

SPECIAL EDUCATION: Contemporary Perspectives for School Professionals, Second Edition

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Marilyn Friend

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SAMPLE CHAPTER 4: Creating Partnerships through Collaboration

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Creating Partnerships through Collaboration



learning objectives

- Describe what collaboration is and why it has become so critical in providing special education services to students with disabilities.
- Identify the skills that are necessary to collaborate effectively.
- Outline collaborative practices that are most common in today's schools, including teams, co-teaching, and consultation.
- Discuss the role of collaboration in working with parents and family members.
- Describe issues related to collaboration in special education.

Michelle

Michelle is a first-year special education teacher at Washington High School. Her undergraduate degree was in psychology, and she just obtained her teaching credential by completing an alternative licensure program at a local university. She is excited about her new career but a bit anxious as well. One of the most interesting experiences Michelle is having is co-teaching with Kira in algebra. The class includes students who did not take algebra in middle school—generally, students who struggle to learn. Five of the students have individualized education programs (IEPs). Michelle and Kira are developing a strong partnership, but it has taken careful planning and honest communication. For example, the two teachers discussed their respective expectations for sharing instruction in the class, and they also negotiated how to divide the teaching and grading responsibilities. Although Michelle's primary purpose in being in the classroom is to ensure that the students with IEPs receive instructional support, both teachers share the goal of creating an atmosphere in which all the students can succeed. One of the challenges Michelle has faced is making sure that she understands the algebraic concepts well enough to be a teaching partner; she really had not thought about the range and depth of curriculum that she would need to understand as part of her job.

Robert

Robert is an eighth-grade student with a moderate intellectual disability who will be going to high school in the fall. His IEP team has convened for the annual review. In attendance are Ms. Speis, Robert's special education teacher, as well as Mr. Green, the school psychologist, and Ms. Taylor, Robert's mother. Robert's English and social studies teachers also are present, as is Ms. Smith, the principal, and Mr. Doyle, a special education teacher from the high school. With extensive supports, Robert has been quite successful attending mostly general education classes for the past three years, but Ms. Taylor is concerned about his options for high school. After Robert describes what he has enjoyed about middle school, what he hopes

to learn in high school, and what jobs he might do when he finishes school, the team brainstorms about the best set of classes, services, and supports for him for next year. Ms. Speis endorses Robert receiving all his academics in a special education setting so that he can learn vocational skills. However, Mr. Doyle discusses his school's strong peer assistance program in English 9 and several elective courses and Robert's achievements during middle school; he suggests general education participation in English, Art I, and required physical education. After discussion of the opportunities and barriers, the team eventually agrees on Robert's goals for ninth grade, and the new IEP is written. Ms. Taylor thanks Mr. Doyle for reassuring her, and he notes that she should contact him next year if she has any concerns.

Mary Jo

Mary Jo is a teacher for students with visual impairments, but she does not have her own classroom. She is an itinerant teacher who serves twelve students in eight different schools. She usually spends Monday and Wednesday mornings at Kennedy Elementary where four of her students are located. She sometimes pulls the students from their general education classrooms to check on their learning progress and to monitor the effectiveness of their adaptive equipment. For example, one of the teachers recently told her that Marcus had broken his glasses and that even using a magnifying glass, he was having difficulty reading his work. She spoke to Marcus's grandmother and learned that he would be receiving new glasses the next day, and she relayed that information to the teacher, asking that she be notified if Marcus did not come to school with the glasses. She also observed Shawn in his fifth-grade class as he worked on a computer with enlarged type. Afterward, she met with Shawn's teacher to discuss his academic work and classroom behavior. Mary Jo finds her job challenging and interesting. She has realized, though, that she has to work diligently to get to know the teachers and administrators in each of her schools, and she sometimes admits that she does not really have a "home" in any single school, a fact that sometimes bothers her.

When you think about being an educator, whatever your role, how do you think your days will be spent? Do you see yourself mostly in terms of your work with students? When you picture your colleagues, do you see them similarly engaged? Many educators think of their roles primarily in terms of their students, and they often consider their interactions with other professionals an add-on or a secondary job responsibility. In fact, the profession of teaching has for many decades been characterized as one of isolation and loneliness (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1982). This characterization of schools is changing but only gradually (Martin & Kragler, 1999), and working with others often is still more like a luxury than a standard for practice (Barth, 2006; Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Woods & Weasmer, 2002).

In contrast to professionals in a traditional school culture, special education teachers and others who provide services to students with disabilities have long relied on working with others formally or informally (e.g., Armer & Thomas, 1978; Menninger, 1950; Pugach & Johnson, 2002), and this emphasis continues today. As an educator in the twenty-first century, your direct work with students is only one dimension—albeit a critical one—of your job (Pisha & Stahl, 2005; York-Barr & Kronberg, 2002). In many ways, your ability to work with other adults is as important to your success as your knowledge and skills for teaching (Friend & Cook, 2007; Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005). For example, on any given day, in addition to your teaching duties, your schedule might include conferencing with a parent before school begins, sharing teaching responsibilities with a colleague in a class that includes several students who have IEPs, or participating in an IEP team meeting right after the students leave at the end of the day.

No matter your planned career as an educator, you quickly will learn that collaboration does not occur because of good intentions; it requires learning the skills to make it a reality. As you read this chapter, try to visualize yourself performing your responsibilities and interacting effectively with colleagues, parents, and others. Have you thought before now about these situations? What questions and concerns do you have? One novice special educator recently echoed the sentiments of many when she sighed and commented, “When I began my job, I realized I was very well prepared to meet students’ needs. My greatest challenge has been learning how to manage the complexities of working with all the other adults.”

“Collaboration does not occur because of good intentions; it requires learning the skills to make it a reality.”

What Is Collaboration?

If you peruse almost any publication related to education, you will find the word *collaboration* used often and in many different ways. Sometimes it seems to be a general way of saying “working together,” as when teachers are advised that collaboration is an effective means of accomplishing their professional development goals or when principals are admonished to foster collaboration in their schools as a means of raising student achievement (Scanlon, Gallego, Duran, & Reyes, 2005; Thousand & Villa, 2000). In some schools, the term *collaboration* appears to be confused with other terms (such as *inclusion*, for example) when someone notes, “We really believe in collaboration. Almost all our students are in general education classes for at least part of the day.”

As a professional who will need to draw on collaboration expertise every day, you should understand that collaboration is more than simply working together and that it is not at all a synonym for *inclusion*. The technical definition of **collaboration** is that it is “a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (Friend & Cook, 2007, p. 7). The most critical word in this definition is *style* because collaboration refers to *how* you interact with others, not *what* you are doing. For example, on some teams everyone present, including the parents, feels free to offer ideas, and all opinions are respected. This is a *collaborative* team. In contrast, on other teams it seems that certain topics should not be raised or that disagreeing with other team members, particularly when parents are present, is viewed negatively. The predominant

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Standard 10 Collaboration
... models and strategies of
collaboration

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Collaboration has another meaning that is far different from the one being discussed in this textbook: It is also the situation that occurs when an individual joins with another for a negative purpose, as in collaborating with the enemy!

style of this team may be *directive*. In both instances, the interactions relate to working as a team—that is, the meeting is the *what*. The factor that varies is the way in which the team approaches its work—that is, the *how* was collaborative or directive, respectively.

Understanding Collaboration

You can further appreciate what collaboration is and what place it has in your professional role by learning about its characteristics (Friend & Cook, 2007). As you read this section, think about how a collaborative style can positively affect your interactions with colleagues and parents.

Collaboration Is Voluntary

No matter your role, you might be directed to work with a group of other professionals on a committee or team. You might even be told that you have been partnered to teach with a particular colleague. Neither of these situations feels particularly voluntary. That is partly correct: Being assigned to work in proximity with others is not voluntary, and it is inevitable and appropriate that in schools such decisions will be made without your input. However, whether you and your colleagues use the style of collaboration remains voluntary. On the committee or team, you and others choose whether to participate as little as possible, thinking of yourselves as a collection of individuals, or to engage fully, recognizing the increased potential of working together, collaborating. Similarly, you and your teaching partner(s) choose whether to divide students and work separately or to blend your talents and create new, shared teaching possibilities. In both cases, proximity is mandated, but collaboration is chosen.

Collaboration Is Based on Parity

Parity refers to the concept that, in collaboration, the contributions of all participants have equal value. For example, imagine that you are at a meeting about a student with very complex needs. Because the other participants casually use terms you have never heard, you might believe that you have nothing to offer to the conversation. This would be a breakdown in parity. However, if you realize that you have a unique perspective on how to successfully reach the student in an education setting, you might make a contribution in that area. A sense of parity would exist.

CHECK

Your Learning

How would you explain the difference between *collaboration* and *inclusion* to colleagues?



When professionals and parents collaborate, parity can be challenging to create and maintain, particularly when cultural differences may be a factor.

Of course, parity has to be fostered for every person participating in an interaction (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004). How might parity apply to parents or general education teachers in their interactions with you? What might cause a breakdown in parity? How could you work to ensure that parity is reinforced in such interactions?

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.disabilityresources.org/index.html

Disability Resources is a website updated monthly that includes many valuable tools, from details about specific disabilities to strategies for working with students and families for professional educators and families, arranged with an A-to-Z index.

Collaboration Requires a Mutual Goal

One of the greatest challenges of working with other adults in schools is confirming a shared goal. If a special education teacher is meeting with a classroom teacher because a student has been refusing to complete assignments, the special education teacher might assume that the goal is to find out why the behavior problem has been escalating so that it can be addressed and the student maintained in the classroom. However, the general education teacher might have asked to meet to suggest that the student spend more time away from the general education setting. Clearly, this interaction is not based on having a **mutual goal**. Alternatively, if the teachers decide that their purpose in meeting is to analyze the situation and decide whether to call the parents or request a meeting with the school psychologist, they do have a mutual goal. Although it may seem obvious that professionals should ask each other explicitly about the goals of their interactions, often this does not occur. You are far more likely to succeed in collaboration if you make this simple effort.

Collaboration Involves Shared Responsibility for Key Decisions

When you collaborate, you and your colleagues share the critical decisions related to your goal, but the tasks required to reach that goal usually are assigned to individuals. For example, a special educator and a general education teacher sharing instruction might decide that the students' project will be to dramatize a scene from the literature being read. However, the general education teacher might assume the responsibility of preparing the evaluation rubric for this project while the special educator prepares an organizer to help some students remember all the parts to the assignment and their due dates. In the hectic world of today's schools, not all work can be shared. In collaboration, then, **shared responsibility** for key decisions contributes to parity and mutual goals while allowing professionals to be efficient through a division of labor.

Collaboration Includes Shared Accountability for Outcomes

Sharing accountability follows directly from sharing responsibility for key decisions. If team members decide to try a behavior intervention plan for a student and it is highly effective, they should share the credit for its success. However, if the plan somehow backfires and causes even further problems, they should avoid trying to assign blame and instead collectively ask, "What should we do now?" In collaboration, **shared accountability** implies that all participants have contributed to planning and implementing a strategy and that they fully accept the outcomes of those decisions, whether they are positive or a cause for concern.

Collaboration Requires Sharing Resources

For collaboration to occur, each participant must contribute some type of resource. Perhaps a special educator can offer ideas for making an assignment more understandable for students or technical information about a student's physical, academic, or behavior needs. Perhaps the school psychologist can create a system of rewards for a student or a group of students. The general education teacher's contribution may be the time to implement the planned intervention and to monitor its impact. By **sharing resources**, everyone engaged in the collaboration shares ownership for the activity or intervention.

Collaboration Is Emergent

As you have probably surmised, collaboration depends on the development of trust, respect, and a sense of community among participants. However, traits such as these cannot exist, fully developed, at the outset of a working relationship, and so these characteristics of collaboration are referred to as *emergent*. That is, anyone who engages in collaboration begins

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Standard 10 Collaboration
... respectful and beneficial
relationships

with a small amount of these characteristics. Would you risk working closely with a colleague if you could not find at least a small amount of trust and respect for that person's knowledge and skills? However, these characteristics become stronger as participants' experience

"Collaboration depends on the development of trust, respect, and a sense of community among participants."

in collaboration grows (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). For example, at the beginning of the school year, Ms. Galliano, a new special education teacher, learned that she would work closely with Ms. Brighton, the speech/language pathologist, regarding services for Luis. Early in the year, both professionals worked diligently to be respectful, to get to know each other's strengths, and to clearly communicate concerning Luis's program. Later, though, as they became familiar with each other's style, after they jointly and successfully managed a difficult meeting with Luis's parents, and through many lunch periods spent discussing their instructional views, they both came to realize that they could rely on each other. They both believed that each had Luis's best interests at heart, even when they disagreed, and they both recognized that if a problem occurred, it could be resolved. Their collaborative relationship had evolved based on their shared work until they sensed that they were a strong and productive educational team.

Collaboration within the Context of Contemporary Legislation and Litigation

Although collaboration in the field of special education has existed informally almost since its inception, it was during the 1960s that the concept was recognized as a fundamental component of providing special services (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). Several contributing factors can be identified. For example, it was during this time that the role of the school psychologist began to be thought of in terms of working with teachers in order to support students. Tractman (1961) argued that if psychologists taught teachers strategies for effectively reaching their students instead of directly meeting with students individually or in small groups, as was customary, psychologists' influence could be multiplied greatly. During the same era, those developing the principles of *behaviorism* for use with students argued that if specialists would teach these principles to teachers, more students would be reached than if the specialists tried to work directly with students (e.g., Tharp & Wetzel, 1969). These concepts were applied to the work of special education teachers, too. In some programs, special education teachers did not work directly with students. Instead, they were assigned the task of teaching

"What has evolved is the recognition that everyone involved in designing, implementing, and monitoring the learning of a student with a disability has a contribution to make."

general education teachers to effectively instruct the students in their classrooms who had disabilities by modeling strategies and techniques and providing professional development to the teachers (e.g., McKenzie, 1972).

These predecessors to today's concept of collaboration tended to assume that special educators and other specialists possessed critical knowledge and skills that would benefit general education teachers.

That is, the specialists were the "givers" and the general education teachers were the "receivers." However, as federal special education laws were enacted, it became clear that reciprocal sharing was needed: When special education teachers told general education teachers how to better instruct students in their classrooms, the general education teachers often rightfully felt that their own expertise was being ignored. What has evolved is the recognition that everyone involved in designing, implementing, and monitoring the learning of a student with a disability has a contribution to make. Thus, *collaboration* as presented in this chapter has become the contemporary model of school practice for professional interactions (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Friend & Cook, 2004).

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Friend (2000) has identified four myths that may undermine efforts at professional collaboration: (1) Everyone is doing it, (2) more is better, (3) it's about feeling good and liking others, and (4) it comes naturally.

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Standard 1 Foundations
... models, theories, and
philosophies

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.newhorizons.org/spneeds/front_spneeds.html
New Horizons for Learning is a nonprofit organization that fosters educational change. On this page of its website you can find articles related to collaboration and inclusive schooling.

Collaboration in IDEA

The current provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contain the strongest expectations ever for collaboration in special education. As you learned in Chapter Two, collaboration among professionals and between professionals and parents is integral in nearly every dimension of the federal law, including the following:

- Participation of general education teachers on most IEP teams
- Increased parent involvement
- Required conflict resolution efforts when disagreements occur
- Emphasis on educating students in the least restrictive environment
- Consultative special education services

When you picture yourself as a school professional, what aspects of your job do you envision as most relying on collaboration?

As you continue to learn about collaboration and its role in the delivery of special services to students with disabilities, keep in mind that collaboration has become increasingly integral to many aspects of society, including business and industry (Ephross & Vassil, 2005; Fullan, 2001). In fact, a recent ad in a business magazine proclaimed, “Collaborate or die!” Because schools tend to reflect the important trends that shape society (Friend & Cook, 2007), collaboration is likely to become an increasingly larger part of your role as a school professional.

What Elements Are Necessary for Collaboration?

As you interact with parents and family members, teachers, administrators, related services professionals, paraeducators, and others, simply hoping that collaboration will evolve is not enough. You can examine your own commitment to collaboration, and you can learn a set of skills that can make the goal of collaboration a reality. These elements of collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2007) are summarized in Figure 4.1 and described below.

Personal Belief System

Having read to this point in the chapter, how convinced are you that the effort collaboration requires results in positive outcomes for students and teachers? This consideration, your *personal belief system*, is the first element of collaboration. If you firmly believe that collaboration is worthwhile, you are ready to learn the more technical aspects of this style. If you are uncertain, then you are not likely to embrace this approach, particularly when it is challenging to accomplish (Pugach & Johnson, 2002).

An example related to your experiences as a student can further illustrate this point. Do you believe that what you do with others is better than what you do alone? Before you quickly say yes, think about the last time you were assigned a group project in one of your courses. Did you mentally groan at the prospect? How might this indicate your readiness and willingness to collaborate? Among all the professionals with whom you will work in schools, the level of commitment to collaboration will vary greatly. Their perspectives, combined with your own viewpoint, will determine whether you will have many opportunities to participate in collaborative activities or whether you will complete much of your work without such support.

Communication Skills

When coupled with our facial expressions, posture, and other nonverbal signals, the words we choose and the way we express them comprise our **communication skills** (DeVito, 2006). Communication skills can be taught and learned readily, and entire university courses are

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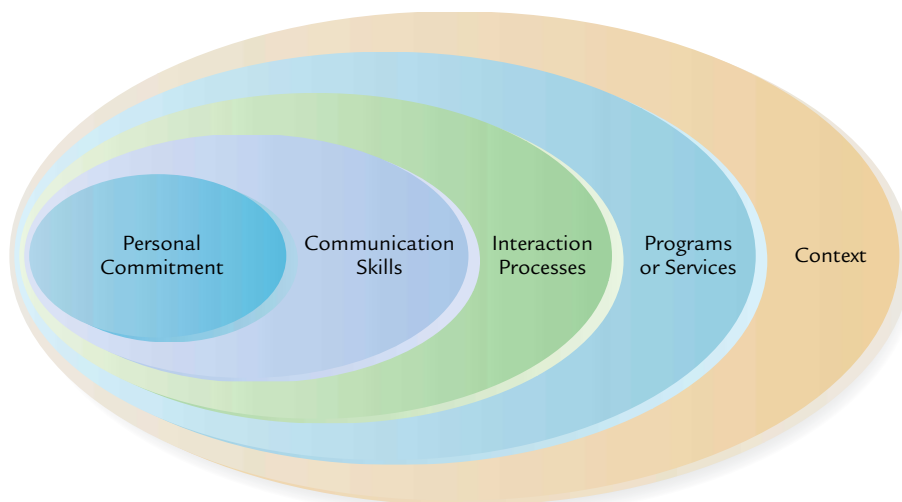
Standard 9 Professional and Ethical Practice
... reflect on practice

dimensions of DIVERSITY

One strategy for fostering a positive working relationship with parents of students with disabilities (and other parents, too) is to avoid crisis-driven communication. That is, contact the parents when there is only a small problem or, better yet, no problem at all. By doing so, interactions concerning serious problems have a stronger foundation for successful resolution.

Figure 4.1

Essential Elements of Collaboration



Source: Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2002). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (4th ed., p. 23). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Copyright © 2002 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

devoted to this topic. Communication skills can have a huge effect on the development of collaboration, or they can inhibit it (Friend & Cook, 2004).

Unfortunately, when all is well and your interactions are positive, you do not need to have exemplary communication skills. Your colleagues know what you mean, and they do not take offense or read alternative meanings into your words. However, when controversial or awkward situations arise, then excellent communication skills are not only helpful but essential (Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005). The problem is that if you do not practice these skills when it is easy to do so, you are unlikely to suddenly have them when the situation demands them.

Dozens of models of communication and sets of communication skills have been described in the professional literature, and presenting a comprehensive list of them is simply not possible here. However, the following concepts and strategies can be especially helpful to you as an educator and reveal the importance of these skills for collaboration.

Effective Communication Strategies

To enhance your communication for collaboration, the place to begin is with listening (Hollingsworth, 2001). Even though teachers have been instructing you on effective listening since you were an elementary school pupil, as a school professional you may find that listening is very challenging. You may be distracted because you are thinking about another student or an upcoming conference, you may be so tired that you have difficulty following what the speaker is saying, or you may be confused by the information being presented. The Professional Edge on page 108 presents information on dilemmas for listening and ways to overcome them.

Another example of effective communication occurs when you encourage others to continue speaking through the use of nonverbal signals (Egan, 2001). For example, if a parent is describing her child's favorite play activities at home, your smile is likely to positively influence the parent to tell you more. Similarly, if you sit so that you are leaning forward slightly and nod as a special education colleague describes the job coaching situation that he is helping to resolve with a shared student, he is likely to sense that you understand and want to know more. By communicating with your body, you convey important messages without interrupting the speaker.

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 9 Professional and Ethical Practice
... use verbal, nonverbal, and written language

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One of the most effective communication skills you can learn to use is silence. During awkward or difficult interactions, allowing a few seconds of silence can help you to listen more carefully and learn more information by encouraging others to continue speaking and providing you with those seconds to think about your response.

One of the first steps in refining listening skills is to recognize factors that may interfere with your ability to listen. Here are some examples:

- You are in a hurry.
- You are distracted by what is around you.
- You are self-conscious.
- You are bored.
- You are thinking about what you are going to say.
- You are on mental overload.
- You are not responsible for the information.
- You are tired.
- You are confused by the topic or the speaker.
- You are daydreaming.

You can improve your listening skills for collaboration by following these suggestions, offered by experienced professionals:

- *Want to listen.* Remember, there is no such thing as disinterested people—only disinterested listeners.
- *Be a good listener.* Be quiet and alert, sit straight, lean slightly forward and make eye contact as appropriate, and let your face radiate interest.
- *React positively.* The only time a person likes to be interrupted is when being “applauded” through nods, smiles, or comments. Be generous with your applause.

- *Empathize with the other person.* Try to put yourself in the other’s place so that you can see that point of view.
- *Ask questions.* When you do not understand, when you need further clarification, or when you want to show you are listening, ask questions. Avoid questions that will embarrass or criticize the other person.
- *Smile appropriately.* A smile can convey to the other person that you care about the topic. However, do not overdo it.
- *Leave your emotions behind (if you can).* Try to push your worries, your fears, and your problems away. They may prevent you from listening.
- *Get rid of distractions.* Put down any papers, pencils, and other items you have in your hands.
- *Get the main points.* Focus on the main ideas. Examples, stories, and so on are important, but they usually are not the main points.
- *React to ideas, not to the person.* Do not allow your reaction to the person to influence your interpretation of what is being said. Good ideas can come from people whose skills or personality do not match yours.
- *Do not argue mentally.* When trying to understand the other person, arguing mentally while you are listening sets up a barrier between the two of you.
- *Use the difference in rate.* You can listen faster than anyone can talk (500 words/minute versus 100 to 150 words/minute). Think back over what the speaker has said to remember and reflect on the message.

A third example of communication skills concerns describing students, situations, and events using nonevaluative language. For example, as you discuss Frederick it might be tempting to say, “He really has a bad attitude. He makes disrespectful comments under his breath and constantly causes a commotion.” Notice how these descriptors of Frederick are actually evaluations. Instead, suppose you say, “During the past three days, Frederick has kept his head down on the desk the entire time; I heard him comment softly that school is stupid; and twice yesterday he rocked back in his chair until it tipped over.” Now you have described accurately what Frederick is doing without making judgments about it. Nonevaluative language is clearly preferred.

One final example of effective communication concerns the use of questions that encourage the other person to continue speaking. What is the difference in the way these questions are posed?

- What are his characteristics as a reader?
- Does he read at grade level? Does he understand what he reads? Does he attempt to sound out words that he does not know?

In the first question, the person responding would be free to discuss any of the student’s characteristics. The response might include reading level, comprehension, and word attack skills,

but it also might include information about the student's fluency and reading interests. In the second example, each question could be answered with a simple yes or no, and the person asking the questions would be largely controlling the types of answers that would likely be given. In your interactions with colleagues and parents, your goal usually is to learn from them. That means that the first question type generally would be preferred to the latter.

Communication Habits to Avoid

As you learn communication strategies that foster strong collaboration, you also should know that some communication strategies have the potential to undermine your working relationships with colleagues and parents. For example, if a teacher rushes up to you outside the school office, hands you a crumpled piece of paper that looks like it was supposed to be student work, exclaims "Look what Shannon did to her assignment!" and looks at you expectantly, what would your response be? It might be tempting to say, "I'll take care of it," or

"Whenever someone is explaining what happened, your reaction should be to seek additional information."

"She's having a bad day; you can send her down to my room and I'll talk to her," or "What would you like me to do?" All of these responses are quick fixes that indicate you are the person who can remedy the problem—even though you really do not know enough about what happened to respond. Whenever someone is explaining what happened, your reaction

should be to seek additional information (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). In this example, a much more appropriate response would be "What happened?" With that information you could gain a better understanding of the situation.

Another example of ineffective communication is the use of questions that actually state your opinions. For example, Mr. Dewey and Ms. Hector are discussing Jamia's behavior plan. Mr. Dewey says, "You're not thinking of using a point system, are you?" Careful consideration of Mr. Dewey's words indicates that he is probably trying to communicate that he is not in favor of a point system, but he uses a question that clearly includes the answer that he wants to hear instead of directly stating his opinion. A far better interaction would have been this: "I'm opposed to the use of a point system with Jamia. What is your thinking?" If you find that your communication with others is peppered with questions ending with phrases such as "aren't you?" "can't you?" and "will you?" this might be a communication skill on which you need to work. You will be perceived as far more respectful and honest if you own your opinions and encourage others to express theirs.

One final example of ineffective communication concerns the use of *jargon*. As you learn about the field of special education and become accustomed to the acronyms and expressions associated with it, you may forget when you speak to others, especially parents, that not everyone has this familiarity. If you say to a parent, "Your child's K-TEA and CBA data indicate an independent reading level at 3.5, instructional level at 4.5, and frustration level at 5.0," you have said many words but probably communicated little. To communicate effectively, you need to adjust the words you use depending on the person to whom you are speaking.

It is hoped that these few examples of effective and ineffective communication habits have piqued your interest in learning more. As you listen to professionals in schools, you can sharpen your own skills by focusing on how they use words that exemplify the characteristics of collaboration—parity, trust, respect. You can also notice how some communication seems to interfere with the development of collaboration.

Interaction Processes

An **interaction process** is a set of steps that are followed using effective communication in order to accomplish the mutual goal of collaboration. A number of interaction processes are common in schools, but the one most often used is some form of **interpersonal problem solving** (Bahr et al., 2006; Griffin, Jones, & Kilgore, 2006), in which a group of professionals meet to systematically identify and resolve student, service delivery, or other professional

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.wjcc.k12.va.us/jbms/FACULTY/ScullionTim/index-2.htm

At Teaching and Learning Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom, you can read an overview of the importance of teachers working together, see floorplans for inclusive classrooms, and link to related resources.

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 9 Professional and Ethical Practice
... engage in professional activities



Questions to Focus Problem Solving for Special Education Teams

One type of problem solving that you have already learned about concerns placing students in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Here are some questions that can guide such team problem solving.

Questions for the Physical and Mobility Dimension

- How could the classroom be made more accessible to the student?
- Does the student's workspace need changes in arrangement or location?

Questions for the Instructional Dimension

- Does the student need visual aids, large-print materials, or alternative media?
- Does the student need process-of-reading guides or highlighted or tape-recorded texts?
- What assessment accommodations are needed (e.g., location, time, format)?
- What possible adjustments could address grading for this student (e.g., extra credit, changed grading scale)?
- How could cooperative learning, peer tutoring, or reciprocal teaching be incorporated?
- Does the student need an assignment notebook or home copies of texts?
- As needed, how could the student work on alternative functional skills (e.g., coin recognition during the unit on metric conversion)?

- What types of assistive technology would facilitate student learning?

Questions for the Social-Behavioral Dimension

- How could the student be involved in social skills instruction? Does the student need counseling?
- Does the student need a behavioral management plan?
- Could the student use self-monitoring of target behaviors?
- How could peers be used to monitor or redirect behavior?
- Could the teacher implement an interdependent group contingency for the class?
- What could the teacher do to foster friendships between this student and classmates?

Questions for the Collaborative Dimension

- Does the student need a paraprofessional to assist her?
- Is co-teaching an appropriate service delivery option?
- How could teachers arrange additional time for planning and problem solving?
- Should the teacher receive assistance from a curriculum consultant or behavioral specialist?
- On what topics would professional development be helpful (e.g., behavior management, understanding students with autism)?

Source: Adapted from Etscheidt, S. K., & Bartlett, L. (1999). The IDEA amendments: A four-step approach for determining supplementary aids and services. *Exceptional Children*, 65, 170-171.

problems. For example, when you meet with the occupational therapist to devise an alternative way for a student to grip a pencil or crayon or when you confer with parents to determine how to address a student's behavior challenge, you are problem solving. Likewise, when you meet with a schoolwide team to discuss how to help a struggling student who does not have a disability be more successful in the classroom, you engage in problem solving. If you think about all the roles and responsibilities you may have in school, you can see that most of them can be considered from a problem-solving perspective; this makes it essential that you know and can carry out this key process. The Specialized Instruction above illustrates the use of problem solving in discussing the least restrictive environment for a student.

Several authors have proposed interpersonal problem-solving models (e.g., Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Snell & Janney, 2000). However, all problem-solving models generally incorporate the following six steps.

"If you think about all the roles and responsibilities you may have in school, you can see that most of them can be considered from a problem-solving perspective."

Create a Climate for Problem Solving

When you problem solve with others, you need to ensure that all participants are committed to the process. One way to accomplish this is to communicate optimism about success. For example, if at the beginning of a meeting, a team member says, “Here we go again. I’m getting frustrated that we can’t seem to find a way to help Mel learn to communicate his needs,” you have a signal that commitment may be wavering. Your response might be, “I’ve been thinking, though. With all of us here today to discuss this, and with the new ideas we’ve been researching, I think we have lots of new options to explore.” You are trying to help set a positive context for the problem-solving process.

Identify the Problem

This problem-solving step is deceptively simple. When you work with a group, each person may have a different perspective of the problem. For example, at a team meeting, a classroom teacher may perceive that the problem is a student’s poor organization skills, while the special education teacher may believe the problem is the other teacher’s reluctance to give the student extra time to organize his materials. At the same time, the psychologist may believe that the student possibly has a short-term memory problem, and the principal may think that the student is simply seeking attention. Because the problems you will discuss with others in your collaborative interactions are usually complex and do not have single, clear answers, it is imperative to spend enough time to ensure that all participants share the same understanding of the problem (Welch & Tulbert, 2000).

Generate Alternatives

In this step, participants brainstorm ideas for addressing the problem that they have mutually identified. They are careful to avoid evaluating each other’s ideas (e.g., “I don’t think that will work”), instead trying to encourage as many ideas being expressed as possible. Some options will be discarded later as unrealistic, but during this part of problem solving, the intent is to generate as many ideas as possible because the quantity of ideas generated tends to increase the overall quality of the solution eventually implemented.

Assess the Potential Solutions, Selecting One or More to Implement

Once a lengthy list of ideas has been compiled, participants eliminate those that are not feasible (e.g., providing a paraeducator for every general education teacher in the school) and those that are unlikely to be implemented or are mostly fanciful (e.g., attaching a student who seems to be in perpetual motion to his seat with Velcro strips sewn to his pants). Each of the remaining ideas is considered carefully (e.g., creating a teacher study group on differentiating instruction; providing teachers with a brief workshop on the student’s communication device). Advantages and drawbacks of implementing the idea are noted as well. Based on this discussion, the number of ideas is gradually reduced to a few. These are assessed for practical matters, such as cost, time involved, and consistency with student needs, and then one or two ideas are selected for implementation. The final part of this step includes making detailed implementation plans.

Implement the Intervention

The most straightforward step of problem solving occurs after all the efforts of completing the preceding steps. The intervention or strategy is implemented, and data are gathered so that effectiveness can be measured. One question during implementation usually concerns time: For how many days or sessions should an intervention be implemented before its outcome is assessed?

Evaluate the Intervention Outcome and Decide to Continue, Modify, or Start Over

After a specified period of time, those involved in problem solving meet to decide whether the solution has been effective. If the intervention has been successful, it may be terminated or continued in its current form. If some difficulties have occurred, it may be modified. If

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.rushservices.com/Inclusion

The Florida Inclusion Network sponsors a website of ideas, inspiration, and resources for including children with special needs in the regular classroom. It contains specific ideas about how teachers have made inclusion work and examples of schools where inclusion works.

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 10 Collaboration
... collaboration with school personnel

fyi

Although no journal addresses only topics related to collaboration, the *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* often includes research-based articles related to this topic.

Problem solving with your colleagues is one of the most common interaction processes you will experience in your role as a school professional.



the participants decide that serious problems exist, other ideas are likely to be tried, or the group may decide that the problem needs to be reconceptualized. For example, if a student's behavior plan has corrected the behavior, the plan may be phased out. Or perhaps the special education teacher likes the plan and thinks it is working but finds that it takes up too much time during instruction. In this case, the team might try to streamline the plan or eliminate some parts of it. Finally, if the teacher reports that no improvement in behavior is occurring, the team might decide to try a completely different intervention.

Additional Considerations for Problem Solving

You might have the impression that problem solving occurs primarily when students have academic or behavior needs. Although this is an important part of the problem solving in which you will engage, it is not *all* the problem solving. For example, you might problem solve to increase parent involvement at your school (e.g., Brandes, 2005) or to increase all staff members' knowledge about assistive technology (e.g., Acrey, Johnstone, & Milligan, 2005). You might even problem solve to figure out a more effective way of having several specialists provide services to a single student in a general education classroom.

As you prepare to become a school professional, you will find that you also need skills for carrying out additional interaction processes that foster collaboration. For example, you will probably practice interviewing parents and conducting conferences with them. You also will discuss how to resolve the conflicts and address the resistance that sometimes occurs in school settings concerning students with disabilities and their services. Finally, you will offer feedback to colleagues and paraeducators. All these activities are processes because they have steps.

As with communication, you can learn to effectively monitor and follow the steps in problem solving. Both sets of skills are critical: If you have good communication skills but cannot help move an interaction from beginning to end through a series of steps, frustration may occur. Likewise, if you know the steps of problem solving and can implement them from beginning to end but without positive communication skills, participants may see the process as directive, not collaborative.

Programs and Services

The next element of collaboration is to design programs and services that foster it. Although as a novice you may not have significant input into the design of programs and services, your understanding of them can help you make an informed judgment about the potential for collaboration. Later in this chapter you will learn about three programs that rely heavily on collaboration: teaming, co-teaching, and consultation.

Supportive Context

The fifth and final element that must be in place for collaboration to flourish is a supportive context. As you gain experience as a professional, you may be able to influence the extent to which collaboration is valued in your school and resources are dedicated to fostering it. However, the professional who is most responsible for creating a school culture that encourages collaboration is the principal (Walther-Thomas, 1997). For example, the principal can ensure that professionals' schedules are arranged to permit them to meet occasionally. This individual also can serve as a facilitator for problem solving (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006). Perhaps most important, the principal can explicitly make collaboration a standard for all the professionals in the school, providing incentives for those working together and directly addressing those who are uncomfortable with the idea. Finally, the principal often can arrange for professional development to help staff members become more aware of the expectations of collaboration and more skillful in implementing collaborative practices (Barth, 2006).

When you put all the elements of collaboration together, you can see that with commitment and understanding collaboration is a powerful tool for educating students with disabilities. However, you also begin to recognize that it involves far more than simply having conversations with colleagues. As professionals explore the potential of collaboration, they also discover options for interacting with their colleagues in nontraditional formats. The Technology Notes explains that electronic communication can be part of collaboration.

Research

Notes

Hunt, Doering, Hirose-Hatae, Maier, and Goetz (2001) used qualitative methods to study the impact of collaboration on outcomes for students with significant disabilities. When the collaborative plans were consistently implemented, students' academic and social skills improved.

How Is Collaboration Implemented in Schools?

Informal opportunities for collaboration occur in schools every day. An occupational therapist and a special educator discuss a problem a student is having grasping small items and devise an adaptation. Five teachers explore the possibility of creating a page on the school website to highlight the service activities of all the students in the school. However, formal structures that rely on collaboration also exist. These include teams, co-teaching, and consultation.

Teams

You learned in Chapter Two that teams play an important role in special education. A team designs interventions to help students succeed before consideration for special education services (Bahr & Kovaleski, 2006). A team completes the assessment of a student who might have disabilities, determines eligibility for special education, prepares the IEP, and monitors student progress (Clark, 2000). At the beginning of the chapter, you glimpsed a team as members discussed Robert, a student with an intellectual disability. Now it is time to think in more detail about the team itself and your role as a collaborative team member.

Understanding Team Concepts

A **team** in education is two or more interdependent individuals with unique skills and perspectives who interact directly to achieve their mutual goal of providing students with effective educational programs and services (Friend & Cook, 2007). You can see that some of the characteristics of collaboration are embedded in this team definition, including the existence of mutual goals. However, as the definition suggests, teaming is much more.

For example, team members should clearly associate themselves as being part of a team. That is, they should have a sense of affiliation with the intervention assistance team, response to intervention team, or the IEP team, instead of feeling like a guest or as if the team's business is not truly their own. Team members also abide by a set

"Team members believe that the success of their work is related directly to the success of the work of all team members."

Technology has brought a whole new dimension to professional support and informal collaboration, with more and more educators accessing the Internet for assistance. Participation in professional educator discussion boards, chats, and online forums gives teachers and other school personnel opportunities to share their successes and to seek assistance with the challenges they face in their work with students. Internet sites also allow educators to share their best ideas for reaching all their students. Here are several websites that you might find useful as an early career special educator.

www.epals.com/community

ePALS, founded in 1996, has as its purpose connecting educators and their students in a safe environment. Winner of many awards, this website brings people from 191 countries and 113,619 classrooms together as learning partners.

<http://teachers.net>

Teachers.net is designed to enable teachers to have a voice in the development of the website in order to improve

practices by sharing their collective wisdom. The website contains many discussion boards of interest to early career professionals, including ideas for lesson plans and classroom activities, response to student behavior problems, and other new teacher resources. You also can join a mailing through this website by signing up to receive information from other educators on topics of your choice.

www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/collab/elec-collab.pdf

Electronic Collaboration: A Guide for Educators is a manual for educators that is intended to teach them the value of electronic collaboration, ways to access existing collaboration sites, and strategies for creating new electronic collaboration.

Source: Based on information from teacherworld.com. (2006, April). Resources for collaboration on the Internet. Retrieved June 21, 2006, from <http://teacherworld.com/collaborationlinks.html#cat4>.

of formal and informal rules. An example of the former is the procedure the team follows in discussing students. An example of the latter is the group's collective understanding about whether team meetings begin on time or whether being ten minutes late is acceptable.

Team members also believe that the success of their work is related directly to the success of the work of all team members. For example, the special education teacher knows that he can much more effectively address Robert's need for vocabulary development by working with the speech/language pathologist, the paraeducator, and the parents. In addition, team members value their differences; they understand that the professional and personal diversity that they bring to the team enhances the opportunity for collaborative and creative problem solving.

Team Effectiveness

Think about the teams of which you have been a member through sports, civic groups, or school. What made your team effective? For an educational team, effectiveness depends on several factors. First, team effectiveness can be judged by the quality of the outcomes the team produces (Kovaleski & Glew, 2006). By recommending strong, research-based interventions, was the team successful in reducing the number of students who needed to be referred for full assessment and possible special education placement? In how many instances was the team successful in resolving specific student problems in inclusive classrooms?

A second component of team effectiveness is the clarity of its goals. If team members all understand the goals of the group, the team's work will be efficient and student needs will be met; if this does not occur, much valuable time may be spent clarifying goals or resolving issues that arise because of the resulting confusion. A third component concerns team members themselves: On effective teams, members feel that their own needs are being met; that is, even if teamwork is challenging, they believe that its benefits outweigh its costs. However, team members also must be accountable. They need to understand that their contributions,

Research

Notes

In proposing a research agenda related to universal design for learning (UDL), McGuire, Scott, and Shaw (2006) emphasized the need for collaboration among educators so that effective practices could be identified.

such as getting specific tasks finished on time, affect all team members and that the quality of their work may determine the quality of the team.

Finally, teams are effective when members monitor their own behaviors, offering input but not monopolizing conversations, helping the process of teaming by making suggestions that could resolve emerging conflicts, and encouraging quiet members to offer their comments. In other words, team effectiveness depends as much on the extent to which each member helps the team accomplish its business as it does on the expertise each member brings to the teaming situation (Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001; Martin et al., 2004).

Special Education Teams

In Chapter Two, you were introduced to the *multidisciplinary team*, the set of individuals who participate in the special education decision-making process. These professionals tend to coordinate their efforts but keep separate the responsibilities traditionally associated with their roles. This type of team is the minimum acceptable level of partnership for special education procedures, but it is not the only type of special education team (Friend & Cook, 2007). In some schools, team members communicate more and share more discussion about services to be offered, but each professional still delivers services separately. This type of team is referred to as *interdisciplinary*. In a few schools, an even more blended type of teaming is found. On a *transdisciplinary team*, members share their information, skills, and service delivery. For example, a classroom teacher may implement strategies recommended by the speech/language pathologist. The special education teacher may work on cutting and buttoning skills based on consultation with the occupational therapist. The speech/language pathologist may incorporate a reading goal from the special education teacher into her work with a student. Transdisciplinary teams are the most collaborative special education teams.

Co-Teaching

The rise in inclusive practices has brought about the need for service delivery options that allow students with disabilities to access their education with their peers in general education while also receiving specialized services. One response to this need has been the development of co-teaching (Walsh & Jones, 2004), the teaching approach that Michelle, who you met at the beginning of this chapter, is participating in. **Co-teaching** is a service delivery model in which two educators—one typically a general education teacher and one a special education teacher or other specialist—combine their

“For co-teaching to be effective, the professionals must maximize the benefit of having two individuals with different types of expertise working together.”

expertise to jointly teach a heterogeneous group of students, some of whom have disabilities or other special needs, in a single classroom for part or all of the school day.

For co-teaching to be effective, the professionals must maximize the benefit of having two individuals with different types of expertise working together (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Salend, Gordon, & Lopez-Vona, 2002). They accomplish this first through clear communication concerning their instructional philosophies, their own strengths and weaknesses as educators, their expectations for themselves and each other, and their preparation for assuming co-teaching roles. Then they decide how to best use their talents in the classroom. The following are some of the approaches co-teachers might use (Friend & Cook, 2007). They are depicted visually in Figure 4.2.

One Teach, One Observe

In the one teach, one observe co-teaching approach, one teacher manages the instruction of the entire group of students while the other gathers data on one student, a small group of students, or even the entire class. Either teacher may observe, but often special educators know more ways to collect this information and may need to share that information with

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



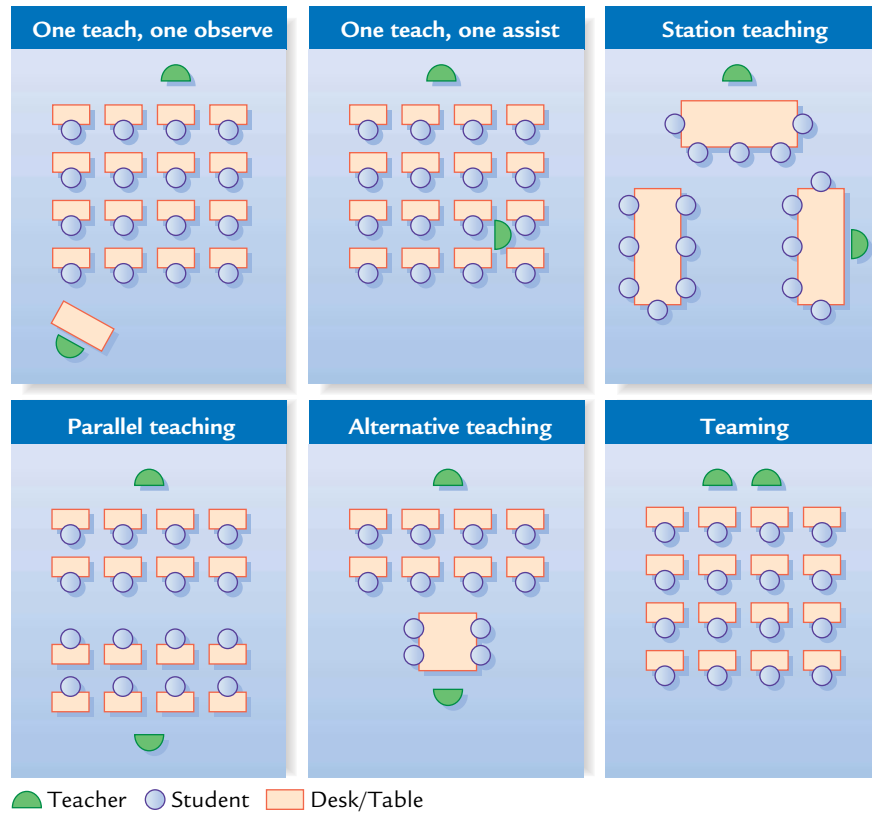
Standard 10 Collaboration
... models and strategies of
collaboration

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 10 Collaboration
... models and strategies of
collaboration

Figure 4.2
Co-Teaching Approaches



Source: Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2007). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (5th ed., p. 88). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Copyright © 2007 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

general education teachers. If professionals notice that a student seems to be having a great deal of difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next, they might observe so that they can address this problem. Or they might observe how students approach independent work tasks or for how long they work before becoming distracted. Professionals might even gather data related to a student about whom they are concerned so that they are prepared for an intervention assistance team meeting.

Parallel Teaching

In some cases, two professionals may decide to split the group of students in half and simultaneously provide the same instruction. This would be appropriate if both teachers were highly qualified in the subject area, or this might occur during discussion so that all students would have more opportunities to participate. In an elementary math class, this approach might be used when some students can work without manipulatives for counting but other students still need them. With older students, this approach would be helpful for review sessions; with both teachers reviewing, they could more readily address student questions and monitor their mastery of the information. One consideration in using this approach is noise: If two teachers are conducting the same lesson simultaneously in a small classroom, the noise level can become too high. In such a case, the teachers might try seating the students on the floor on opposite sides of the classroom or, for older students, having the student groups face away from each other.

Station Teaching

In *station teaching*, the teachers divide instruction into two, three, or even more nonsequential components, and each is addressed in a separate area of the room. Each student participates in each station. For example, in an algebra class one group of students might be working with the general education teacher as she introduces systems of equations, the second group might be working with the special educator to review last week's information, and the third group might be working on their reports about famous mathematicians. All students would receive the instruction at all three stations. In an elementary classroom, one group might work with the speech/language pathologist on vocabulary and sentences, the second group might discuss the current story with a general education teacher, and the third group might work independently on story writing. With younger students, there might only be two stations, each with a teacher. Halfway through the instruction, the groups would simply switch. In a secondary setting, particularly if class periods are relatively short (forty-five to fifty minutes, for example), a station might last the entire class period. In that case, the lesson plan would have to span three days in order for all students to access all three stations.

Alternative Teaching

In some situations, pulling a small group of students to the side of the room for instruction is an appropriate strategy. When do you think this might occur? If you immediately think about this as a way of providing remedial instruction to students who did not understand a previous lesson, you are thinking like many teachers. But for what else might you use this approach? What about *preteaching*—that is, helping students learn vocabulary words before they are introduced in large-group instruction? What about enrichment? What about teaching several students key concepts that they missed because they were absent? Many professionals worry appropriately that too much alternative teaching, especially for a remedial purpose, can give the impression of having a separate special education class operating within the walls of the general education classroom. This can be stigmatizing for students. However, if the purpose of the group varies, this can be a powerful use of two professionals in the classroom.

Teaming

When teachers have built a strong collaborative relationship and their styles are complementary, they may decide to use a teaming approach to co-teaching. They may fluidly share the instructional responsibilities of the entire student group:

- One teacher begins by explaining the concept of democracy, and then the other teacher gives an example.
- One teacher delivers a brief lecture while the other teacher models note-taking skills for students using the overhead projector.
- One teacher explains a math procedure, and the other teacher interjects questions to ensure that all students understand.
- Two teachers decide to explain latitude and longitude to their students by coming dressed for the parts: One wears a shirt with vertical stripes and the other a shirt with horizontal stripes.

Some teachers use this approach extensively and find it energizing, as do Hilda and Cheney who are featured in the Firsthand Account. However, for some teachers the informality and spontaneity of this approach does not match their styles. All co-teachers should at least be aware that it has the potential to capture student attention but that the opportunities for dividing students into a variety of groups is just as powerful and should not be underestimated.

One Teach, One Assist

In this co-teaching approach, one teacher manages the instruction of the entire group of students while the other circulates among the students, providing assistance. For example,

Research

Notes

Magiera and Zigmond (2005) found that when professionals co-teach, students with disabilities interact less with the general educator but receive more individualized instruction by interacting with the special education teacher. The researchers concluded that the educators needed professional development to improve their practices as well as shared planning time.



FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

Co-Teaching Algebra: Leave Your Ego at the Door

Hilda Wallace and Cheney Jackson have shared instruction in a high school Algebra I class in the Charlotte–Mecklenburg (NC) Public School District for two years. Their students include mostly freshmen and sophomores. As their comments illustrate, they have worked diligently to create an effective partnership.

Hilda: To make co-teaching successful, you have to be flexible—you can't think of your partner as your classroom assistant. I can't even tell you how many suggestions Cheney has made that help all the kids, not just the students with disabilities.

Cheney: In algebra, I have the experience of taking it in high school and being afraid to raise my hand—I didn't want people to think I was stupid. I know that some of our students feel like that. So in class, sometimes we do things two ways, and the kids can choose the one that makes sense to them.

Hilda: Something else . . . We never say, "These are my kids and those are your kids." It's always "our kids." You cannot come into this classroom and identify which kids receive special education. We're that way about being teachers, too, and so are the kids. They just see us as two teachers in algebra.

Cheney: We see the results in our achievement testing. When our

kids take the district quarterly tests, our scores are among the highest in the county. We have high expectations for all our students—we never lower the standards because the class includes students with disabilities—and we feel like we get the best out of them.

"The kids can't tell the difference between the teachers."

Hilda: If I was giving advice to new teachers, I'd tell them to be sure to discuss issues. If one teacher is a control freak, they need to clarify how they're going to run the classroom. They should figure out how to have an equal partnership. For example, they can't say, "You grade those papers and give report card grades to your students, and I'll do mine." If the kids don't see you

working together, they'll take advantage of it.

Cheney: You have to talk about things. Last year, we had more planning time, but this year, we still meet as much as we can. Sometimes we're on the phone so that we both know what's going on.

Hilda: It's especially nice this year because we co-teach in three blocks (out of four). Sometimes after the first block, Cheney will say, "I have an idea about a different way we could do that," and then we try it in second block and do it again if it worked. If there happens to be something she doesn't feel completely comfortable with, she'll hold back the first block, but then she jumps right in during second block.

Cheney: We're both kind of easygoing, and so we talk things out and make it work for the kids. We don't disagree; we have different ways of doing things. It's a marriage, and you really have to work together.

assisting is an accepted co-teaching practice when one teacher is monitoring to ensure all students are completing the math equation correctly. However, it has drawbacks, too. If teachers, especially special educators, spend too much time assisting, they probably will be bored and feel more like paraeducators than teachers. Also, one person assisting too much can be distracting for students. Finally, if either teacher assists a great deal, some students will come to rely too much on this always-available source of help instead of learning to work independently.

Other Co-Teaching Considerations

Co-teaching is a particularly sophisticated type of collaboration that some have likened to a professional marriage. Just as in a personal relationship, in this professional relationship great care must be taken to attend to details, to ensure that communication is clear and direct, to address problems when they are minor so that they do not become significant, and to maxi-

mize the talents of both professionals (Dieker, 2001). Further, if one professional is a novice and the other experienced, the co-teachers may have to be especially careful that they build a partnership that is satisfactory to both.

Consultation

A third application of collaboration for special educators occurs in **consultation**, “a voluntary process in which one professional assists another to address a problem concerning a third party,” often a student (Friend & Cook, 2007, p. 89). In many ways, consultation is a specialized form of problem solving (Kampwirth, 2005).

The consultant meets with the other professional, first working to establish a positive working relationship. Across several meetings, they jointly identify the problem, brainstorm ideas for addressing it, and select options that seem likely to succeed. The professional receiving consultation support then implements the intervention and reports on its success. Together, the consultant and the other professional decide whether they need to continue to meet, either to revise the intervention or to continue monitoring its effectiveness. In some cases, the consulting relationship ends when the problem is resolved. However, if the consultant has ongoing responsibility for the student in question, consultation may occur for the entire school year. Mary Jo, the teacher for students with visual impairments you met at the beginning of the chapter, provides this type of consultation. As you can see, the overall intent of consulting is to help a professional encountering a problem—often a teacher struggling to address a student need. An example of consultation is presented in the Positive Behavior Supports.

For some school professionals, consultation is a typical and significant role responsibility (D. Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 2001; Harris & Klein, 2002; Vaughn & Coleman, 2004). For example, school psychologists and counselors often have time set aside in their schedules to meet with both special education and general education teachers to discuss how to meet student needs in the classroom. They might work directly with the student on occasion, but they rely on the teachers to implement most of the strategies and to monitor student responses. Special education teachers might or might not have consulting responsibilities. In New York and some other states, certain special educators are assigned to be *consultant teachers*. If you are a consulting teacher or in a similar role, you may model effective ways of working with certain students, meet with teachers to discuss student issues, and observe in classrooms to determine student needs and progress. If you work as a resource or self-contained teacher, particularly in an inclusive school, you might receive or offer consultation (Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005).

Have you noticed that all the examples of consultation in this section imply that the consultant works with other professionals but not with the student? Your observation is correct (Kampwirth, 2005). Consultation is an **indirect service**, not a **direct service**. Consultation is an effective means for professionals to collaborate when the student in question needs only minimal support. It also sometimes is used as a transition strategy for a student who no longer needs special education services. In some cases, as with a student with physical or sensory disabilities, consultation provides an opportunity for teachers to obtain the technical information they need, such as how to use a specialized computer keyboard or a communication device. Consultation sometimes is appropriate for other situations, too. For example, a consultant might assist a classroom teacher regarding a student at risk to decide if the student should be referred to the intervention assistance team. Consultation also can have a positive impact on the skills of the professionals who benefit from it. When they learn a new strategy for teaching a student with a behavior disability, they might find that they can use it with other students as well.

As programs and services for students with disabilities become more inclusive and as standards become higher and accountability increases, collaborative options such as teaming, co-teaching, and consulting are likely to expand (Downing, 2001). These formal applications of collaboration will reach their potential for meeting student needs only if you

CHECK Your Learning

What are the advantages and potential drawbacks of each of the six approaches to co-teaching?

dimensions of DIVERSITY

Consultants working with migrant families should strive for collaboration by drawing on family strength, seeking language assistance as needed, and learning about family culture (Clare, Jimenez, & McClendon, 2005).



Using Consultation to Address Teacher Concerns and Student Needs

One common use of consultation is for situations in which students are displaying disruptive behaviors for which teachers cannot find effective strategies. Here is a sample of a consultative interaction between behavior specialist Mr. Corlone and beginning special educator Ms. Mitchell concerning Randy, a middle school student with autism. No matter which types of students you plan to work with, this brief interaction illustrates the important contribution of consultation to collaborative school services.

Mr. C: I've been looking forward to this second meeting so that we could really start to get at the dilemmas you're seeing for Randy in school.

Ms. M: Me, too. It was very helpful last time we met to discuss some of the details about Randy's background and how we would work together, but I'm anxious to address the problems.

Mr. C: Let's do it, then. What are the specific concerns that you have about Randy?

Ms. M: I don't even know where to begin. At the beginning of the year, Randy had a very difficult time adjusting to this school. He spent a great deal of time rocking and crying, and he refused to do almost everything. We got past all that, but now I see some of those same behaviors returning.

Mr. C: How so?

Ms. M: Yesterday was a good example. It was time for the students to stop their work to leave for lunch. I had used my usual strategy with Randy of cautioning him ahead of time that a change was coming and of talking to him about the

need to begin to put away his materials. He seemed fine at first, but suddenly he swept everything off his desk and began to rock and cry. I have no clue why.

Mr. C: What did you do?

Ms. M: I gave him a little time to calm down and then started over again. The second time the problems did not occur.

Mr. C: What ideas have you had about what might be happening?

Ms. M: . . .

Thinking about the Situation

1. Even if you had not read the introduction to this feature, how would you know which professional is the consultant?
2. These professionals are at what point in the problem-solving process? What part of consulting has already been completed?
3. If you were Ms. Mitchell, what other questions would you like Mr. Corlone to ask?
4. With classmates, take on the roles of these professionals and continue the conversation. Then analyze what is said in terms of the problem-solving process and use of a collaborative style. If you were the recipient of consultation services, how would you prefer the interaction to proceed? What should the consultant do to assist you? If you were a special educator in the role of the consultant, what do you think would be most important to say or do?

and your colleagues understand how to develop them and carefully continue to refine them.

How Does Collaboration Involve Parents and Families?

You already are becoming aware that parents and families play a critical role in special education procedures, planning, and programming. The message that accompanies this awareness is that your job includes understanding parents and families in order to collaborate with them (Lo, 2005; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2002). However, you also have explored in Chapter Three some of the dilemmas of working with families. With the increasing diversity in U.S. society, it is risky to assume that you can truly understand families simply because you are a caring educator (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston, & Nelson, 2005). Knowledge and skills must be a companion to your care.

Families and Collaboration

Many barriers to professional–parent collaboration can arise (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004). These are some of the most common (Friend & Bursuck, 2006):

- Parents may have had negative experiences when they were in school, so they may be reluctant to come to school and uncomfortable interacting with school professionals.
- Some parents who live in poverty or who have come to the United States from another country may view educators as authority figures to whom they must listen. As a result, they may not share information or offer their point of view.
- Parents may encounter logistical problems in getting to school for meetings and conferences. Some lack transportation, some need child care, and some cannot leave their jobs to come to school during the times educators usually wish to meet.
- Some parents are confronted with language barriers in schools and misunderstandings that arise from cultural differences.
- Schools may not make parents feel welcome. Educators may ask them to wait for a lengthy period of time for a meeting to begin, and they may inadvertently ignore or minimize concerns that parents raise concerning their children.
- Some educators believe certain parents are not good parents or that they do not care, and so they may make only minimal effort to interact with those parents.
- Some educators are intimidated by parents, particularly those who are knowledgeable about special education and who insist on particular programs or services. As a result, they may limit communication with these parents.
- Communication from school to home may focus on negatives.
- Professionals and parents may develop stereotypes of each other, and they may act on those stereotypes instead of on objective information.

When you consider parent interactions with school professionals, would you add other items to this list? Some would include the entire notion of how a family responds to having a child with a disability (Montgomery, 2005). In some families, the child with a disability is viewed as simply another family member, particularly if the disability is mild. In other families, particularly if the child's special needs are significant, parents may experience a range of emotional responses, such as denial, guilt, anger, shame, and depression, with eventual acceptance of the child (Lambie, 2000). In yet other families, cultural norms are related to disability. In some cultures, having a child with a disability is a source of shame; in others, it may be associated with religious beliefs, either as a punishment to parents or as a loss of the soul (Rogers-Adkinson, Ochoa, & Delgado, 2003). Any of these factors, as well as many others, could negatively affect collaboration.

Building Partnerships with Parents

If so many obstacles exist, what can you do to encourage collaboration with parents? First, it may be inappropriate to begin by thinking of parents only in terms of collaboration. Although some parents will embrace collaboration and be actively involved working with you on behalf of their child, for others the first step might be to create conditions that encourage meaningful parent participation (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2002). This might be accomplished by providing parents with information about what will occur at a team meeting prior to the meeting date. It could also involve having one person from the school meet separately with the parents prior to a team meeting so that the parents are prepared for what will occur in the larger group. For a few parents, participation might



Through collaboration with school professionals, parents can help their children with disabilities reach their potential and realize their dreams.

CHECK Your Learning

Compare the barriers to collaboration with the issues related to race and poverty in Chapter Three. How are they similar or different?

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 10 Collaboration
... concerns of families
... becoming active participants in the educational team
Standard 3 Individual Learning Differences
... variations in beliefs, traditions, and values

CHECK

Your Learning

How do educators sometimes limit parents' participation in collaboration?

dimensions of DIVERSITY

Communication with families is about more than language. Be sure that your questions are respectful. For example, ask "Who reads with Jose?" rather than "Do you read with Jose?" (Rogers-Adkinson, Ochoa, & Delgado, 2003).

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 7 Instructional Planning
... roles and responsibilities of paraeducators

be enhanced by making sure that supplies such as paper, pencils, and folders are available for parents' use; by providing to them samples of their child's work; or by offering to assist with transportation.

To foster participation that might lead to collaboration, you also need to address cultural differences. Lynch (1998) suggests that educators remember three points: (1) Culture is dynamic, and so what you may know of a culture from prior experience may not be valid today; (2) although culture influences people, so do other factors, such as socioeconomic status; and (3) no cultural group is homogeneous. These statements can serve as reminders that as you strive to understand a certain culture and learn to respect its norms, you should avoid treating all members of that cultural group as though they are alike. Developing cultural sensitivity truly is learning to balance knowledge with openness.

Many other options exist for encouraging parent participation. As noted in the section on communication skills, you should avoid using jargon when interacting with parents. You also can help by asking parents questions about which they have a unique and valuable perspective. For example, you might ask, "What are your child's favorite play activities at home?" or "What are the most important goals that you have for your child for the upcoming school year?" When you ask questions that honestly invite parental input, participation is more likely to occur.

Ultimately, perhaps the most important way to increase parent participation is to recognize that unless you have a child with needs very similar to those of the parents with whom you are interacting, you cannot understand those parents' perspective, and you should not expect that you ever will, not in any complete sense. If you can remind yourself of that fact, you will probably remember that listening to the parents' point of view is the first step to fostering parent collaboration (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

What Are Issues Related to Collaboration?

Although collaboration is rapidly becoming integral to the roles of professional educators, as illustrated in the Specialized Instruction on page 123, it is not universally accepted and supported by extensive research. Issues related to collaboration include the extent of its application in special educators' work with paraeducators, the limits to collaboration created by lack of time to meet with colleagues, and the research base for measuring collaboration's effectiveness.

Working with Paraeducators

Federal special education law acknowledges the importance of paraeducators to the education of students with special needs and notes that they should be trained to carry out their jobs (Jolly & Evans, 2005). In Chapter Two, the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals were outlined. However, another dimension in any discussion of paraeducators is the nature of their working relationships with professionals and parents and the place of collaboration in professionals' work with paraeducators.

If you consider the responsibilities that paraprofessionals have in special education and general education settings, what would you say should be the relationship between them and the teachers and other specialists with whom they work? Is collaboration appropriate? The answer to this question is somewhat complicated.

Paraeducators are valuable members of the instructional teams for students, but these staff members do not have the same professional status or job responsibilities as the professionals. Even if paraeducators have a teaching license, they are employed in a nonteacher capacity at a much lower pay scale and generally have responsibilities much more limited than those of professionals. And so, in some cases collaboration is appropriate, but in others it is not. For example, occasionally a paraeducator will refuse to carry out the directions of the teacher, possibly by "forgetting" them. Once in awhile, a paraeducator will contact the



Response to Intervention and Collaboration

As you have learned, federal law now permits the use of response to intervention (RTI) data as a component of determining whether a student should be identified as having a learning disability. These data typically are gathered as the student moves through three tiers of increasingly intensive and highly structured interventions. As you might suspect, collaboration is integral to RTI, a point illustrated in these examples:

- **Tier 1** Teachers are expected to provide high-quality instruction to all students. This suggests that differentiated instruction, curriculum-based assessment, and positive behavior supports will be provided—all areas in which special educators have highly specialized knowledge to share with their general education colleagues.
- **Tier 2** Professionals systematically engage in shared problem solving to design more intensive interventions for students who need them. Professional development, consultation, and other collaborative strategies are implemented to assist teachers to assess student needs, implement appropriate interventions, and evaluate student progress. As interventions are implemented, the problem solving team monitors their impact on student learning and behavior. In addition, parents are included in the planning, implementation, and monitoring process. When

Tier 2 is divided into subtiers, this problem-solving process is repeated, in effect creating a third level of intensity for the instructional intervention and possibly involving more professionals in the collaboration.

- **Tier 3** The multidisciplinary team that includes the members you read about in Chapter Two conducts a comprehensive evaluation that includes RTI data along with other measures, follows all requirements for parent participation, and collaborates to determine whether the student has a disability and is eligible to receive special education services. Unique to RTI procedures, this team must decide whether standardized test information is needed in addition to the ongoing assessment information gathered during Tiers 1 and 2.

Sources: Based on Mellard, D. (2005), *Understanding responsiveness to intervention in learning disabilities determination*, Nashville, TN: National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, retrieved June 24, 2006, from <http://nrcld.org/publications/papers/mellard.shtml>; Kovalski, J., & Prasse, D. P. (2004), Response to instruction in the identification of learning disabilities: A guide for school teams, *NASP Communiqué*, 32(5), retrieved June 24, 2006, from www.nasponline.org/publications/cq325instruction.html.

parents and discuss school matters even though the teacher has specifically and appropriately requested that this not occur. How would you handle situations such as these? If the paraeducator is assigned to work under your direction, you are responsible for providing day-to-day supervision for that individual (French, 2001). This implies that you appropriately assign work to the paraeducator, meet to discuss plans and problems, and ask for input from others who also observe the paraeducator with students. If a serious problem arises, you are faced with a supervisory matter, not a collaborative one, and you are obligated to meet with the paraeducator to discuss it. Because your principal or another administrator probably has the formal supervision responsibility (i.e., the authority to require changed behavior or to sanction the individual), if you cannot satisfactorily resolve the situation, you should involve your administrator, who will likely request that you keep a record of any negative incidents that occur.

Is it possible for special educators to collaborate with paraeducators? Yes, and most paraeducators are wonderful, caring individuals who are true advocates for students and who recognize that teachers and other professionals direct their work (Gerlach, 2001). Your collaboration with them is somewhat similar to the possibility of your principal collaborating with you. Just as your principal may truly collaborate during a meeting at which a student crisis is discussed, you understand that this does not mean that you and your principal should share all decision making and that your input always will be sought. The same notion holds for paraeducators. You can and should collaborate with your paraeducator as appropriate for the situation, such as to coordinate snacktime or to discuss adaptations that might help a student during world history class. However, at times you will explain to the paraeducator what needs to be done, and it is appropriate to expect the paraeducator to follow your directions—possibly to use a specific computer program to help a student with word attack

PROFESSIONAL MONITORING TOOL



Standard 5 Learning Environments and Social Interaction
... direct and support activities of paraeducators

Teachers and paraeducators often collaborate, but working with paraeducators also involves supervision.



skills or to position a student in a particular way that encourages better posture and social interactions with other students.

Many professionals have strong working relationships with their paraprofessionals, and together they function as an instructional team (e.g., Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek, 2005). If you communicate clearly with paraprofessionals about their work, invite their feedback and insights, and resolve differences as soon as they arise, you will find that the balance of appropriate supervision and collaboration is easily achieved.

Time for Collaboration

If you ask any experienced school professional to name the greatest barrier to effective collaboration in schools, you will undoubtedly be told that it is lack of time for shared planning (Hawbaker, Balong, Buckwaiter, & Runyon, 2001; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Mastropieri, 2001). Several issues are involved. First, activities carried out collaboratively take longer to plan and evaluate than activities carried out by individuals. If three people meet to discuss Colby's problems at his community-based job, it undoubtedly will require an hour to discuss and address. If you are working on the problem yourself, you will think about it as you do other tasks, decide on a course of action, and carry it out much more quickly.

The second aspect of time concerns the need for shared time (Hackman & Berry, 2000; Kaff, 2004). In most schools, special education teachers, general education teachers, and other professionals all have planning time. The dilemma is that they do not have time together to discuss shared students. Thus, teams need adequate time to meet when all members can be present and focused on their tasks; co-teachers need opportunities to discuss lessons they have delivered, to plan future lessons, and to assess student progress; and consultants need time to interact with the other professionals.

A third dilemma related to time also should be mentioned (Friend & Cook, 2007). Education professionals often spend much of their time interacting with children or young adults. When they do have shared planning time, they may be tempted to spend a significant amount of it discussing a recent school event or one person's new puppy or grandchild. Although this is understandable, you have to consider the time to meet jointly with others at school as a precious commodity that cannot be wasted. Some professionals have found that always having an agenda for the shared time helps them to stay focused.

A final time issue concerns a chronic problem for busy educators: running late to arrive at planned times for collaboration. As you walk down the hall or across the courtyard for your meeting, what should you say to the colleague you encounter who says, "I'm so glad I ran into you. I really need to discuss something with you. It'll only take a couple of minutes." If a true emergency exists, of course you will send word to your waiting colleagues and attend to this matter. However, if you stop each time someone asks for your input, you might damage your

Most professionals express concern about finding the time needed to form collaborative working relationships with their colleagues. They also worry about setting realistic expectations regarding time for collaboration. These are some of the ways—some for elementary settings and some for secondary settings—professionals are making the most of the time they do have available:

- Other professionals in the school help to cover classes, including principals, assistant principals, counselors, social workers, department chairpersons, psychologists, and supervisors. Although this option is only available to any single teacher occasionally, it can create pockets of planning time.
- In some districts, retired teachers, qualified members of social or civic organizations, and others can work as volunteer substitutes; they meet the criteria to be employed but refuse the paycheck.
- For co-teaching, some partners begin each class period with three or four minutes of instructionally appropriate independent work time, during which students work alone or with a partner. While students work, the teachers do informal planning.
- In some schools, principals and part of the school staff show instructionally relevant videotapes or other programs to groups of students so that other staff members can plan.
- When school-based staff development sessions are scheduled, sometimes it is possible to have them begin late or conclude early, with the saved time used for collaboration.
- To encourage co-teaching as a form of collaboration, one principal arranged for teachers to come once each month after school for planning sessions; they received required staff development credit for doing so.
- In elementary schools, teachers can divide the labor of preparing for instruction to save time. That is, each teacher in a grade level takes the lead for preparing materials for different lessons, making enough copies for all teachers in the grade level.
- Some educators can only arrange to meet before or after school for planning. However, they make their work more enjoyable by bringing favorite snacks or meeting at a coffee shop instead of staying at school.
- Professionals find funds for substitute teachers. Some sources of funding include grants or contributions from state or local foundations, parent-teacher organizations, and disability advocacy groups.

collaborative relationships with those waiting for you; your chronic tardiness could be seen as a lack of interest in and respect for the shared work.

Are you wondering how professionals in schools find time for collaboration? You will find several suggestions in the Professional Edge above. Which seem feasible to you? As you talk to practicing teachers and other professionals, explore other ideas for creating time for collaboration by asking them how they manage this chronic education challenge.

The Effectiveness of Collaboration

As you learned earlier in this chapter, collaboration does not have value unless it is a vehicle for achieving goals for students and their families (Friend, 2000). Thus, it is always a dimension of some other activity. This has made it difficult to study, and the majority of information about collaboration consists of stories of success or advice for accomplishing it in schools (e.g., Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Further, because collaborative activities tend to be complex—involving several individuals, each of whom has unique contributions to make—trying to study collaboration by comparing the activities of several groups is likewise challenging. The Inclusion Matters describes some recent research efforts related to collaboration and inclusive practices.

If you look for research that studies only collaboration, you will find few resources (Schulte & Osborne, 2003). Instead, you might locate studies about the impact of communication skills on parents' or professionals' sense of collaboration (e.g., McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Montgomery, 2005). You also might find studies documenting the effectiveness of

Research

Notes

Collaboration has been recommended as one strategy to help overcome the research-to-practice gap—that is, the fact that many professionals in the field are not aware of and do not implement practices demonstrated to be effective through research (Gersten & Smith-Jones, 2001).

Implementing Inclusion through Collaboration

Researchers who examine topics related to inclusion generally agree that the success of inclusive schooling rests on the extent to which professionals can develop collaborative working relationships. Here are some examples:

- Smith and Leonard (2005) explored collaboration—particularly in terms of the role of the principal—on the implementation and outcomes of inclusive practices. After observing and interviewing professionals in ten elementary and middle schools, the authors found that (a) clarifying the roles of both general education and special education teachers was critical to success, (b) nurturing positive attitudes was essential and a critical responsibility for principals, and (c) implementing a collaborative problem solving process fostered clear communication.
- Mastropieri and her colleagues (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005) studied collaboration and inclusive practices using case studies. In four cases spanning elementary, middle, and high school, they found that (a) collaboration was more effective in co-teaching situations when special educators had some knowledge of the academic content being taught, (b) high

stakes testing could negatively affect inclusive practices and teacher collaboration, and (c) the professional relationship between the teachers was critical in influencing outcomes for students.

- McLeskey and Waldron (2002) studied the perceptions of teachers in six elementary schools regarding making adaptations for students with disabilities in their classrooms. They found that the need to make such accommodations led to more collaboration among staff members.
- Fennick (2001) reported on co-teaching in a life skills class as a means of fostering inclusive education. She concluded that the collaborative efforts of two teachers enabled them to successfully teach a class that included typical learners and learners with disabilities.

As you read professional publications, stay alert for studies that address inclusion. You are likely to find that all of them emphasize collaboration among professionals and between professionals and parents and that all of them include collaboration as an essential element of inclusive schools.

teaching a specific problem-solving process and implementing it to address student academic and behavior concerns (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006).

Another way to explore the research related to collaboration is to examine studies about collaborative applications such as teaming, co-teaching, and consultation. More research exists in this area, but it only indirectly addresses collaboration. For example, teams have been studied in business and education for many years. For schools, data have been gathered concerning the importance of strong team leadership, the impact of clear team procedures on team productivity, and the elements that create the sense of community that maximize team effectiveness (e.g., Bahr et al., 2006). However, how can collaboration be separated from these elements? Generally, it has not been studied as a discrete part of teams but rather assumed to be the result of other positive team features.

Consultation also should be considered. Consultation has a considerable research base, mostly in disciplines such as school psychology, counseling, and business; much less research exists related to teacher consultants. Researchers have explored consultants' communication skills, the impact they have on consultation outcomes, and the impact of various consultation models (e.g., Grissom, Erchul, & Sheridan, 2003). Consultation research also has explored teacher and parent perceptions of consultation effectiveness and the extent to which consultants' recommendations are actually carried out (e.g., Sheridan et al., 2004). However, isolating and studying the impact of collaboration on the consultation process has been challenging, and too few studies related to this topic have been completed to reach valid conclusions (Denton, Hasbrouck, & Sekaquaptewa, 2003).

A similar perspective can be offered on co-teaching. Much has been written, but little concerns the collaborative aspect of co-teaching (e.g., Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Murray, 2004). For example, Magiera and her colleagues (Magiera,

fyi

In some locales, co-teaching is a means for ensuring that students with disabilities in middle and high schools are taught by teachers who are highly qualified in the academic content areas while they also receive special education services.

Smith, Zigmond, & Gebaner, 2005) completed forty-nine observations of co-teaching in eight high schools. They found that both teachers spent considerable time monitoring student work and that special educators did not usually lead instruction. However, detailed analysis of one of the successful co-teaching partnerships indicated that co-planning and other collaborative activities were integral to positive student outcomes and teachers' satisfaction.

One conclusion that could be drawn on the basis of this discussion is that collaboration should be deferred until its efficacy has been established through research. Doing so would be unfortunate because today's schools rely more than ever on strong collaborative relationships among professionals and others (Barth, 2006). An alternative conclusion is that collaboration is extraordinarily difficult to scrutinize, but the data gathered that relate to collaboration suggest that it is a powerful approach when used appropriately (Caron & McLaughlin, 2002).

Collaboration as a standard for school professionals is a relatively new idea. It should not be surprising that the research basis for it is still emerging. What is important for special educators to remember is that they should stay abreast of developments related to collaboration, remain open to new ideas about it, and possibly even join with colleagues to read and learn more about it.

CHECK Your Learning

Why is it so challenging for researchers to study the impact of collaboration on special education programs and services?

SUMMARY

Collaboration is a style through which special educators and other professionals can approach their interactions with each other and parents; it is based on voluntariness, parity, mutual goals, shared responsibility for key decisions, shared accountability for outcomes, shared resources, and the emergence of trust, respect, and a sense of community. Collaboration has existed for many years among special educators, but IDEA has bolstered its role in the delivery of services to students with disabilities. For collaboration to exist, professionals must believe that it is a valuable approach, use effective communication skills, follow clear processes (e.g., interpersonal problem solving), create programs and services that support it, and work with admin-

istrators to create a culture that fosters it. In addition to informal collaboration, three formal applications are common in today's schools: teaming, co-teaching, and consultation.

Although nearly all professionals would assert that collaboration with parents and family members is critical, accomplishing this can be challenging. Sometimes, a first step is increasing meaningful parent involvement. When professionals diligently strive for collaboration with parents, parents are receptive and appreciative. Several issues characterize collaboration, including the complexity of professionals working with paraeducators, the realistic barriers that lack of time can create, and the emerging research base on which collaborative practices are based.

BACK TO THE CASES

Michelle

According to the case study outlining the collaboration between Michelle and Kira, Michelle faces a challenge in making sure she understands the algebraic concepts in order to be an effective teaching partner. Which two of the co-teaching models might be best to use until Michelle and Kira feel confident about Michelle's knowledge of algebraic concepts? (See CEC Standard 10 and INTASC Principle 10.01.) Explain why you have selected each model.

Robert

In this case, we meet Robert's teachers and mother as they meet to collaborate about and plan for his transition from middle school to high school. During the meeting, disagreement occurs

regarding the most appropriate educational setting—that is, the combination of general education and special education classes. (See CEC Standard 10 and INTASC Principle 10.02 and 10.04.) What communication skills could help to successfully resolve a conflict such as this one? What might escalate it? Justify your response by providing specific examples that illustrate your thinking.

Mary Jo

Based on the characteristics of collaboration and the definition of consultation, do you believe that Mary Jo's role as a consultant is the most effective way to work with the teachers at her school? (See CEC Standard 10 and INTASC Principles 10.01 and 10.02.) Provide specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Collaboration, p. 102
Communication skills, p. 106
Consultation, p. 119
Co-teaching, p. 115
Direct service, p. 119

Indirect service, p. 119
Interaction process, p. 109
Interpersonal problem solving, p. 109
Mutual goal, p. 104
Parity, p. 103

Shared accountability, p. 104
Shared resources, p. 104
Shared responsibility, p. 104
Team, p. 113

REVIEW, DISCUSS, APPLY

1. Collaboration has become important in schools because it has become central in many other aspects of society. What examples of collaboration in business and other fields can you find in magazines and advertisements and from conversations with friends? How are they similar to or different from what you anticipate finding in your role as a professional educator? (Learning Objective 1)
2. Make a chart similar to the one following. Then complete it by identifying specific words and actions that illustrate the presence of the characteristics of collaboration. (Learning Objective 1)

Collaboration Characteristics Examples with Words or Actions

Characteristic	Specific Examples
Style	
Voluntary	
Mutual goal	
Shared responsibility for key decisions	
Shared accountability for outcomes	
Shared resources	
Trust	
Respect	
Community	

3. Interview an experienced professional about a positive experience related to collaboration. Prepare a brief report and reflection that illustrates which of these elements of collaboration that individual addressed: personal belief or commitment, communication skills, interaction processes, effective programs and services, and a supportive context. (Learning Objective 2)
4. Think about a highly effective team that exists in an area other than education (e.g., sports, medical field, faith-based group). What makes this team so effective? How could the same characteristics be applied to a team of which you will be a part? What is your role in helping a school team be as effective as teams outside education? (Learning Objective 3)
5. Using a lesson plan developed in another course or a model lesson plan from a website or other source, apply each of the co-teaching approaches to it. Which approaches seem most likely to succeed? Why? If you were assigned to co-teach with a colleague in your first professional position in a school, how would you approach that individual to discuss the possibilities? (Learning Objective 3)
6. Consultation is an application of collaboration that varies greatly in its use from state to state. How is consultation addressed in your state's policies and procedures for special education? If you could speak to an experienced consultant, what questions would you like to ask? (Learning Objective 3)
7. Why might cultural differences between a parent and professional negatively affect the opportunities for collaboration? What steps can you take to foster positive parent interactions, regardless of whether collaboration is a goal? (Learning Objective 4)
8. Suppose that you are assigned to work with a very experienced paraeducator in your first year as a teacher who seems to want to tell you how students should receive services and how the special education program should be operated. With classmates, discuss what you might do in such a situation. Role play how you might approach the paraeducator to address this topic. (Learning Objective 5)
9. How much planning time do you think educators should have for their collaborative work? Compare your responses to the time allocations in local school districts. How would you go about asking for shared planning time if none was assigned? (Learning Objective 5)
10. You read that the research base for collaboration is still emerging. What questions about collaboration would you like to have research answer? Look for a research-based article on that topic, and plan to share your findings with classmates who also have completed this assignment. (Learning Objective 5)

Go to Allyn & Bacon's MyLabSchool (www.mylabschool.com) and enter Assignment ID SPV3 into the Assignment Finder. Watch the video, *Classroom Aides*, in which a classroom paraprofessional talks about working one-on-one with a student with special needs who is included in a general education classroom.

Question: Relate the experiences described to what you have just read about working effectively with paraeducators. How does collaborating effectively help educators meet the requirements of IDEA? You may also answer the questions at the end of the clip and e-mail your responses to your instructor.
