



Resource Title:

Collaboration: A Must for Teachers in Inclusive Educational Settings

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Summary of Resource:

This article, written by Dr. Hwa Lee at Seton Hall University, provides a rationale and methodology for developing collaborative relationships, which can be used in schools to benefit all students. The author provides several practice tools, which can be useful to students, teachers, and parents as they establish relationships at school and in the community. This article may help CTE teachers and their special education colleagues work together more effectively.

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88

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Collaboration: A Must for Teachers in Inclusive Educational Settings

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What is collaboration?

In the past, teachers tended to work alone and there was little or no collaboration among teachers. This type of isolated work style is changing and more educators are sharing ideas, develop plans together, and implement plans and evaluate outcomes with their colleagues. Collaboration is a style that professionals choose to use in order to accomplish a goal they share. Any activity that teachers work with someone else requires collaboration (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). **True collaboration** is demonstrated only on the teams where all members feel their contributions are valued and the goal is clear, where they share decision making, and where they sense they are respected (Cook & Friend, 96). A number of terminologies may be used to discuss collaboration strategies (e.g., consultation, teamwork, collaborative work, collaborative consultation) but the term "collaboration" will be used as the umbrella concept for a number of collaborative strategies in this learning station.

****Why do we need collaboration?***

The majority of public educational settings provide inclusive education for students with and without disabilities. Teachers and related educational professionals support students in achieving not only academic skills but also in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become caring and compassionate citizens. One of the most critical skills for these individuals who are involved in providing inclusive education is collaboration. Through collaboration, ideas can be shared, new and better strategies can be developed, problems can be solved, students' progresses can be better monitored, and their outcomes are evaluated effectively. True collaboration will enhance an effective inclusive education and will be beneficial for all the individuals involved in the child's education including parents.

Characteristics of Collaboration

Friend and Cook (1996) outlines **six key attributes** to collaboration.

One: Collaboration is voluntary. You decide to participate.

Two: Collaboration is based on parity. Teachers who collaborate must believe that all individuals' contributions are valued equally.

Three: Collaboration requires a shared goal. Teachers tend to collaborate only when they share a goal.

Four: Collaboration includes shared responsibility for key decisions. Teachers divide work and share decision making about the activities they are undertaking.

Five: Collaboration includes shared accountability for outcomes. If teachers share key decisions, they must also share accountability for the results of the decisions.

Six: Collaboration is based on shared resources. Each teacher in a collaborative effort should make an effort to contribute some type of resource.

Seven: Collaboration is emergent. True collaboration will emerge as teachers are more experienced at collaboration.

Prerequisites for Collaboration

In order to create collaborative relationships among team members, the following ingredients are essential:

A. Reflecting on your personal belief system: How much do you value sharing ideas? Examine your belief system to see if you have tolerance toward changing your standards in your classroom.

B. Refining your interaction skills: First, you need to develop effective communication skills which include listening, attending to nonverbal signals, and asking questions and making statements in clear and nonthreatening ways. Secondly, you need to have interaction-process skills which include conducting effective meetings, responding to resistance, resolving conflict, and persuading others.

C. Contributing to a supportive environment: Administrative and staff support, teachers' effort to contribute to collaborative atmosphere, and the availability of time for collaboration.

Communication Skills for Effective Collaboration

1. Use knowledge of frame of reference to foster effective collaboration.
2. Recognize that shared problem solving begins with the understanding that there are many "right" answers for addressing student learning and behavior.
3. Develop effective strategies for listening.
4. When someone shares a concern with you, avoid the temptation to offer advice immediately.
5. As much as possible, focus your interactions on observable information.
6. Use collaborative language; that is, ask questions that encourage others to speak.
7. Monitor how much you talk.
8. If you have a disagreement with a colleague, address it as soon as possible and in a straightforward manner.

. Effective Applications of Collaboration in Inclusive Schools

A. Shared problem solving: is the basis for collaborative activities in many contexts of school settings. This is a challenging task since it involves a group of professionals whose needs, expectations, and ideas should be blended into shared understanding and mutually-agreed upon solutions.

* **A Model step for shared problem solving** include: (a) discover a shared need; (b) identify the problem; (c) propose solutions; (d) evaluate ideas; (e) plan specifics; (f) implement the solution; and (g) evaluate outcomes.

B. Co-teaching: When two or more teachers share the instruction for a single group of students, typically in a single classroom setting (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). One way of meeting the needs of students in inclusive schools but not a solution for every inclusive situation.

****Types of co-teaching****

A. One teach, one support: one teacher leads the lesson and the other takes an assisting role.

B. Station teaching: curricular content is divided into two parts. One teacher teaches half of the content to half of the students while the other teaches the other part to the rest. The group then switch and each teacher teach his/her part of the lesson.

C. Parallel teaching: Two teachers divide a heterogeneous class group in half and have each teacher instruct half the class separately.

D. Alternative teaching: Dividing the class into one large and one small group (e.g., small group for remediation)

E. Team teaching: teachers share leadership in the classroom; both are equally engaged in the instructional activities. One teacher may begin a lesson by introducing vocabulary while the other provides examples to place the words in context.

****Co-teaching pragmatics****

1. Students are heterogeneously grouped so students with disabilities are appropriately integrated with their peers without disabilities.
2. Both teachers take on teaching and supportive roles.
3. Which approach is best depends on student needs, the subject being taught, the teachers' experience, and practical considerations such as space and time for planning.

C. Teaming

Do you have any experience as a team member?

Teams are formal work groups that have certain characteristics. They have clear goals, active and committed members, and leaders; they practice to achieve their results' and they do not let personal issues interfere with the accomplishment of their goals.

Teaming is one of the most typical strategy to implement inclusive educational practice. For example, you may belong to a multidisciplinary team that determines students' eligibility for special education services and writes students' IEPs. Teaming itself will not guarantee a successful educational practice. The success of the team will depend on each team member's understanding of mutually shared goals and their collaborative effort for the goals.

****Characteristics of Effective Teams****

1. All participants understand, agree to, and identify the primary goal for the team.
2. The team is characterized by open communication that includes ideas, opinions, and feelings.
3. Team members trust one another, that is, they know that no team member will deliberately take advantage of another.
4. Team members support each other by demonstrating care and concern.
5. Team members manage their human differences. They clarify how they are different from one another and use these differences as strengths for creative problem solving

rather than as hindrances to problem resolution.

6. Teams meet and work together only when necessary.
7. Team members have fundamental team skills, including those for communication, those for addressing task goals, and those for maintaining effective team functioning.
8. Teams have leaders but recognize that leadership is shared by all team members.

D. Consulting

Teachers often find that they do not have direct support for a student in their classroom. They may find situations when they must seek support through consultation. **Consultation** is a specialized problem-solving process in which one professional who has particular expertise assists another professional who needs the benefit of others (Sheridan, Welch, & Orme, 1996). The role of consultant in collaborative school consultation is to contribute specialized information toward an educational need. The *consultee* uses the information and expertise of consultants and other collaborators to provide direct service to the client. All who are involved including *consultants*, *consultee*, and *client* are collaborators working together in a combined effort to address a particular need. For example, a learning-disabilities consultant (consultant) may serve a new student (client) who has a learning disability indirectly by collaborating with the classroom teacher (consultee) who provides direct service to the student (Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 1996, p. 6).

****Collaboration with Family Members****

Teachers must remember that family members are important members in any type of educational teams. They can also be excellent consultants, collaborators, and team teachers. Please visit Dr. Lee's learning station: [Partnership with Families of Children with Special Needs](#).

Dettmer, P., Dyck, N., & Thurston, L. P. (1999). [Consultation, collaboration, and teamwork for students with special needs](#). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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