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7 Tips for Successful Collaboration



By [Erin Gilrein & Jennifer Wolfe](#) | February 20, 2015 8:45 am

Who We Are and What We Do

We are National Board Certified Teachers who have been collaborative partners for almost a decade at Oceanside High School in New York. Our collaboration works because we're working together towards a common goal: helping our students reach their fullest potential. We teach two integrated sections of ninth grade Honors English and Social Studies, where our students move as a cohort between our classes, giving them an experience that illustrates how English and Social Studies are related by providing them with the opportunity to read text deeply, and link themes occurring across both classrooms. In addition, we team teach a Conference class where students delve deeper into the humanities, exploring concepts that link us all in the human experience.

Every year we have the opportunity to teach grades other than the ninth grade integrated program, and we choose to stay together. We love working together to mold new entrants into high school, teaching them the skills they'll need for high school, college, and career success, while we encourage each other to be the best teachers we can be.

The following seven tips come from our decade of experience working together as collaborative partners.

Carve Out Common Planning Time

Collaboration works best when teachers have common planning time. Our school culture honors collaborative partnerships by providing common prep periods to all teachers who are in collaborative teaching pairs, like us. This common prep period allows us time during the school day to think about ways we can integrate our curriculum, collaborate on lessons, link big ideas, and share information about our students. Also at Oceanside, we have a private [Oceanside Teaching Channel Teams](#) site where our collaboration can continue virtually, and we can share lesson documents, reflect on videos of lessons, and continue the conversations we started at school.

To Try: Text your partner a lesson idea for next week's unit and ask what ideas she can add.

Use Your School Schedule To Your Advantage

Sharing the same cohort of students in a collaborative partnership allows room for creative scheduling. While our school day is not a block schedule, we have our shared integrated ninth grade students for two to three periods in a row daily. Therefore, we can opt to teach in a pseudo-block schedule, where we combine our classes to team teach big thematic concepts, share student presentations, or perform projects. We find creative ways to accommodate each other's lessons, and we trust that a three period Social Studies class one week is balanced by a three period English class the next.

To Try: Rethink ways you can organize the students with your partner. Borrow the auditorium for presentations. Have your partner teach a bulk of the students while you provide one-on-one or small group instruction on writing.

Maintain Hope

In a collaboration filled with hope, you have a receptive and trusted partner who is your sounding board. Your partner is there to be your biggest cheerleader, to motivate you to reach for your dreams, to hand you some chocolate, or to remind you that anything is possible. This hopeful motivation fosters optimism and positivity, and it develops the trust within a collaborative team. Then, the innovation based on hope can begin.

online community where teachers can watch, share, and learn diverse techniques to help every student grow. We are a non-profit organization.

To Try: Remind your partner that you appreciate all of her hard work. Share your ideas with her and ask her for her thoughts.

Use Your Grit

When challenges arise, you always have a partner who is in it with you. It's the grit that allows you to adjust to setbacks, hone your goals, and redirect your energies. It pushes you to dig deep for motivation when the work seems insurmountable. It brings the perseverance and drive to carry on even when things are difficult. When setbacks arise, it is the chance to rethink, realign, reenvision, and try something new.

To Try: Ask your partner for support when times get tough.

Share a Growth Mindset

Collaborative partners stimulate each other's growth mindset. In a collaborative partnership, you have accountability to one another, you do not want to let each other down, and you do your best so that the partnership flourishes. The collaboration fosters the motivation of a growth mindset because you always have each other as models of life-long learning, grace under pressure, and resilience to setbacks. In fact, in the growth mindset, the innovative collaborative partner reminds you to grow from the "no," to rethink obstacles as opportunities, and to keep trying to make your dreams a reality.

To Try: Growth mindset matters. Choose an area of teaching you find challenging and find a partner to help you brainstorm ways to make it an area of growth.

A Shared Language Is a Shared Mind

When we use shared language and expectations in our two separate classrooms, our students' work shows deeper understanding, analytical writing, critical thinking, and Advanced Placement skill development. We know each other's AP habits of mind and discipline-specific writing rubrics, and we have collaborated to use the same language in teaching AP skills and writing to students. This shows students that the qualities of effective writing are consistent across the disciplines. This understanding helps students to grow because they begin viewing writing as a process instead of a stand-alone task.

To Try: Grab your partner's writing rubric, compare it with your own, and decide on the best common language to use in developing classroom writing materials.

Cultivate a School Culture of Administrative Support

It has been a highly regarded practice at Oceanside High School to preserve collaboration partnerships that work well, something for which we, as teachers, have tremendous gratitude. Administrators maintain successful partnerships, allowing teachers to grow together, and throughout the years teachers create lessons that cross disciplines.

To Try: Be an advocate for your program and your collaborative partnership by showing administrators how students benefit from your work together.

We all know that teachers are busy, and good collaboration takes time. It is worth the time to get to know your collaborative partner, talk about each other's subjects, and look for common ground. Even taking baby steps towards collaboration will result in increased student engagement and enliven your teaching practice, while actually saving you both time in the long run.

A Quick Word About Ego

Be sure to check your ego at the door in a collaborative partnership. When working

with another teacher, it's about trust, about give and take, and about discovering new ways to teach. If your collaborative partner isn't similar to you, find commonalities between your subject areas. Think about how you can help each other grow, and make a commitment to work together, even in the smallest of ways. Collaboration is an organic, living, coming together of two professionals, and it's up to you to create an environment where you and your students can thrive.

*Erin Gilrein is a National Board Certified Teacher in AYA English Language Arts, and has been teaching English classes at Oceanside High School in New York for 13 years. Erin developed the Long Island National Board Network, and currently serves as Long Island Regional Co-Director of the NYS National Board Certification Resource Center, and as the co-facilitator of **Teaching Channel Teams** for Oceanside UFSD. She co-facilitates candidate cohorts in conjunction with Adelphi University and local teacher centers, and she co-facilitated several professional development classes about teacher evaluation regulations, Common Core Standards, effective teaching, and their respective impact on teachers and student learning.*

*Jennifer Wolfe is a National Board Certified Teacher in Adolescent/Young Adult Social Studies and works at Oceanside High School on Long Island where she has been teaching for 18 years. In her tenure at Oceanside, she has earned the NYS High School Social Studies Teacher of the Year Award from NYSCSS, three Fulbright Scholarships, including a semester abroad with the Fulbright Teacher Exchange, and an honorary doctorate from Union Graduate College in Schenectady, NY. In addition to her full-time teaching schedule, Jen is the SEED Grant District Candidate Support Provider for Roosevelt UFSD in Roosevelt, NY. She sits on the NYS National Board Council, and is the Long Island Regional Co-Director NY National Board Certification Resource Center. Jennifer also co-facilitates **Teaching Channel Teams** for Oceanside UFSD.*

Oceanside UFSD is a member of Teaching Channel Teams. [Learn more.](#)



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Brenda Rhodes 10:10am

How lucky you are to find co-worker of the same mindset, enthusiasm, and direction! Teaching cohort groups in this manner can be so rewarding and productive since you can zero in on the problems and work on them together. It returns much of the fun in teaching.



Andrea Licata Feb 22, 2015 4:19am

This sounds like what I always thought teaching would be!



Taleb Rostami Feb 21, 2015 9:58pm



A question for teachers
 (I|G|)Individual - Group - Individual
 It's one on of my strategy in the classes.
 What's your Idea?
 Based on action research the answer is with me, What about you?



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