

# All for One: The Essential Art of Collaboration

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As teachers shoulder more and more instructional and administrative responsibility, a collaborative attitude is essential in today's world of education. Teachers often face the challenge of finding others who match their willingness to collaborate consistently and passionately toward common goals. In picturing a dream team of collaborators, an "all for one" attitude may come to mind. This declaration, as penned by Alexandre Dumas, characterizes a team of boisterous French musketeers who battled enemies and fought for justice. Could it be that today's teachers of gifted children are the modern version of the musketeers?

## Successful Collaboration

Plans at the ready, Lisa stands at the door to greet her middle school students. Lisa's gifted students gallop at full speed into her classroom. They know learning will be different and worthwhile. Even though Lisa is the sole teacher in her classroom, behind the scenes she is an active member of several extended teams of educators who are focused on meeting the broad needs of gifted learners. Examining Lisa's collaborative relationships explains some of her classroom and teaching successes.

In its simplest terms, collaboration is working with someone to accomplish a task. Like most secondary teachers, Lisa partners with her grade-level col-

leagues to develop lesson plans and address student learning needs, administrative tasks, and stakeholder concerns. In Lisa's case, the principal hired the other content teachers, and Lisa is expected to band with them to "make it work." Fortunately, her team utilizes several essential practices which help them impact student learning in positive ways.

## Supportive Expectations

Bauml (2016) suggested that successful collaboration begins with supportive and consistent expectations from administrators. Principals must not only ensure teachers have regular, unencumbered meeting times within the school day, but also support teachers in learning how to work together as a team. Because collaborative teams are accountable for their actions, agenda-driven meetings provide consistent meeting formats and keep conversations on track and focused. Successful collaborative teams also trust each member to carry a fair share of the load and to complete tasks in a professional manner.

Lisa was a consistent contributing member of her school-based team, but readily admitted her participation is basically due to the expectations of the administrator. The learning demands of her gifted students, however, urged Lisa to seek a broader collaborative effort—one that expanded beyond her school to include other teachers in gifted edu-

cation who understood her challenges. This search for an effective team moved Lisa from a "have to" to a "want to" collaborative attitude.

*En garde!* For teachers of the gifted, collaboration can be a meaningful network of like-minded professionals that enables them to work smarter, not harder, in order to provide the best possible service to students. Imagine a musketeer, not the candy bar, but the French guard type—the one with buckles, a sweeping cape, and a flashing sword. The traditional duty of a musketeer was to protect the royal family. Today's teacher of gifted and talented children is quite similar to the strong, skilled musketeers who were sworn to protect the royal household. In educational terms, the household is a teacher's school, administrators, district, and of course, the students.

## The Team

Lisa utilized the essentials of effective collaborative teaming, such as time, training, support, and trust, to assemble her band of musketeers. First, Lisa understood her strengths as a teacher. She also knew the areas where she needed support. At the beginning of the school year, Lisa set out to find her collaborative musketeers! She found them at district-level meetings. One teacher was administratively savvy and modeled how to work well with principals and build effective partnerships with students' families. As a weekly (some-



times daily) process, the two collaborators checked in with each other through email and mobile text. They even created a private Facebook account where they could share ideas and post photos of progress and success. Most importantly, they worked together to identify challenges and specific strategies that could help them address issues. So, the two became a team of one.

The next musketeer, a Porthos-like collaborator, was larger than life and had an impressive grasp of gifted programming rules and regulations. This teacher supported the team by initiating meeting times, prioritizing the agenda, and communicating current research

on gifted education issues. As a result, the three collaborators became one team of musketeers. *All for one!* Together they tackled a broad range of issues, services, and needs. In combining their strengths, the teachers stood at the ready to “protect and defend” their students, administrators, gifted programs and services, and schools.

Like most teachers, Lisa faced many challenges at the beginning of each school year. She served an ever-increasing number of exceptional students with diverse needs. She worked with complicated family schedules, complex student issues, and collaborated with every grade level in her

building on gifted issues. In working with her modern musketeers, Lisa experienced reduced stress, improved advocacy for her gifted students, and a sense of professional empowerment that emanates from focused team work. In all, Lisa navigated the school year quite successfully. She was, after all, a musketeer! **THP**

### Resources

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## iMathination

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*Educational Leadership* Article—From Answer Getters to Problem Solvers, by Flynn (October 2017)

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