



"It is all about teaching and learning, a school-wide participatory learning community, and the use of technology to make a difference throughout the school culture."

Get an iTeam in Your Life and See the Difference!

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Name them the iTeam, the iStaff, the Mouse Squad, or whatever, but call them, turn them loose, and get out of their way! That is the sentiment one finds when teacher librarians and teacher technologists build a group of students who want to build the entire school culture into a learning culture.

During this past spring, I had the opportunity to interview members of this elite middle school team in Syracuse, New York, with Sue Kowalski at a learning commons workshop. Here were ten members of her iStaff with all ability levels (from geek to mentally disabled) describing to the audience the service they rendered the entire school through the learning commons that Kowalski had put into place. It literally brought tears to our eyes to watch the pride, confidence, and skills these young people possessed and how they were dedicated to teaching and learning throughout the school.

In a second interview at ISTE last fall, I interviewed members of the Mouse Squad under the direction of Alex Fleming as they conducted a poster session for hundreds of passers-by near the doors to the exhibits. Their same sense of excitement, dedication, and entrepreneurship proved that these two professional adult coaches have a secret that every teacher librarian needs to know.

Yes, we have had student library helpers for decades. They have shelved the books, circulated the 16mm projectors throughout the school, and performed a myriad of other tasks that helped the school library hum. They helped keep the organization running. But this is a major step forward. While they are still extremely helpful, this is not about keeping the organization operational. It is all about teaching and learning, a schoolwide participatory learning community, and the use of technology to make a difference throughout the school culture. It is also about developing young people who have a sense of their own worth, a pride in what they are contributing, and certainty that they are building

themselves into productive and contributing members of society as they aim for college or careers.

And so we present the experiences of these two elite squads in their own words as assembled by their adult coaches. But before doing so, take a look at the YouTube video created by a similar group of young people as they worked to spread word of the Google Apps for Education (a free and safe tech environment created by Google): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkXd9xPzYQI>. Yes, we know that Google is using this as a promotional video for the tech system they have created, but we also appreciate the contribution that Google is making by providing innovative, free, ubiquitous, and equitable access to a cadre of tools that revolutionize schools. In all three cases, teachers all of a sudden realize they don't have to be experts in all things technology to be able to boost learning technologically. They only have to trust the fact that kids will rise to a challenge to share, create, and build something that everyone in the school can use.