



Time together is time well-spent only when educators know how to collaborate

Raise your hand if you've been in a workshop that included either of the following movie clips to illustrate what it means to really collaborate: the barn-raising scene in *Witness* or the scene in *Apollo 13* where Ed Harris dumps a box of miscellaneous parts on a table and tells a team to use those parts to solve a complex problem.

There's a reason many of you are familiar with these clips. Those are great scenes to lead into discussions about bringing together varied perspectives in high-stakes situations to solve pressing problems. Such clips help us understand why collaboration is absolutely critical and, at times, lifesaving. But I wonder what clips we'd use to illustrate how those teams got to that point. What made the scientists at NASA able to do that work together? Clearly, they had years of practice in communicating, challenging one another, listening, and making decisions quickly.

For groups to realize all of the benefits possible through collaboration, the people in those groups need to develop the knowledge and skills that support effective teamwork. That means that those who provide time and structures for group work also must

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provide support in developing these skills.

If time to collaborate were the only resource necessary to create high-performing teams, then countless schools would be achieving at the higher levels that effective collaboration facilitates. But time for collaboration isn't enough. Knowledge and skills in how to use that time are equally essential.

Many of the learning designs that advance the goals of teams and individuals rely on these skills and more, whether the learning is face-to-face or incorporates technology and blended approaches.

Educators need expertise in several areas, including:

- **Group development:** Teams go through stages of development, and it's important for all members to recognize that.
- **Norms for working together:** Effective groups agree in advance that they will work together in certain ways.
- **Communication skills:** Teams need knowledge about how to talk and listen in ways that honor all members' perspectives and facilitate discussion and dialogue.
- **Conflict resolution:** Any group that hopes to solve trenchant challenges will need expertise in openly addressing disagreements to reach common understandings and solutions.
- **Decision making:** Groups may



be able to communicate well, but if they don't know what decisions to make and how to make them, they will not make progress toward goals.

- **Determining shared goals and visions:** When groups come together, their work can only be successful if they know what they hope to achieve.
- **Establishing trust:** Being open to frank discussion about individual beliefs and practices requires levels of relational trust that aren't necessarily typical in schools and school systems.

This issue of *JSD* explores collaboration's potential and the steps to take in developing group expertise. Effective teamwork is not something that comes naturally when people are given time to work together. If school and system leaders don't attend to this element of professional learning, their efforts to provide daily or weekly team time will be wasted, and stakeholders involved in supporting such time will justifiably lose faith in what we purport collaboration can achieve. ■