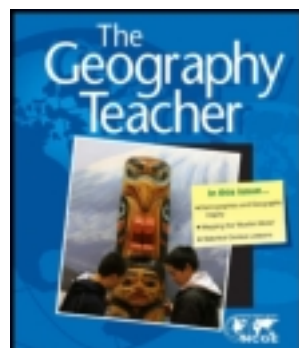


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President's Column: Collaboration Opportunities

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President's Column

Collaboration Opportunities

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Several things have happened to me since my last column and all of them got me thinking about an important concept in teaching—collaboration. My meetings with the New Mexico After School Programs, local interactions with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) educators, and the New Mexico Science Teacher's Association annual conference made it clear to me that educators at all levels need to get together from time to time to share ideas, exercises, success stories, and more. I enjoyed that meeting immensely and it reminded me of how isolated I often felt as a high school and junior high school teacher until I attended those meetings. The pace of teaching, lesson preparation, testing, grading, counseling—not to mention taking tickets at ball games, orchestrating club activities, organizing science fairs and so many more activities often overwhelms the K–12 teacher. When I was doing this I often felt I was in survival mode and was pretty much left to my own devices.

So what opportunities are there for K–12 educators to get renewed and to interact with others in their profession, with those in higher education, and elsewhere? The good news is there are many. One, opportunity of course is to invite college and university faculty to your professional education meetings including social studies and science meetings. It

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benefits the K–12 teachers to learn of new approaches and technologies and the higher education faculty to be reminded of the essentials of education in their own classes. Another source of collaboration I am finding quite useful is local and regional museums, state and national parks, historical sites and nature preserves, all of which often have educational programs and education coordinators. Some even offer summer programs for teachers that are often both enlightening and inspiring. Most are minimal cost as well and some provide continuing education units.

Perhaps one of the more important opportunities for collaboration has to do with the National Geographic Alliance Network. Not only are Alliances now partnering with the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) to provide collaboration, not to mention discounted dues for NCGE memberships, but the people in the alliances themselves are often both ready and anxious to help K–12 and after-school educators with ideas, exercises, lectures, field trips, and the like. Another often overlooked opportunity is the Esri Education GIS Conference held in San Diego that provides four days of sharing and hands-on workshops for educators wanting to add GIS technology to their courses.

Other organizations that offer educational opportunities that often have geographic content are 4-H, Future Farmers of America, and Scouts. Even if students are not members of these organizations the organizations themselves often provide after-school opportunities that their members develop and deliver. Finally, state departments of education often provide leadership through social science and science coordinators, after-school programs, and other initiatives. While these and many others are often available, we frequently forget about them in the turmoil of our everyday efforts. It will serve us well to think about these collaborative opportunities when feelings of isolation set in.

Dr. Michael DeMers is Professor of Geography at New Mexico State University specializing in Geographic Information Science, Landscape Ecology, and Geographic Education. Dr. DeMers is the 2010 winner of the Anderson Medal of Honor in Applied Geography awarded by the Applied Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers (AAG). He has taught eighth grade earth science and high school physics, chemistry, and physical science. He holds positions as GIS Section Editor of *Geography Compass*, Chair of the Anderson Selection Committee (AAG), Alliance Coordinator of the New Mexico Geographic Alliance, and is a member of the board of the Applied Geography Conferences. He has published over fifty articles and four texts on geographic information systems, two of which have been translated into Russian, simple Chinese, and Arabic. His current educational research focuses on geogaming, geodesign, and the use of immersive virtual worlds as ways of both exploring GIScience and creating new tools for both learning and practicing geography. He also does research in land classification with special emphasis on the nature, methods, and accuracy assessment of land classification boundaries and on the use of GIS for water resources management.

