Chapter 2. Promoting Collegiality

Much of my thinking about supervision and leadership stems from the work of Roland Barth. In his book *Improving Schools from Within* (1990), Barth maintains that faculty collegiality is the most important factor in determining the success of a school. The premise of collegiality is simple yet powerful: If students are to grow and learn, the adults in the school must grow and learn, too. This understanding has had a profound effect on me. When a school is alive with collegiality, then creativity and passion thrive, and every teacher improves each year. That is a lofty claim but not an unreasonable one. Collegiality has that much power!

An environment that promotes growth has never been more needed than in today's high-pressure educational world. As expectations rise and demands for accountability increase, faculty collegiality is an integral tool for developing teachers and for creating a milieu that supports their growth. Although the kinds of missions and pedagogical approaches found in schools vary dramatically—from following the thinking of E. D. Hirsch to that of Howard Gardner, for example—the quality of teachers is the key factor in students’ success in every setting. As a result, regardless of mission or focus, I cannot imagine a good school in which collegiality is not an important part of the culture.

Collegiality is distinct from both congeniality and collaboration, though the terms have much in common and are often confused. Congeniality is present when people get along well and like one another. Congeniality is evidenced by smiles, laughter, and concern for others’ personal lives. People ask “How was your weekend?” because they truly care. This type of interaction is meaningful because we all want to enjoy work and to know that our peers care for us. We cannot overlook the importance of congeniality because it is the base upon which collegiality is built. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how collegiality could flourish in a school without congeniality. However, congeniality alone is not sufficient. People will not work well as colleagues simply because they enjoy and care for one another.

Collaboration has much in common with collegiality. Both terms imply a setting in which people work as colleagues and benefit from their relationships. Collaboration implies working with others, being teammates, and perhaps sharing ideas. It does not, however, focus on learning with and from one another, and that is what distinguishes it from collegiality.

Barth’s collegiality contains four components specific to schools: teachers talking together about students, teachers talking together about curriculum, teachers observing one another teach, and teachers teaching one another. Despite its encompassing scope and power, Barth’s model does not explicitly address the essential collegial relationship between administrators and teachers. As a result, I add a fifth component of collegiality: teachers and administrators learning together.
These kinds of collegial interactions foster reflection and dialogue, and the norm becomes a culture in which people willingly learn with, learn from, and teach their colleagues. How collegiality is manifested varies with the educational setting and context, but some commonalities apply to all situations. Figure 1 on p. 22 describes each of the components of collegiality.

**Figure 1. The Five Components of Collegiality**

1. **Teachers talking together about students**
   - discussing students' strengths
   - discussing students' needs
   - discussing how students have changed over time
   - comparing and contrasting how students perform in different settings
   - discussing how to work with families to help students grow

2. **Teachers talking together about curriculum**
   - developing curriculum
   - reviewing curriculum
   - revising curriculum
   - aligning curriculum to standards
   - applying multiple intelligences theory to curriculum
   - integrating curriculum through thematic instruction
   - designing assessment tools that teach and evaluate
   - talking about pedagogy

3. **Teachers observing one another teach**
   - gaining an appreciation for other teachers within the building
   - asking questions that cause the teacher being observed to reflect
   - giving positive feedback so that the teacher being observed can grow
   - giving negative feedback so that the teacher being observed can grow
   - sharing ideas through watching one another teach

4. **Teachers teaching one another**
   - sharing expertise about curriculum, pedagogy, and child development
   - sharing knowledge about curriculum
   - sharing awareness and knowledge from readings
   - sharing insights about families
   - sharing what was learned from attending presentations and conferences
5. **Teachers and administrators learning together**
- talking about educational philosophy and school vision
- reviewing common perspectives and goals
- tackling issues and problems in a collegial manner
- discussing how individuals see issues differently due to their professional roles
- working together on faculty committees and ad hoc groups to reflect on the past and plan for the future

Components 1–4 are adapted from Barth (1990).

**Finding Ways to Attain Collegiality**

As Lao-tzu said, “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” A setting in which teachers and administrators work as colleagues—and one in which every teacher grows—does not come to life quickly or easily. Creating such an environment requires vision, energy, and tenacity on the part of the school leader. Some approaches increase both the likelihood and pace of creating a collegial setting. The following strategies will help leaders who want to encourage collegiality in their schools.

**Form a Book Group**

The easiest way to begin to develop collegiality is by forming a book group. The group should meet voluntarily, before or after school or in the evening. The principal initiates the group and facilitates the first meeting, after which facilitation responsibilities are rotated among the participants. Whether reading a book such as *Emotional Intelligence* or an article from the latest issue of *Educational Leadership* or *Education Week*, there is much to be gained from being involved in an educational discussion while sitting on a couch or around a table.

> Together we are a collection of knowledge and experiences that reach beyond what any of us could be on our own. ~Ben

More participation is always better, but a book group can begin with as few as four or five members. Over time, as the participants share what they learn and how enjoyable they find the discussions, the numbers will grow. Because the group is voluntary, there will be a significant number of people who cannot or choose not to attend. That is OK. If you wait for everyone to get on board, you'll never begin. A nucleus of teachers spreading the word about this positive experience will entice others to join.

The principal's attendance is not an option, however. She needs to be present at the sessions and participate in the give-and-take. She needs to be a colleague who is learning, not an administrator observing. This sets the tone for future discussions and debates. Indeed, the relationships that develop from interactions in the book group make it easier for participants to talk about contentious issues and topics throughout the year, whether in the teachers' lounge or at a faculty meeting.
We have offered book groups for years at New City School, almost every summer and often during the school year. The following books have been read and discussed in faculty book groups: *Frames of Mind; The Unschooled Mind; Emotional Intelligence; Warriors Don't Cry; I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings; White Teacher; Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?; Daughters; Boys and Girls Learn Differently; A Mind at a Time;* and *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*. A few teachers are almost always involved, but others choose to participate based on the book that is being discussed or what else is happening in their lives at that particular time. Providing food makes every book a bit more enjoyable.

**Make Collegiality a Goal**

Depending upon the teacher's skills and experience, pursuing and supporting faculty collegiality should be a stated goal. Indeed, given the importance of adult collegial learning to student learning, how could it not be? For example, a leader can focus a teacher's efforts and validate her energies by helping her set a goal of working with and learning from others. The particular strategies that are developed will, of course, frame the teacher's efforts. The teacher might agree to lead a faculty committee, help form a book group, or facilitate curriculum development for a grade level or academic department. Or the teacher might act as a mentor to a new teacher or to a teacher new to the school. Perhaps the teacher will decide to play a leadership role within a grade-level or department team. Unless collegiality becomes a part of specific goals, it will remain nothing more than rhetoric, something that is often talked about but never realized.

A classroom can resemble a cave unless teachers have an opportunity to collaborate, commiserate, and contemplate with one another. Teaching is so much about human interaction, that the “other kind” of interaction, adult to adult, is critical to a teacher's feeling whole. —Kathy

**Develop Curriculum as Colleagues**

Just as the best way to learn something is to teach it, the best way to know and understand curriculum is to develop it. Most teachers, after all, didn't choose a career in education because they wanted to become actors reading a script that was developed by others. They became teachers because they liked learning and teaching, enjoyed working with children, and wanted to use their creativity and energies in making a difference for students. Even the best curriculum is made better by educators adapting and massaging the material to fit their unique classrooms and the present year's students.

**Meet to Share Ideas**

Faculty meetings (discussed in Chapter 8) should be times when everyone *learns*, not just when everyone *hears*. These meetings are great opportunities for teachers to share a new technique or approach, to relate their experiences at a workshop, or to talk about a new way to assess student growth. Unfortunately, teachers are often reluctant to do this because publicly sharing a success may seem like bragging. If sharing is a part of almost every faculty meeting, however, teachers will recognize that it is simply something that everyone does, not self-promotion. When this happens, faculty meetings become productive learning sessions.

Once the norm is set for sharing successes, it also becomes much easier to share failures. It's only natural to be reluctant to share mistakes and failures, but doing so is beneficial. Sharing errors and talking about them creates an environment in which people can learn from others' mistakes. In addition, if the sharing of failures is done well, with appropriate humor and support, it can also bring a faculty closer together.
Address Collegiality on Teacher Evaluations

If we value what we measure, then a teacher's role as colleague should be addressed in the end-of-year evaluation. Indeed, if teachers are made aware that collegiality is something that will be positively considered—from listing the committees on which they have participated to noting the presentations they have given to recounting their roles in helping others grow—it will make a difference in their attitudes and actions. This is not to say that teachers will work as colleagues solely because it might be noted on their annual evaluations. But including collegiality on the annual evaluation reminds everyone that this area is important and legitimizes spending energies toward developing it.

Even if a school does not have the latitude or desire to use performance pay to link collegiality activities to remuneration, think of the effect that the following narrative would have on Irene Jones when she receives her annual evaluation: “Irene is to be commended for her efforts with a new teammate. She has led by example, inviting her new teammate to observe and critique her. She has also led by brainstorming, meeting after school on a regular basis to talk about big and little issues. Her teammate has had a good first year with us, and I know that Irene's skills and energies were instrumental in this success.” Collegiality should not be all that is addressed on Irene's evaluation, of course, because collegiality reflects only a portion of her role as teacher. But collegiality is too important a portion of teachers' professional lives to be ignored.

Involve Teachers in Hiring

Including teachers in the hiring of colleagues is a wonderful way to develop and reinforce collegiality. In the first place, it's appropriate for teachers to have some input in determining with whom they will work. Second, participation in the hiring experience is a terrific forum for reflection and growth. Beyond the consideration of whether candidate Juan's experience outweighs candidate Janel's enthusiasm, the dialogue of the hiring process forces teachers to talk about what is important in education; what is needed in their particular school, grade, or department context; and what comprises good teaching. Lastly, because candidates meet with their prospective peers as well as the principal in the hiring process, the interview becomes an entry point to establishing peer and mentor support for the new hires.

At New City School, teachers are involved in all hiring decisions. I typically do the initial screening to reduce the field to two or three strong candidates. At that point, the potential teammates (and often a teacher or two from adjacent grades) join me for the group interview. I ask the opening question: “Pretend we haven't reviewed your résumé, and tell us about yourself.” Then I mainly observe and allow the teachers to question the candidate. After the interviews, the teachers and I talk as colleagues to determine which candidate would be the best person for the position. Invariably, these discussions address the kinds of teaching qualities and skills that we seek in order to match or support the teachers on the present teaching team. We also consider how the range of life experiences that candidates possess might make them more effective teachers and teammates. This discussion is a wonderful tool for encouraging teachers' reflection.

Children learn how to be team players by observing team players. ~Debbie

Before the group interview, I make it clear to the teachers sitting in on the interview that I can veto the hiring of a teacher even if they, as prospective teammates, think the candidate would be great. I also note that I cannot hire someone unless they want to work with that person. This means the hiring truly is a collegial decision. Occasionally, after the interview, teachers will have trouble making a decision because of
some hesitancy or a lack of information. They might say, “I'm not sure I really got to know her” or “I'd like to hear more about his approach to literacy.” When this happens, I offer the teachers an opportunity to invite the candidate to meet at school or go to lunch, without an administrator's being present. After all, what better way is there for them to determine whether they seem likely to work well together than by engaging in a long lunch discussion or spending time in a classroom talking about education? Before this meeting takes place, I make it clear that I would be pleased to hire the candidate and that the decision is theirs. (Obviously, I make this offer for them to have a subsequent meeting only if I am comfortable hiring the candidate.)

Each time my teachers and a candidate meet separately after an initial interview, it is a productive experience. Often, they come away with a much better sense of the candidate and are excited about having him or her as a new teammate. I then follow up and offer the position to the candidate. Sometimes my teachers come back with the realization that the candidate would not be a good hire, and they appreciate the opportunity to learn that firsthand. Always they come back grateful for the opportunity to get to know a prospective teammate and to have such strong input in the hiring process. Sharing the responsibilities for hiring increases the likelihood that there will be a good match among the teachers, something particularly important in a collegial setting. Sharing the hiring process is also a powerful way of showing teachers that they are trusted. Prospective teachers, too, receive a powerful message about trust and the type of school at which they hope to work.

The following events happened last summer. A teaching team and I interviewed a candidate, and it was clear that she had rich experiences and many talents. What was less clear to her potential teammates—and to her—was the quality of the “fit.” How well would she work as a member of a four-person team? After the team interview, the teachers wondered how receptive she would be to their ideas and how much respect she would have for what they had built. When I talked with the candidate, she had many of the same questions and wondered if the team would be open to her ideas. Everyone agreed that it was difficult to make an assessment about something as amorphous as teaming ability in a brief interview, so the teachers and the candidate were quite pleased when I suggested a second, longer, and more casual visit. They met in a classroom without me. The story ends well: The candidate and teachers agreed that it would be a good match. Of course, the story would have ended well even if they had not agreed. In either case, the protagonists would have obtained valuable information and each of them would have played an important part in the process.

A caveat to consider when involving teachers so intimately in the hiring process is that we all tend to see merit in and are attracted to people who remind us of ourselves. This predisposition is even more true when we are considering those who might be our coworkers and teammates. As a result, it is only natural for teachers to want to work with others who share their attitudes and hold their values. That similarity can certainly reduce possibilities for conflict and increase the likelihood for congenial relationships that might lead to collegiality. However, we need to be careful that a teaching team doesn't simply replicate itself in the hiring process. The tendency to want to select others who are similar can make it more difficult to increase the diversity within a faculty; it can also make it more difficult to bring in someone who will offer a unique perspective. I have found that the best way to address this tendency is to talk about it with teachers before the hiring process begins. This issue becomes part of a larger discussion on the qualities we are looking for in a new teammate.

Create Applications That Reveal

Much can be learned about a candidate from the teaching application if that is a purpose of the application. Because school cultures are different, getting a match between a candidate and a school—more properly, between a candidate and the school's faculty—is essential. It is not enough to establish that a candidate
has the appropriate degree and experience, although that is necessary. We should use the application as the first step in enabling the candidate to reveal her educational philosophy and worldview. An individual school should have the option of creating its own teacher application form in addition to what is required by the district. The forms should reflect the school's mission and needs. To interview at a particular school, candidates might submit individual school applications after their general applications are screened at the district level.

There is no greater force for professional development among school staff and, ultimately, for student learning than collegiality. Without collegiality, we're working in a vacuum and very much alone in our thinking. ~Kathleen

At New City School, we require applicants to submit a cover letter, résumé, and references; to submit information to allow us to obtain a criminal background check; and to complete our application form. Given our mission and educational philosophy, we also ask questions that speak to multiple intelligences (MI), the role of the personal intelligences (also known as emotional intelligence, or EQ), and diversity. As a result, our application form, shown in Appendix A, asks applicants to respond to three questions:

1. Are there differences between success in school and success in life?
2. Describe, as developmentally appropriate for the age of students that you would like to teach, what issues of human diversity are important and how they should be addressed.
3. What book or work of art has had the greatest impact on you?

As you can imagine, reading these responses helps us get to know the applicant and enables us to begin to make a judgment about whether this is someone who would fit well with our mission and teaching team. Many times a candidate's responses become a topic of questions and discussion at the group interview.

If the culture of education is truly to change, the practice of a teacher walking into his or her classroom and shutting the door to all other adults has got to stop. ~Mike

Though these questions yield rich insight into a person's beliefs, how a candidate responds to the small blank box on the front of our application form yields even more information (see Appendix A). The directions instruct the candidate to "Use this space as you wish, as another way to tell us, or show us, something about you. Let yourself go. Be creative. Be humorous. Be adventurous. Be serious. You decide." The range of possibilities for completing the box is almost endless.

Candidates use this space to write poems, offer quotes, or make statements (all in very small handwriting!). Sometimes they include photo collages or pictures they have drawn. Occasionally they glue three-dimensional objects to the form. In addition, a small flyer that talks about collegiality is sent to each candidate with the application form. The flyer explains why collegiality is so important to us and describes the opportunities for teachers to learn together at New City School. It is important that prospective teachers see our focus on collegiality and want to work in this kind of setting.

Valuing Emotional Intelligence
I have already noted that collegiality is built upon congeniality. This means that leaders must work to create a school climate in which everyone gets along. Strategies range from the simple—periodically having food in the faculty lounge to entice teachers to come and chat—to the complex—consciously exhorting teachers to work on their emotional intelligence (EQ). Developing EQ (or the personal intelligences) is important because a collegial setting requires that teachers work more closely together than is often the case in schools. Teachers need to be skilled in both giving feedback to and receiving it from their colleagues. This can be difficult; indeed, the very teachers who excel in patient communication with students sometimes find it much harder to communicate with adults. As I discuss in Chapters 7 and 8, school leaders need to emphasize improving adult-to-adult communications.

Through collaboration and conversation, we can teach each other so much. We are each a library of information, experiences, useful tips. ~Rachel

Administrators should make working on their personal communication with adults a priority, too. Simply put, a leader must form relationships that build a team. This is true in any setting, and especially true in a collegial setting. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Nohria, Joyce, and Robinson (2003) illustrate this point. The authors observe that a range of personality characteristics is not significant in a CEO, including whether the person is “viewed as a visionary or detail-oriented, secure or insecure, patient or impatient, charismatic or quiet.” One quality does matter: “the ability to build relationships with people at all levels of the organization and to inspire the rest of the management team to do the same. CEOs who present themselves as fellow employees rather than masters can foster positive attitudes that translate into improved corporate performance” (p. 51). Unless principals are careful, they can spend so much time doing the tasks that are necessary to survive that they ignore the building of relationships that are necessary to succeed. Some ideas about this topic are included in Chapter 7.

Similarly, in *Multiple Intelligences and Leadership* (2002), Susan Murphy talks about vision and communication.

Most successful leaders have the ability to communicate persuasively, either through creative use of words that paint a compelling view of the future for the organization or work group, or by the certainty with which the leader introduces the mission and the strategic plans to accomplish that mission. The second potential for influence comes from a leader's ability to tune in to the needs of the followers. Those people who feel that they are truly understood may be more likely to listen to the leader's ideas and implement his or her plans. (p. 174)

Here again, school leaders need to find the time to listen to others, painful and as inefficient as that might seem. They must remember that one-way communication, by definition, is not good communication. One-way communication can relay a message, but it rarely accomplishes a task. These are issues with which I struggle, even after more than 25 years of experience in running schools. Intellectually, I know that I need to take the time to solicit input and make sure everyone is on board. I understand that it is important for me simply to “hang out” in the teachers' lounge, no matter how deep the pile of papers, phone messages, and e-mail messages that taunts me from my desk. But this is hard to do (much harder to do than to write about!). Appropriately, Roland Barth once commented, “The obstacles to the job are the job.” We all need to remember that success begins with building relationships. It doesn't end there, and relationships aren't the only things that matter. Unless the relationship piece is in place, however, successfully completing the task will be much more difficult, whatever the task may be.
Creating a Culture of Collegiality

The job of the principal is to create a school culture that transcends personality, even her own. A strong culture offers a clear sense of expectations to everyone about what is important. This includes how to teach students, as well as how to interact with other adults. In talking about culture, Deal and Peterson (2003) note that “highly respected organizations have evolved a shared system of informal folkways and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose” (p. 1). They also observe that “cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the ways people think, act, and feel” (p. 4). This is especially true in schools: “In the world of education with its multiple challenges and complex goals, ritual is probably more important than in a business with a tangible product or service” (p. 32).

Together we understand; divided we just stand—if we're lucky. ~Brian

All schools have a culture, although many times we are not aware of it. A culture that is underground can foster misunderstandings and will surely fail to move the institution forward. Barth defines culture as "the complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (R. S. Barth, personal communication, October 16, 2004). Barth (2002) suggests that a school's culture can be made explicit by answering the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of students who succeed?
- What are the characteristics of teachers who succeed?
- What does the principal value?
- What is the communication pattern from principal to teachers?
- What is the communication pattern from teachers to principal?
- What is celebrated at a school?
- What takes place at faculty meetings?
- What doesn't take place at faculty meetings?
- What advice do teachers new to a school need to know?

Faculty collegiality happens because of our administration. ~Julie

I believe that these additional questions also are relevant:

- What do we do that we should abandon?
- How do our critics view us and why?
- What institutional old mistakes do we continue to make?
- Under what circumstances is it OK to make mistakes?
- What new areas or directions should we pursue?
What should we be celebrating?

Using these questions as “discussion starters” at a series of faculty meetings would lead to rich dialogues about values, educational philosophies, and what needs to take place to make the school better.

Growing in a Collegial Setting

Teaching can be a remarkably insular activity. In too many situations, teachers spend their day interacting with students, getting little or no feedback from other adults. We wonder why it can be difficult for teachers to continue to grow and learn, but we should not be surprised that this is the case. School settings often work against this kind of adult growth taking place.

In contrast, a collegial setting is one in which every teacher will grow. This setting attracts the teachers who make a difference in students' lives. These teachers are not necessarily more expensive, they may or may not have an advanced degree, and they may or may not be technologically savvy. They are, however, teachers who continually grow and learn. They look for creative ways to reach their students, and they look for creative ways to challenge themselves. The best way to attract and keep these teachers is to offer a setting in which collegiality is the norm. In a collegial school, everyone can flourish.