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I get by with a little help …

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'We don't live alone.
We are members of one body.
We are responsible for each other.'
J.B. Priestley, An Inspector Calls, 1944

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I get by with a little help …

Bill Rogers

P·C·P
Paul Chapman Publishing

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SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

CHAPTER 1 explores the immediate context of colleague support, particularly the current climate of change that is affecting schools. There are many factors that impinge upon, and affect, colleague support in a given school (for good or ill). These factors are introduced in this chapter and developed in subsequent chapters. The research methodology is briefly explained in terms of the teacher narratives that inform this book.

CHAPTER 2 examines the determinants of colleague support in schools. The potential in schools is for isolationist culture and practice to adversely affect colleague-coping and professionalism; the natural stress of teaching is explored through research on the positive (stress-buffering) benefits of colleague support, morale and supportive leadership and supportive teaming. Professional development is explored in supportive colleague cultures. The issue of personal and professional needs is also addressed in light of colleague support and how colleague support can enable change in school cultures.

This chapter is an exploration of the literature as it addresses the nature of social support and how such a concept is observed and expressed within colleague cultures in schools.

CHAPTER 3 develops a whole-school approach to colleague support through a proposed 'typology of colleague support'. This 'typology' is based on the degree, and level, of consciousness within a school culture as it seeks to meet the espoused needs of its teachers. The 'structures', 'forms', 'processes' and 'policies' that can

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enable colleague support are discussed as practical and professional ways of meeting such needs.

CHAPTER 4 looks at how teachers might understand colleague support in their school, based on direct – longitudinal – research from teachers in schools. This chapter discusses how colleague support can enable the meeting of needs from basic expressions such as 'creative whingeing', incidental sharing and humour, and purposeful teaming through to the *enabling protocols* of colleague support. These 'protocols' are the defining and enabling features of a supportive colleague culture. The 'protocols' illustrate how supportive colleagues manage coping, stress, failure, support and professional growth. Case examples from a variety of schools are utilised to illustrate the meanings and practices of colleague support.

CHAPTER 5 discusses how colleague support is 'built' in schools – how it is managed, affirmed and developed. Rather than merely leaving such support to chance, this chapter addresses how to constructively address support, particularly in areas such as behaviour management, discipline, challenging children and classes, 'struggling' teachers, and teachers who have to cover 'hard classes'. The issues of teams and teaming are addressed as significant features of supportive collegiality.

Professional development in terms of encouragement, professional feedback and elective mentoring (and coaching) is explored through case examples in supportive schools.

CHAPTER 6 addresses colleague support and the process of change: both natural, normative change and imposed external change. The typology of support in Chapter 3 is re-addressed in terms of the difference that conscious, collaborative, collegiality can make to change imperatives.

CHAPTER 7 explores and discusses the adaptive utility of the colleague support model and the typology and practices developed in chapters 3 to 6. A practical framework for needs-analysis and change is offered for school awareness-raising and needs-analysis.

CHAPTER 8 provides a brief summary of the key ideas in the book (sounds a bit like the teacher summary of a lesson!) and introduces two metaphors which (I hope) will emphasise the essential features of colleague support.

The APPENDICES offer needs-analysis options for addressing supportive change in the area of colleague support.

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For their participation, goodwill, suggestions, ideas and understanding; this is their story and not just mine. To all my many colleagues who gave unstintingly of their time and themselves, this is their story; this book is a small return for so much given. My faith in the self-effacing aspects, and mutual regard, of my colleagues has been reaffirmed.

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William Arthur Rogers
December 2001
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INTRODUCTION

'What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other.'

George Eliot (1819–1880)

'The thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.'

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 3:1

'People must help one another; it is nature's law.'

Jean de la Fontaine (1621–1695)

It is 8:30 a.m., a busy secondary school staff room. The daily organiser is 'flat out' engaging a few last-minute changes with teachers. A few teachers are creatively, even purposefully, whingeing about 8D – the transitional whinge 'makes them feel a bit better', 'as if we're all in the same boat; a bit leaky, a bit rusty but roughly going in the same direction!' This is colleague support.

A colleague says to a harried-looking fellow science teacher, 'Look, I'll drop the photocopied sheets in your pigeon hole; we're covering the same unit of work.' The other colleague looks relieved as she runs off to her home group class (she was concerned about the last-minute rush to get 'that worksheet ready').

This, too, is colleague support; transitional, on-the-run, none the less valued for that.

Anne has a 'blazing migraine'. Janet notices this (it has happened before) and offers to take the class for Anne while she recuperates. On other occasions (not too many), Anne has asked for similar support – it has never been refused.

Fortunately, Anne is in a supportive, a collegially supportive school. In some schools, teachers will suffer physical and psychological pain; difficult classroom and playground management issues; uncertainties about teaching practice; rarely receive useful professional guidance and feedback; and not enjoy the opportunities for professional off-loading and problem-solving.

School cultures are significantly affected by their 'colleague culture' and how 'consciously' schools address the issue of colleague support.

'Gees Paul, you look sh__house!' Carl says with humour to a fellow teacher who

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does, indeed, look 'a little washed out' already at 8:40 a.m. 'Listen I'll grab you a coffee all right?'

'Thanks Carl …'

A brief chat about 9C and the social studies class aided by a collegial cuppa gives Paul that 'coping edge'. It may not sound like much in the long haul, but this, too, is colleague support.

A colleague walks past a very rowdy class and looks through the glass that separates him from a very stressed looking colleague. After knocking on the door he asks politely if he can 'borrow one or two students, please?' His body language, and tone, indicate this is a 'collegial' expression of support (code for 'I'll take a few students – the most troublesome at present – and look after them till the bell goes'). His colleague is immediately thankful and supported by this courteous knock on the door, as distinct from a colleague 'barging in' and 'taking over'. Later that day the two colleagues sit and debrief and longer-term offers and options of support are explored.

Carmel taught a composite grade 5/6 class. Over several weeks (since the beginning of term 1) the class had become 'increasingly difficult to manage'. It was 'one thing after another': the general level of noise and rowdiness as students entered the classroom; the pushing, shoving and annoying comments; the inattentive behaviour during instructional time ('boys being silly', 'calling out, 'butting in'); general noise level during on-task learning time; and 'loss of active learning time'.

Carmel was new to the school and initially hesitant about asking for help; she was a little anxious, as an older teacher, that she not be seen as ineffective or, worse, incompetent.

The school is a very supportive school, however, and when a colleague noticed – one day after 3:30 p.m. – that Carmel looked more than 'a bit wrung out', it eventually 'all came out' and very quickly a 'support process' was offered that stopped the spiral of disillusionment and 'partial defeat'. It was an offer accepted, and an offer grounded in long-term support options. The support offered was genuine, caring and non-judgemental.

A 'fresh-start' program was initiated with the class that reviewed whole-class and individual behaviour concerns; *shared* rights, responsibilities and rules; core routines (such as seating plans, entering and *leaving* the classroom considerately, workable routines for class discussion and learning time); 'partner-voices' and co-operative talk during on-task learning time; and conferring routines for teacher assistance etc.

Classroom meetings initiated the 'fresh-start' process, and a colleague worked with Carmel to set up the initial meeting with the grade and to act as a supportive

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mentor to discuss, plan and review the process of change. A key feature of this long-term professional support was peer-coaching, a process that enabled Carmel to professionally reflect on and assess aspects of her teaching and behaviour management (see Chapter 5).

Carmel felt better, gained significant professional hope and coped more effectively with the class group. It took time, effort, goodwill – in effect, colleague support. It made a significant difference; I know, I was there.

All these examples from different schools embody typical features of colleague support: moral, 'structural' and professional support. All teachers recognise these expressions of support given by their colleagues, but colleague support is not limited by such expressions.

This book addresses the difference that colleague support can and does make to the individual teacher and to whole-school cultures. Colleague support can significantly affect stress and coping; the management of change (externally imposed and internally required); professional development (including professional feedback); the maintenance of effective discipline and classroom management and more.

This book came about as a result of an ongoing interest in how colleague support operates in schools and the difference it can make within a school. That 'interest' was further extended with a longitudinal research study (doctoral research) into colleague support that enabled me to more consciously address the effect of colleague support within and across schools. This research is discussed in Chapter 1 and referred to throughout the text as it is applied to aspects of individual and social coping, and the meeting of colleagues' needs within a school context.

A colleague

Colleague refers to a fellow person in one's professional life to whom one '… joins in alliance with, unites … binds together [with] one who is associated with another in office or employment' (*Oxford Shorter Dictionary*, p. 619). It can also refer to one who '… is an ally – a confederate' (ibid). Colleague, in this sense, can have a meaning that carries degrees of affiliation and support association, through to 'ally', 'co-worker' and 'partner'. Indeed, much of the research on social support, as distinct from the terminology of *colleague* support, emphasises understandings such as 'alliance', 'aid' and 'emotional concern'. Indeed, the more common term used for support, in the literature, is 'social support' rather than 'colleague support'.

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I have opted for the term 'colleague support' as it allies the understanding of the personal and relational more strongly than does 'social support'; though social support is a significant feature of colleague engagement in a social-professional setting like a school. It is within these accepted meanings that I have embraced this term. When using the term 'collegial', as an adjective, I mean it to carry the basic concepts of colleague support such as moral support, structural support and professional support – concepts developed fully in chapters 2 and 3. More importantly, in this text I have allowed my colleagues to define and shape their meanings of colleague support across the fundamental dimensions of support: moral, structural and professional. These dimensions are affected by several factors:

- the effect of stress and the reciprocal 'buffering' given by colleague support
- the coping mechanisms of individuals as they interact with their colleagues
- the negative effect of social and professional isolation
- how colleague support meets individual needs and interpersonal needs
- the nature of the school as an 'organisation' and a 'culture'
- how a school addresses and manages change
- the place of encouragement and professional feedback
- the role, and effect, of appraisal and mentoring in colleague support.

Figure A.1 (over page) represents the dynamic nature of the dimensions as they are affected by a school's organisation, structure and culture as it consciously seeks to address support.

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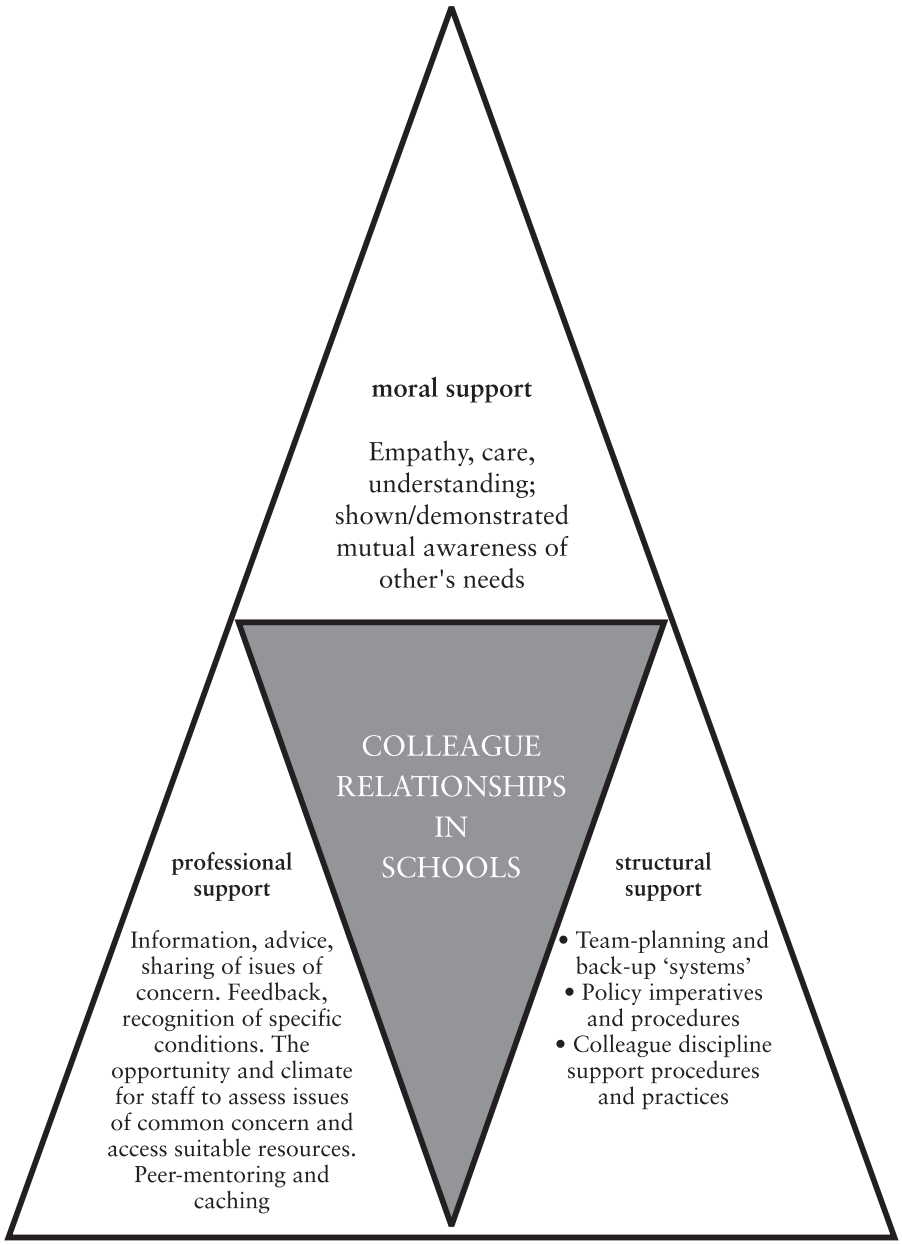

Figure A.1 *Dimensions of colleague support*