**Collaboration Characteristics Summary**

**Modified from Friend and Cook (1996)**

**Excerpt from Gosselin (2015)**

**Focus on Them, p. 63-65**

***a. Collaboration is voluntary.***

There are two levels regarding the voluntary aspects of collaboration—participation and whether the participants want to use collaborative practices. Participation in this project was voluntary. The extent to which the participants wanted to use collaborative practices could explain the effectiveness of various teams. However, it should be noted we never discussed collaborative practices, so most groups functioned using their perceptions about how a team should function.

If true collaborations are to develop within teams, intrinsic motivation must be used for team members to see value in the partnership and feel that they have a clear choice to participate. Faculty can be recruited but not coerced. Pre-service teachers can be required to have inquiry experiences, but the details and commitment must be left to them; and classroom teachers must freely choose to be involved. You cannot force people to collaborate. You can throw them in a room together and tell them to be a team. Ultimately they will choose how they will work. If they have never been provided a foundation in collaborative practices, then the extent to which these practices will be used is minimized. In our case, it was the luck of the draw when we put the groups together.

#### b. Collaboration is based on parity.

Each member of a collaborative team must see that their contributions are equally valued, even if those contributions are drastically different. In this project, highly effective teams had members who developed and contributed unique skills for the good of the entire project. All members valued the contributions made by each member.

All team members’ perspectives must be heard. Different points of view lead to better and more comprehensive outcomes.For example, the scientist was certainly the content expert, but the classroom teacher knew how the research findings ultimately had to be packaged to create curriculum, and the pre-service teacher many times became the skilled technician who held the key to good test results. The concept of being valued is critical to the success of any athletic team. Members of the most successful teams will all have a sense that their contributions to the team are important.

#### c. Collaboration requires a shared goal.

This characteristic emphasizes the importance of a participatory process in developing your end-in-mind. The most effective teams shared a common vision or common goals of the task and the desired outcomes. Sharing a common goal provides a strong sense of team purpose that serves as a beacon for team success. One of the biggest challenges that we created for ourselves with this project was, at the time, that we did not know how important having this shared goal would be. The driving force for establishing team makeup was the research to be accomplished. The only connection requested was that team members be willing to work together on a question established by the scientist.

From the start, this created many challenges for the teams to establish a shared goal as well as parity. We were asking these people to work together on projects based on interest in the topic. We assumed that a working relationship would form around that tie to a common interest, and by inference the team would have a shared goal. We created working teams, with a focus on the “what” these teams would do, but we invested no time or energy in “how” individuals were to work together. This was a valuable, but tough lesson to learn.

#### d. Collaboration is emergent.

The most successful teams spent far more time together than other project groups and, as a result, communicated with each other far more often. This time on task and open communication facilitated, and was critical to, success. The best collaborations grow as the relationships among team members grow.

As we examined the effectiveness of the teams, as defined by both products created and comments from interviews about their working relationships, we found that those more productive teams had formed working relationships that became a driving force to their work. For example, the most effective team in the project under discussion still met almost daily during the project, and the scientist and K-12 teachers continue to meet fourteen years after the project ended. They saw the results of their investment in time multiply, as each member's expertise developed. This attribute clearly suggests that short-term projects, designed for a few hours or even a couple of weeks, may fail to provide the time needed to develop effective collaboration. Newly formed teams need to spend time talking about their purpose, how they plan to work together, and what they hope to accomplish.

They also need to develop a sense of trust among team members if they are going to achieve maximum effectiveness. If they fail to develop trust, they are likely to experience difficulties later in the process. Time with your team is critical to relationship development, which is critical to developing trust; hence, it is critical to development of an effective collaborative team.

***e. Collaboration includes shared responsibility for key decisions.***

The most effective teams jointly discussed key decisions of research design and interpretation, and every member made contributions. On the other end of the spectrum, in the least effective teams, generally one member of the team, typically the scientist, told team members what to do and when. This approach sabotaged the entire collaborative process. As a result, not only did the team members not have a shared goal, they did not have an opportunity to get truly invested in the project, because they had nothing invested in defining the outcomes—because they had nothing invested in the decisions. The educators were not treated as equals and acted accordingly. Promoting shared responsibility for key decisions can be accomplished through consensus-based decision-making. It is critical that the team members need to take responsibility to define what they mean by consensus-based decision-making and how it will be used.

#### f. Collaboration includes shared accountability for outcomes.

Because members of effective teams favored direct input into key decisions, they stood ready to take full responsibility for accomplishing the needed tasks. In addition, because they established open communication, members knew their roles and felt a sense of responsibility to each other.

Promoting a sense of individual accountability among all team members is an important attribute for creating a shared sense of accountability, as well as shared responsibility. Individual accountability is observed when each member of the team takes responsibility for speaking up, contributing to group discussions and decision-making, praising the contributions of others, following through on identified tasks, and reflecting on the overall functioning of the team.

#### g. Collaboration is based on shared resources.

Just as each member must have a sense of parity, members must feel that their contribution plays a crucial role in task accomplishment. Team members can contribute time, space, equipment, expertise, or other assets. In whatever shape or form they are contributed, the contribution of the resources should be acknowledged.