite of ambivalent feelings about some of them. I eat with others in the faculty lounge a few times a week now—I never would have thought I'd feel comfortable doing that at the start of the project!*

Special educators must work with others for whom special education is their secondary, rather than primary, focus. These other individuals are like the "extended family"—the school personnel and general education teachers. Often, special educators must advocate for parents as well as for their students. They are likely to work directly with families and also communicate family needs and concerns to other educators. (Chapter 11 provides ideas for improved collaboration with members of your students' families.) By learning to apply the creativity used in their classrooms to contacts with other adults, special educators can develop working relationships that will enable them to eventually serve their students best.

Sometimes, as in an arranged marriage, building a collaborative relationship takes a while. Initial skepticism toward collaboration can be overcome. A school building, or district, must undergo change in order to be fully receptive to the supports administrators must provide in a collaborative environment. Senge's (1990) classic, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, illustrates the kinds of transformations that must take place for a building to be able to truly be a learning organization. Mohr & Dichter's (2001) article, "Building a Learning Organization," describes the kinds of changes that take place when a school moves from a hierarchical to a collaborative model. The differences between collaboration, consultation, and teaming are subtle but unmistakable. The following section of this chapter clarifies these distinctions.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN COLLABORATION, CONSULTATION, AND TEAMING

The development of collaboration in special education has its roots in the consultation model. Ripley (1998) provides a useful historical overview. Consultation generally designates one person—the consultant—as the "expert." In some interdisciplinary teams, such as those providing physical education services to students with disabilities, the consulting model continues to be used. Shapiro & Sayers (2003) explain that "school-based roles and responsibilities of physical therapists, occupational therapists, therapeutic recreation specialists, and adapted physical education teachers are defined by regulations, guidelines, and philosophies gathered from Federal and state laws, state guidelines, professional standards, and school district policies" (p. 32). Each professional contributes a unique perspective, and together they each "provide additional data and important intervention strategies for the development and implementation of the student's IEP goals" (p. 37). Originally, consultation had a different structure for special educators.

Consultation became part of the service delivery model in the 1960s and 1970s when services to special needs students often had to take place prior to formal referral. Consultation usually occurred in a triad consisting of consultant, teacher, and student (Fuchs, Fuchs, Dulan, Roberts, & Fernstrom, 1992). Pugach and Allen-Meares (1985) explain that "consultation typically denotes an inequality of status between professionals, usually with the implication that the regular classroom teacher is less qualified than a support services specialist to provide input and resolve problems" (p. 4). In many schools, school psychologists were the experts to whom school personnel turned for advice (Reeve & Hallahan, 1994). Although the idea of an expert had appeal, the consultation model was shown to have limitations. These limitations were, in part, due to questions raised about measurable benefits.

Empirical literature on consultation was reviewed by Fuchs et al. (1992). They reviewed articles, book chapters, dissertations, and monographs written between 1961 and 1989 and found that few data-based studies evaluated the effectiveness of consultation. They considered the reasons for the limitations and proposed two explanations. First, there were significant challenges to conducting well-controlled research in the field that were rarely overcome. Second, many studies focused exclusively on teacher or consultant attitudes or satisfaction, rather than on student progress (Fuchs et al., 1992, pp. 162–163). The following situation is based more on attitudes than on student behavior.

> *Every day at lunch, I heard the same things. Teachers would tell me all the things my kids did wrong on the playground, in the bathrooms. They never had a suggestion or offered any sympathy. After a while, it became so bad that any response I made would just make them start laughing. By October, my students got much better and learned to control their behavior everywhere in the school. Even so, the teachers never bothered to say anything positive. Somehow, "my" kids never became "our" kids.*

For effective consultation to take place, both persons (consultee and consultant) need to have some things in common. The lack of joint ownership for student problems or student growth is evident in the example above. Johnston (1990) would classify this situation as "troubled." When evaluating the participation of school psychologists in the consultation process, he recommends several factors as important: "enthusiasm, communication skills, mutual respect for professional abilities, and mutually desired expectations" (Johnston, 1990, p. 53). However, everyone involved in the consultation process did not always view it in the same way. Thus, the effectiveness of the consultation process is severely limited.

In the late 1980s, practitioners began to change the roles taken in their work together. Ponti, Zins, and Graden (1988) described a consultation-based approach to decrease referrals to special education that employed a collaborative process involving psychologists, teachers, and parents. This process "became part of the [school] system's routine functioning, . . . and positive expectations regarding the program were created among those who were involved in it" (p. 99). Teachers and other service providers began to work together more effectively, and these unique configurations became more standard.

The switch from *consultation* to *collaboration* came when the role of the special educator evolved from that of expert to one of a collaborator or joint problem solver. In part, this was a realistic response to situations faced by many beginning special educators. After the passage of P.L. 94–142 in 1975 (see Chapter 2 for a historical perspective on service delivery to students with special needs), the need for special education teachers increased dramatically. Often, special educators were hired immediately after they graduated from college. These beginning teachers were not considered experts when they joined school faculties. Most of their fellow teachers had been teaching for some time, and many were parents of children the same age as the new special educators. This made the establishment of the special educator as the expert frustrating and unrealistic.

I'll never forget the first time I tried to make a suggestion at a faculty meeting about getting parents more involved in our afterschool program. One of the teachers said, "Where do you get those ideas? Are you a parent?" and I looked around the room and realized that almost everyone there was a parent, except me. Four of the teachers had grandchildren! I got really quiet after that.

Twenty-five years after the passage of P.L. 94–142, legislation has supported collaboration in the general education classroom. Austin (2001) investigated the views of 46 pairs of general and special educators who co-taught. Asymmetrical relationships were seen to exist: both general and special educators believed that the general educator

> did the most in the inclusive classroom (p = .001) . . . This may be due to the fact that the special education co-teacher is typically the visitor in the classroom and is often viewed as the expert on curriculum adaptation and remediation, whereas the general education co-teacher is often regarded as being more expert in the content area. (p. 252)

The roles the co-teachers took in Austin's view include behaviors both identified as important:

> offering feedback to one's partner, sharing classroom management, providing daily mutual planning time, and using cooperative learning techniques . . . This reality should compel school districts and teacher education

> programs to provide training, practices and supports to serve in inclusive classrooms. (p. 254)

Collaboration has become integrated into the work in the inclusive classroom.

With the implementation of P.L. 94–142, schools faced practical realities of changing their faculties, bringing young, beginning special educators together with highly experienced general educators. The timing for a change from consultation to collaboration was right for another reason: collaboration had a philosophical appeal for many teachers. Babcock and Pryzwansky (1983) contrasted the perceived value that principals, teachers, and special education teachers attributed to four different models—Collaboration, Mental Health, Medical, and Expert. The reliance on the expert to provide the answers was presumed in both the Medical and the Expert models. The Collaboration approach was most highly rated, illustrating that education professionals found the opportunity to participate in a problem-solving endeavor preferable to getting answers from experts. As Reisberg and Wolf (1986) stated emphatically at the time, the process of collaboration required shared thinking, often leading to schoolwide change: "The value of cooperative planning and decision making in the development of a school change process cannot be underestimated" (p. 12).

Increasingly, diverse use of the collaborative process was described in special education literature. For example, Donaldson and Christiansen (1990) outlined a cycle in which collaboration could be incorporated at several different decision points, depending on the needs of the student and the team. Idol (1988) modified her definition of consultation to be "collaborative in that all individuals involved in the process are assumed to have expertise to contribute and responsibility to share for instructional outcomes" (p. 48), illustrating the broadening of the original meaning of the term consultation to include a sharing of expertise. The term *interactive teaming* described how coordinated groups of individuals with different perspectives could successfully meet the needs of culturally diverse students (Correa & Tulbert, 1991).

However, the use of the same terms to connote various approaches was confusing. In 1991, Cook and Friend described this period in the field as follows:

> The present status of consultation and collaboration might well be likened to a period of adolescence: Just as teenagers are often a mixture of smooth growth and awkwardness, so, too, is the field as it appears to be striving for conceptual clarity amid its own contradictions. Some services are emphasizing collaboration while successfully meeting student needs. Others are struggling to find an identity. When we look to anticipated adulthood for collaboration and consultation, we hope for a time when all educators understand both concepts and are able to use both effectively to serve our society's children. (1991b, p. 27)

This book illustrates a process by which the "adulthood" of collaboration can be encouraged. It supplies a strategy that fits the request of Bay, Bryan, and O'Connor (1994) to "create a structure that foster[s] reflectivity and analysis among teachers" (p. 18). Through the use of a collaborative approach building on self-reflective activities, you will learn how to successfully collaborate with others. Fennick and Liddy (2001) warn, however, that the need for training in collaboration has expanded beyond the original group of special educators to include general educators. IDEA and IDEA 2004 both support the use of the Least Restrictive Environment for students with disabilities, and increased time for special education students in general education classrooms means increased collaborative teaching.

> Teacher preservice and inservice preparation for collaborative teaching must be reexamined if teachers are expected to share responsibilities that affect teaching formats and the curriculum. Although special educators are more likely than general education teachers to have experienced training for collaborative teaching, opportunities for training must increase for all co-teachers. Without extended opportunities to learn collaborative teaching skills, the number of general education teachers who are willing and prepared to teach collaboratively will not increase. (Fennick & Liddy, 2001, p. 238)

In some circumstances, cooperative teaching or teaming is the means by which teachers work together in schools. The focus is on direct instruction to students, often involving both the special educator and the general educator. Reeve and Hallahan (1994) recommend that "the teaching arrangement best suited to the participating teachers, students, and classroom evolves out of close planning and evaluating by the general and special educators" (p. 6). They make the following distinctions:

> In cooperative teaching both general and special education teachers are present simultaneously in the general classroom with joint responsibility for instruction. . . . In a team teaching approach, the special educator and the general educator jointly plan and teach academic subject content to all students. (p. 6)

Thus, the location of instruction, and the extent to which both teachers are involved in planning instruction, can vary depending upon the approach that best meets the needs of the students and the adults involved. In evaluating the benefits of cooperative teaching, Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) asked 46 general and special educators to evaluate the potential benefits of a cooperative teaching model. Using a 5-point scale, with 5 representing "very likely," the highest benefit (4.37 for general educators and 4.22 for special educators) was "Increase teaching/learning potential" (p. 19). They conclude that "through cooperative teaching, more individualized teaching becomes possible, as each teacher is more able to take full advantage of his or her particular skills" (p. 21).

As Gulledge and Slobe (1990) describe the successful interdisciplinary team, the knowledge base of special educators can provide the general educators with new information to reach students more effectively:

> Adding a special educator to an interdisciplinary team does not add to the burdens of the team, but lightens the load. These teachers possess an expertise in the special needs of exceptional children that is often missing in the regular educators' background. (p. 35)

Instead, the development of a successful team is ideally "forged in an intense team-building process. A team is much more than a bunch of people appointed to do a job together" (Maeroff, 1993, p. 514). The commitment of special educators to a collaborative process can be the resource base used to improve the quality of their lives in schools.

Deep commitment and effective strategies for collaboration are essential, as many logistical and ideological challenges may stand in the way of collaborative work. Able-Boone, Crais, and Downing (2003) describe how the collaboration among the preparation programs for early childhood, speech-language, and occupational therapy led to preparation of graduates who were able to benefit from interdisciplinary instruction. Commitment to offering such a preparation program requires a willingness to overcome obstacles, such as "crowded curricula, differing schedules, and different priorities within the individual disciplines" (p. 82). These authors found that collaboration was a solution that bolstered their commitment to interdisciplinary work: "networking among interdisciplinary faculty who have parallel interests and expertise . . . [and] creative solution[s] to ensure that the collaborative efforts achieved will continue to thrive with or without funding" (p. 82). This type of collaboration serves as a strong foundation for other collaborative models teachers are likely to find in their work.

Barnes, Bullock, and Currin (1997) describe the many types of collaboration that are part of the model for assisting students with special needs to make a smooth transition from school to work:

> While the concept of cooperative planning and service delivery appears to be straightforward, community transition teams can be difficult to maintain when there are conflicting priorities and time constraints. The skills that facilitate collaboration need to be intentionally developed. The territorial attitudes that are a barrier to collaboration may originate in the separation of programs at the preservice level.
>
> Special educators and VR [Vocational Rehabilitation] counselors share a common goal, that being the maximum self-sufficiency for young adults with disabilities. . . . Collaborative skills should be introduced and practiced as a part of the preparation of the special educator. (p. 256)

Collaboration moved from the outer circle of options for special educators into the hub of work in schools, with families, and became part of the expectations of community members. Programs like the one described by Simpson and Yocom (2005) include collaboration as one of the strategies that makes the Every Child program successful within the school: a rethinking of the school day to allow for team meetings led to a block scheduling approach, which facilitated better services to students as well as opportunities for faculty meetings during "collaboration times." "Gilbert described the block schedule as key to the program's success: 'Before, scheduling was a nightmare, general education teachers would send kids down at their whim. We had no ability to group students either by skill deficit or subject'" (p. 39). Instead of viewing the special education resource setting as a black hole, teachers in the building began to work together more effectively to keep each other informed about needs and options. The collaborative process became one that was infused into the routines of all educators, and expanded: "With the emerging success of the Every Child project at Mills Elementary School, 10 more elementary schools in Casper have adopted the program" (p. 40). Collaboration offered new resource opportunities to students and teachers.

There is need for further examination of collaboration practices. Duke (2004) reviewed 26 empirical studies of collaboration, which focused on general and special educators, and drew the following conclusion:

> The descriptive key words *special education* and *collaboration* yielded some 934 entries in the ERIC database. Only 41 (4%) of these 934 entries, however,

> represented empirical studies published in refereed journals, and only 23 (2%) of these examined collaboration among general and special educators. (p. 315)

More empirical research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration. As an example, Duke recommends the following: "This research should explicitly examine systems of privilege/oppression based on skin color, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status. This research would transform the empirical discourse surrounding collaboration" (p. 315). Further research would enable a better understanding of the effects of collaboration on both students and teachers. Simpson (2004), in her discussion of how to reduce barriers to inclusion, identifies collaboration "as an essential element in the development of an inclusive culture (Kuglemass, 2001; Carrington and Elkins, 2002). Building relationships and shared approaches are therefore crucial" (p. 66). Collaboration is identified as valuable, but more is needed to infuse collaboration into practice.

CONCLUSION

Developing a positive outlook on collaboration, or even learning to use collaboration strategies effectively, will not necessarily lead to successful collaboration. Kugelmass (2004) provides a number of examples of the challenges that individuals face when working on establishing a collaborative model within a school: "To develop the kind of collegiality needed for the long-term sustainability of collaborative leadership . . . they needed to understand that it would take time to develop trust for one another" (p. 108). Collaboration is the result of effort and attention; as Gulledge and Slobe (1990) explained, seeing results after several years of effort, "the walls between special and regular educators will not fall simply because they are teammates. The relationships they develop will take time. . . . Teachers new to the building are amazed at the understanding and acceptance that exists between regular and special education" (pp. 35–36). Lenz and Deshler (1990) corroborate the need to have a realistic, patient view when they describe the establishment of new instructional procedures. Their cautions apply to the establishment of an effective approach to collaboration:

> Successful use of complex . . . procedures . . . requires a significant investment of time and practice. Frequently, teachers will discard a new instructional procedure before allowing sufficient time for its effects to be realized. In the never-ending search for the "magic widget," teachers often flit from one instructional procedure or material to another. (p. 94)

Collaboration guarantees no "quick fix." Instead, it requires a serious scrutiny of a person's intrapersonal and interpersonal practices (as outlined in Chapter 3). Schmoker and Wilson (1993) report that the incorporation of teaming, based on the Deming model for Total Quality Management, had observable, dramatic results at the end of one year, but the most substantial result—gains in student achievement—took several years (p. 394).

As special educators, our motivation is similar to that of general educators. We all want to see long-term improvement of the educational climate in the schools, leading to effective education of all students. We must learn to be effective collaborators and problem solvers. Golightly (1987) described the need for teaching collaboration skills within special education preparation programs because, at the time, few teacher preparation programs included team-building. Hopefully, with the incorporation of more opportunities for collaboration training into college courses, this situation will change. This book is one approach, making each special educator responsible for taking a proactive role in collaborating with others.

Collaboration is becoming a more routine strategy across the educational spectrum. Bassett (2004) commented on the benefits independent schools experience in such programs as the Breakthrough Collaborative (www.breakthroughcollaborative.org), involving middle school, high school, and university participants.

It is hoped that as educators, we have come a long way since Dudley-Marling (1985) warned that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) could, if viewed "only as the fulfillment of a legal requirement, become an essentially meaningless exercise" (p. 67). Simpson, Whelan, and Zabel (1993) recommended that special educators in the 21st century must be prepared differently. They predicted that collaboration would comprise much of their work:

> Future collaborative approaches will likely discard the consultant–consultee model, whereby consultation flows from expert to novice, in favor of more transdisciplinary approaches. . . . That is, special educators will be trained not only to provide expertise but also to seek expertise from a variety of sources and coordinate the application of such expertise. . . . In addition, collaborative approaches will not be limited to traditional "educator" roles. Because of the multiple ecological factors that affect children's lives and learning, educators must collaborate with non-school systems. (p. 10)

The concerns raised by Simpson et al. (1993) are addressed in the preparation of special educators. Today's journals are filled with examples of the new roles that special educators take (e.g., Ford, 2004, in relation to interactions of educators with community agencies) as well as the integration of training on collaboration into the preparation of special educators (e.g., Hourcade & Bauwens, 2003). While there is still more to be done for teacher preparation (e.g., Bouck, 2005, in her discussion of the preparation of secondary special educators), progress has been made over the last few decades.

Dallmer's (2004) thoughtful reflections on her experiences collaborating in schools, in higher education settings, and with professional development schools led her to this conclusion:

> What my experiences have taught me is that undergirding collaborative relationships is a value system that honors "human caring, commitment, and justice" (Dickens, 2000). This sort of relationship building is based on trust and respect and every interaction is a part of an ongoing process to reaffirm those beliefs (Miller et al., 2000). It is a process that requires conversation and compromise. It is time consuming, difficult, and requires patience. (Dallmer, 2004, p. 43)

Development of collaboration skills can benefit general educators, special educators, and teacher educators. There will be an ever-expanding need for collaboration and the benefits that it can produce. Collaboration is expected to be an increasing part of the role of the special educator.

My high school juniors had their minds everywhere but my classroom. I tried everything I could think of, but I still couldn't get their attention. When I started talking to a few other teachers, I realized I wasn't the only one who was talking to myself. We've started some new initiatives, using all our contacts in the community. What a difference it made in my outlook! I had actually been thinking about leaving teaching, but now I'm full of ideas again.

Smith's (1992) caution is one we can all benefit from addressing:

> As educators try to meet the continuing goal of changing our practice, the enemies of change and renewal await: inertia, impatience, fear of faddism, misinformation, lack of information, and mistrust. Patience and persistence will be required to overcome the habits of isolation and privacy . . . and to gain the greater good of combined efforts. (p. 254)

We need to heed Smith's advice in order to make use of collaboration. Darling-Hammond (1999) describes the potential benefits of collaboration when she includes it in her list of what teachers need to know, as a tool for their students as well as for themselves:

> They need to know about *collaboration*. They need to understand how interactions among students can be structured to allow more powerful shared learning to occur. They need to be able to shape classrooms that sponsor productive discourse that presses for disciplined reasoning on the part of students. They need to understand how to collaborate with other teachers to plan, assess, and improve learning within and across the school, as well as how to work with parents to learn more about their students and to shape supportive experiences at school and home. (p. 226)

Collaboration can assist you in many aspects of your work as a special educator. Instead of making you the slave of practices you resist and resent, this book will provide you with the tools you need to make collaboration work for you and your students.